



Rawson

CENTRE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP
CARIBBEAN

RECOVERY RESILIENCE GROWTH

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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OUR *Journey*



The Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship - Caribbean is a non-profit accelerator helping entrepreneurs to scale their business through training, mentorship, and access to finance. It's our mission to create dynamic Caribbean economies through entrepreneurship.

The Early Days

We first opened our doors in 2011 with 20 entrepreneurs per cohort. Each entrepreneur attended training one day per week, for 12 weeks at the Centre's Montego Bay location. By the end of 2014, we had successfully trained 7 cohorts in Jamaica.

In March 2015, we launched the *Branson Centre Caribbean Online*, an online platform that provided training to a much wider pool of entrepreneurs. Soon after, we took our first leap outside of Jamaica into the wider Caribbean, setting up the programme in the British Virgin Islands. There, we welcomed our first regional cohort in January 2016. To date, more than 2,800 people have registered for training.

Scaling for IMPACT

2017 was another milestone year for Branson Centre. We moved our headquarters from Montego Bay to Jamaica's capital city Kingston and revamped our suite of services to focus on supporting a select group of high-potential, high-impact, fundable entrepreneurs. Through our 6-month accelerator programme, we

have played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between sources of capital and over 40 change-makers.

Recovery. Resilience. GROWTH

In March 2020, we shifted our focus from business acceleration to recovery management to help our entrepreneurs confront the challenges brought on by COVID-19. We continued the trajectory of high-touch services by offering our programme 100% online. We also evolved our signature event to a 2-day virtual experience. The results have been a 95% satisfaction rate from our cadre of entrepreneurs, and the education of over 3,000 people worldwide with content on leadership, marketing, and branding through our *Branson Centre Summit*.

OUR PARTNERS

We are currently funded and supported through:

- Virgin Unite

CORPORATE PARTNERS

- PROVEN Investment Limited
- PanJam Investment Limited

IMPACT Report

This was an outstanding year of impact for the Branson Centre. We increased our reach and touched more lives through our strategically crafted digital experiences which helped entrepreneurs navigate the new normal brought on by COVID-19.

ENTREPRENEURS
IMPACTED THROUGH
PRIVATE WORKSHOP
SERIES

28

ENTREPRENEURS
IMPACTED THROUGH
PUBLIC WORKSHOP SERIES

335

BRANSON CENTRE
SUMMIT ATTENDEES

3,111



BUSINESSES IMPACTED
IN ACCELERATOR
PROGRAMME

14



GRANT FUNDING PROVIDED
FOR IGNITE ENTREPRENEURS
THROUGH THE DBJ

JMD \$28 MILLION

CHAIRMAN'S *Message*



Since 2011, Branson Centre has supported the Caribbean's entrepreneurial ecosystem with fervent dedication and has stimulated economic growth within the region. As Chairman, I am pleased to be part of an organization that was able to demonstrate legerity to support entrepreneurs at a time when businesses across the world were struggling to grapple with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Despite the unexpected challenges, we stood prepared to support entrepreneurs to recover and grow. We remain resolute in our fight to get back on an economic growth trajectory so that we can continue to fulfil our mission of creating dynamic Caribbean economies.

Branson Centre has always stood as the gold standard for business acceleration in the Caribbean, and this year, our team of experts was determined to continue to uphold this standard of excellence. We quickly shifted our focus at the onset of the coronavirus outbreak in Jamaica and moved our programme online. This act of agility is attributable to the team's expertise, technological competency, and foresight. I am proud that this visionary group of go-getters was able to persevere and meet the ever-changing needs of entrepreneurs in the time of a crisis.

Our goal now is to repair our investment pipeline and help entrepreneurs to recover from this experience. Notwithstanding various new challenges,

entrepreneurship and investment in the Caribbean economy will continue to be the driving force that moves the needle. Though we did not have a pipeline for this unprecedented global crisis, having acted in a startup business capacity for many years prior, we have a full range of understanding and are very clear that our mission cannot stop.

On behalf of Branson Centre's Board of Directors, I would like to thank our partners and all who have supported our resilient efforts for 2020. We look forward to our continued work together, and helping businesses survive and thrive even in the face of adversity to drive sustainable development in the Caribbean.

Christopher Williams
Chairman

Our dynamic team at Branson Centre takes an evolutionary approach to meet the ever-changing demands and subtleties of the economic environment.



CEO'S *Message*

Stepping into the role of Branson Centre's CEO at the height of a global pandemic was uncharted territory. Though it was a natural progression in my leadership journey, the immense responsibility of managing a global brand during a crisis required a different kind of mindset. It was always my mission to help entrepreneurs to not only grow their businesses, but develop themselves holistically. When COVID-19 hit, this approach to entrepreneurial development became even more critical.

This year, Branson Centre's previous mission of 'creating dynamic Caribbean economies' evolved into 'creating dynamic Caribbean entrepreneurs'. Our bright and dedicated team remained committed to help our entrepreneurs navigate this new normal, not just from an operational standpoint, but from a workplace wellness perspective; and with my wellness background, this was the perfect time for me to be in this role. This year was one that challenged not only entrepreneurs, but tested business enablers mentally, physically and spiritually yet they were able to persevere.

“

It was always my mission to help entrepreneurs to not only grow their businesses, but develop themselves holistically.

”

When the pandemic presented itself in Jamaica, the team acted swiftly to prepare for what was to come. We had no idea that we would have to completely change our programme to accommodate our entrepreneurs going through this crisis, but we rolled up our sleeves and made it happen. Despite the challenges they were facing, a few entrepreneurs were able to thrive, while the majority experienced significant setbacks. The pandemic shifted the situation from expansions to the reduction of staff, resources, customers, and loss of distribution channels. It was clear that we needed to prepare our entrepreneurs for the age of digital transformation by providing them with the tools and education necessary to pivot, innovate, and lead remote teams. Our first move towards this involved listening to them and understanding what they were going through.

The event impacted the lives of more than 3,000 business owners and individuals worldwide, and featured 24 global experts delivering gems of wisdom and insight to help attendees survive and thrive in this digital age; all across a series of on-demand webinars and two panel discussions.

We picked up the phone and called our entrepreneurs with a view to create a programme that could assist with their immediate and future needs. What followed was tapping into the wisdom of experts, coaches and mentors who supported the Centre to create the programme. This programme gave our entrepreneurs the tools to navigate the immediate crisis in a strategic way, giving them the best chance of survival while preparing for growth and resilience in the future.

We also had to shift the way we worked at the Centre, no longer able to meet face-to-face, we transformed our programme to a completely digital experience with a series of private virtual workshops, one-on-one and group coaching, as

well as digital resources and training. This was not a unique experience for our entrepreneurs; small businesses around the world were being negatively impacted and we knew we wanted to do more. So, we tapped into our pool of experts to deliver our first-ever virtual summit *Leadership in a Digital Age* during Global Entrepreneurship Week. The event impacted the lives of more than 3,000 business owners and individuals worldwide, and featured 24 global experts delivering gems of wisdom and insight to help attendees survive and thrive in this digital age; all across a series of on-demand webinars and two panel discussions.

COVID-19 has been a reminder that while we cannot fully prepare for a crisis, we can meet it head-on with courage. I applaud our entrepreneurs for making things happen and being innovative despite the challenging circumstances. I would like to extend thanks to our supportive Board of Directors, dedicated partners, coaches, and mentors for their commitment to entrepreneurial development. Also, I would like to extend special thanks to the Branson Centre team; I am immensely proud of how hard they have worked to ensure that everything fell into place for our entrepreneurs on the path to recovery, resilience, and growth.

This is a time to take hold of the digital landscape, as we all strive to become leaders in this ever-changing world. We can't sit around and wait for things to go back to normal, but instead, we must adapt to changes, and move forward.

Lauri-Ann Ainsworth
Chief Entrepreneurship Officer

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

Timeline



Cohort Welcome



International Women's Month



Growth Mindset Webinar



Branson Centre Goes Digital



Red Stripe LIVE

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE



CEO Meeting



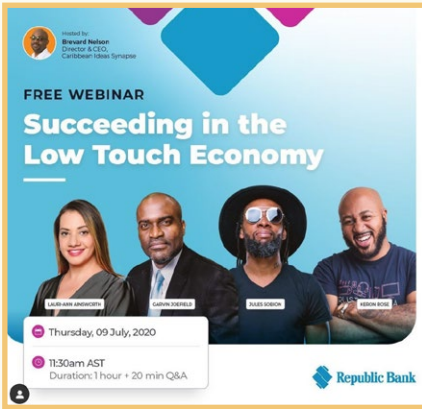
Remote Work Chronicles



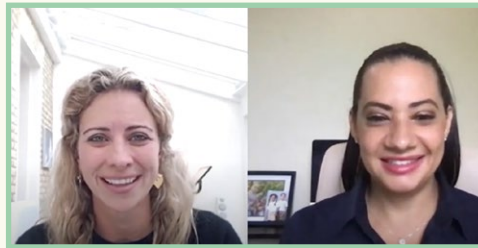
Disaster Management Training



Investment Readiness Bootcamp



RBTT Digital Conference



Holly Branson Interview



Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Strategic Planning



Yardie Divers Adventure



Yello Media Group Gift

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER



PSOJ Conference



Branson Centre Anniversary



Branson Centre Summit

OUR
Big Wins

PROGRAMMES



2020 was marked with challenges and opportunities. We were tasked to find innovative ways to continue our programme due to the coronavirus pandemic, while limiting the possibility of exposure to ourselves and our entrepreneurs to the virus. The result was providing our cadre of entrepreneurs with a unique digital experience with access to exclusive training and coaching sessions 100% online.

Here are some other highlights of the year:

14 NEW BUSINESSES FROM ACROSS THE CARIBBEAN

After reviewing close to 300 applications from businesses across the Caribbean, we welcomed 14 new businesses into our accelerator programme from Jamaica, Belize, Trinidad and Barbados.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

COVID-19 hit during the remaining four months of our accelerator programme. We still wanted to provide support to our entrepreneurs, but we had to reimagine what this would look like. It was our goal to act as a support system to them navigate this new reality.

We called our entrepreneurs to get a better understanding of their needs and reached out to subject matter experts, coaches and mentors to help shape this upgraded programme. The result was a digital experience that allowed our entrepreneurs

to complete the programme remotely while getting the support needed during the crisis.

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES

We created opportunities for collaboration and learning between our blue economy and growth-stage entrepreneurs. Starting from January until the end of the programme in June, we hosted training sessions that exposed both groups to sustainable business practices. As a result, we launched three new workshops:

- **Measuring & Monitoring Impact**
- **Blue Economy Marketing**
- **Branding & Scaling in the Blue Economy**

PRIVATE WEBINARS

Our private webinars were a success, and garnered a 95% satisfaction rating. At the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, we engaged our entrepreneurs in discussions to understand the challenges they were facing. To support them, coaches and facilitators were invited to help shed light on recovery strategies that focused on three core areas: **strategy**, **finance**, and **marketing**. Each entrepreneur had a one-on-one session with a mentor to discuss the best way for their business to tackle issues.

DBJ IGNITE SUCCESS STORIES

7 entrepreneurs were supported, which since the launch of IGNITE, is the most in our portfolio. Jodi-Ann Whittingham is a Branson Centre entrepreneur that has shined in this programme. She started her hair care line under *Gwen-Estelle Naturals* and later applied for the IGNITE grant to sustain her product. Through passion, perseverance, and strategic marketing, she managed to get all of her products on display at *Fontana Pharmacies* (Jamaica) island-wide.

DEVCOMMS

The socio-economic effects of the coronavirus required a rapid adjustment to our communications strategy. We focused on adding immense value to the entrepreneurial ecosystem through educational content while increasing awareness of our programme shift from business acceleration to recovery management.

The approach yielded favourable impact metrics, including the exponential growth of our email database, increased social media engagement, as well as a surge in virtual speaking engagements for our newly appointed CEO.

COVID-19 RESOURCE HUB

Video content has always been favoured among our audience. We have increased production through our webinars and team expertise content on our new [resource page](#) on [bransoncentre.co](#). Created to help entrepreneurs navigate this new normal, it has become the website's second highest viewed page.

PUBLIC WEBINARS

We executed three **Recovery.Resilience.GROWTH** webinars which garnered a total of 335 registrants. We repurposed the content on multiple channels, such as our newsletters and our resource hub, so that we could reach even more entrepreneurs.

YELLO MEDIA GROUP PARTNERSHIP

Yello has been a stalwart support in various capacities throughout the year. One of many fruits of the partnership included the gifting of US\$10,000 worth of marketing consultation and services to 20 of our recent graduates. Additionally, Yello partnered with us as a major sponsor of our first digital conference: **Leadership in a Digital Age**.

MASTERCARD SYNERGY

We provided educational resources to support Caribbean SMEs through Mastercard's small business education portal **MastercardBIZ**. Our entrepreneurs also got the opportunity to utilize free cyber vulnerability assessment services to determine how to best protect themselves against the heightened risk of cybercrime.



HOLLY BRANSON INTERVIEW

Our CEO got the opportunity to share her people-first approach to supporting entrepreneurs in an interview with the head of **Virgin Unite**, Holly Branson. The conversation was publicised on [Virgin.com](#) and its social media channels. This conversation was well received and contributed to raising awareness on our initiatives.

DIGITAL EVENT CIRCUIT

Our CEO increased the organization's brand equity through participation in numerous high-profile online events. Some of which included the **PSOJ's The Road to Recovery** conference, as well as the **Republic Bank of Trinidad and Tobago's Succeeding in the Low Touch Economy** panel discussion.

VIRGIN FILM

The team and select entrepreneurs were featured in **Entrepreneurship is in our DNA**. The short film which showcases how members of the Virgin family are going the extra mile for people on the frontlines during the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

BRANSON CENTRE SUMMIT EDUCATES 3,000

Leadership in a Digital Age was created to help usher Caribbean entrepreneurs into the fourth industrial revolution. Over the course of two jam-packed days, our attendees got the chance to learn from 24 global experts and digital entrepreneurs. Our dedicated partners for this event were **PanJam Investment Limited** and **Yello Media Group**.

SCREW IT, LET'S DO IT

It was important to highlight our transition from business acceleration to recovery management in the face of COVID-19. Making its debut during our virtual summit, our 2-minute brand video **Screw it, let's do it** highlights the milestones of the year and our commitment to entrepreneurial development.

OPERATIONS



The coronavirus outbreak pushed us to make a number of changes to our operations. Subsequently, we continued to advance numerous measures related to efficiency and stakeholder healthcare and protection.

PANDEMIC POLICY

Given the government's work from home orders, we had to reimagine our way of working and the policies that guide us as an organisation. This process included examining labour laws with a representative from the Ministry of Labour to ensure we were adhering to guidelines. Additionally, our sick leave policy was updated following the coronavirus outbreak to include a *pandemic policy*. This policy was crafted to outline the steps that should be taken if an employee, or close relative, tests positive for COVID-19.

PBX INTEGRATION

To increase efficiency around the office, a personal branch exchange (PBX) system was introduced. This simplified the processes of call forwarding and message routing in the office. This system also reduced contact between employees, which came in handy as a preventative measure to reduce any potential spread of COVID-19.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN

We developed a disaster management plan before the coronavirus outbreak. The plan was tailored to the Centre's current location, as this will determine possible foreseeable disasters that may impact the Centre. This meant understanding our location and possible disasters we may encounter, then establishing procedures to minimize the impact of

these disasters. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, in compliance with the government's protocols, hand sanitizers, masks, and additional cleaning agents were purchased. We also arranged the office space to ensure the recommended social distance was maintained.

SYSTEMS RATIONALIZATION

With the new way of working we had to rationalize our tools and processes, especially since we were now working predominantly as a remote team. This proved to be useful following the coronavirus outbreak, as all processes had to be moved online. We used a customer relationship management (CRM) platform to regulate the relationships between our entrepreneurs, mentors, and volunteers. Prior to the software, different platforms were used to manage all our customer relationships, which proved to be inefficient and time-consuming. Implementing the CRM mitigated this by providing a comprehensive management effort.

PROGRAMMES SUPPORT

We are an all-hands-on-deck kind of a crew, and when we shifted our programme to utilize more technology, the Operations team became heavily involved in the day-to-day execution of our digital experience. This shift not only allowed the teams' expertise to be utilised in a new way, it also allowed for cross-functional training and capacity strengthening.





OUR *Stories*



BRANSON CENTRE WELCOMES 14 NEW BUSINESSES INTO ITS **ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME**

We kicked off 2020 on a high note as we welcomed 14 new businesses into our 6-month accelerator programme. Nearly 300 businesses from across the Caribbean submitted applications, and after a rigorous vetting process, the following businesses from Jamaica, Belize, Trinidad and Barbados were selected:

- **Instant Save Water Conservation**
- **The RibKage Grill**
- **Connect Critical Infrastructure Solutions**
- **The Book Merchant**
- **Captured Moments**
- **Little Hobby Hut Fish Farm and Safari**
- **JL Farms**
- **Aquatic Ornamental**

- **Clean Harbour**
- **AquaWorx**
- **Vetiver TT Ecological Engineering Solutions**
- **Oracabessa Dive Shop**
- **Nature My Therapy**
- **Angel Lisa**

It was our goal to create a greater impact through a triple bottom line approach - **People, Planet, Profit**. We were excited to support more businesses focused on scaling in the **Blue Economy** knowing that it offers immense expansion opportunities for regional businesses in the sector. This cohort also reflected greater gender parity as approximately 50% of the selected companies are led by women or have mixed-gender founding teams.



BLUE DOT MAKING A MASSIVE SOCIAL IMPACT

One thing Branson Centre isn't short of is talented entrepreneurs. When they innovate, they innovate to excite, they innovate to adapt, and they innovate to make a change. One such entrepreneur is Larren Peart. Since the coronavirus outbreak, Blue Dot's CEO has been leading a group of young professionals dedicated to assisting Jamaican citizens grapple with the coronavirus pandemic.

The group, Citizens Response JA (CRJA), includes entrepreneurs, doctors, engineers, and other young Jamaicans who are working to help address some of the challenges that the country has been facing in response to the deadly virus. The group immediately began the manufacturing and provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers and COVID-19 patients at the onset of the outbreak.

"It is recommended that healthcare workers wear face shields over their N95 mask to preserve the life of the filter. So we are printing 3D face shields and attaching laminate to it," Larren said in an interview. "We are also 3D printing a device that allows four persons to be connected to a ventilator instead of one," he added.

Larren and his team at CRJA have donated thousands of PPE masks and gowns to the healthcare sector, and have also built emergency ventilators and testing booths. CRJA also has the manufacturing capacity to produce 3000 test swabs per day. In addition to that, Peart and his team at Blue Dot have devised a survival guide to help small businesses prepare for the post-COVID-19 era.



“With dwindling budgets and constrained lifestyles, consumer behaviour has definitely shifted. How consumers would have marketed products and services pre-COVID would not be as effective now as it was then, target profiles have changed. So it’s very important for businesses to understand these changes and create strategies and campaigns to remain top of mind and relevant to the new consumer needs,” he continued.

Larren believes that the key to surviving the pandemic is being able to measure, in real-time what these changes in consumer behaviour are going to mean. As a result, the team at Blue Dot formed the *Bluedot Comuna* community to respond to the challenges of gathering data amid the pandemic. This is an online network which allows for the gathering of quick insights without having to do field surveys that could expose both the participants and the researchers to health risks. Surveys are sent to the *Comuna* community, which represents varying demographics, and Blue Dot receives real-time feedback through which assessment of changes in the consumer behaviour can be made.

Among his many social ventures, Larren also spearheaded the production of an interactive map to track and analyze the 2020 Jamaican General Election. This map was modeled from CNN’s *Magicwall* and John King and was the first of its kind for Jamaica and the Caribbean Region. The map

allowed people to view the historical election data in real-time and make their projections based on data.

“I will continue to push the envelope, to do things that have never been done here in the Caribbean, and prove that there are no limits to what we can achieve,” he said. “The interactive map was just another step for us in our efforts to give the people access to data”.

The pandemic continues to present a number of setbacks for all businesses, but Larren says that Blue Dot has been presented with opportunities that are still untapped.

“**With dwindling budgets and constrained lifestyles, consumer behaviour has definitely shifted. How consumers would have marketed products and services pre-COVID would not be as effective now as it was then, target profiles have changed.**”

THE WELLNESS CEO



Women are multi-talented and multi-skilled powerhouses and are dedicated and fearless front-runners in today's workforce. Our CEO is no exception. Ever since she stepped into the role of Captain of the Branson Centre ship, she's navigated a dedicated team through calm and stormy waters with grace and brilliance.

As a wellness expert, it has always been Lauri-Ann's mission to create a space for personal growth and collaboration within the Centre. Some of the ways she has done this are by facilitating mastermind sessions with the team to offer support for personal projects, and by hosting fireside conversations with entrepreneurs to allow them to share their perspectives of what they want to see done in the ecosystem.

COVID-19 required us to act fast and re-strategize on how to best serve our entrepreneurs. This involved delivering our programme 100% online while working from home. While most would have buckled under the pressure of rapid change, Lauri-Ann stayed true to her values of encouraging workplace wellness to facilitate a seamless transition. "I'm passionate about workplace wellness because to be productive at work and achieve the goals you have to fill your cup," she

While most would have buckled under the pressure of rapid change, Lauri-Ann stayed true to her values of encouraging workplace wellness to facilitate a seamless transition.

said. "It's easy to get worn out with everything you have to deal with, especially when you're running a business, but you have to find the time to take care of yourself emotionally and physically to take care of your team and customers".

Seeing her team happy and healthy has become a major priority. "Taking care of your team is critical during these times. Each team member has different needs and it's important to discern what works for them on an individual level. While some may need more one-on-one coaching conversations, others may be more task-oriented so communicating and checking in through email may be a better option. I am so proud of the team for going above and beyond to serve our entrepreneurs during the period, despite the challenges".



INSTANT SAVE PARTNERS WITH THE WATER PROJECT

COVID-19 caused entrepreneurs to rethink how they serve their customers and Instant Save's Leanne Spence is no exception. Through her company, she developed and sourced solutions that minimize the risk of spreading the virus whilst using water as efficiently as possible. One of those solutions was the creation of an impressive portable hand wash and storage station designed from a barrel.

Since working from home was now in full swing it caused her to think quickly by targeting homeowners. "Before COVID-19, 95% of our revenue was attributed to commercial clients, with the closure of entities and the trend towards work from home we connected with our homeowners and created a water-saving kit to help cut water costs through water conservation".

In light of the pandemic, Leanne realized that water is now at the forefront as an essential public health measure for sanitization and cleaning. "This new reality requires that we adapt our infrastructure, systems and our way of life to sustain current and future needs". Recognizing the need for proper water usage is the reason why she has partnered with *The Water Project* to address the water management challenges in Jamaica. This project is focused on

educating individuals on managing water demand through *Rainwater Harvesting* and *Greywater Recycling* courses. Together, they have created *The Homeowners' Water Management Guide* as well as a video series on *How to Read Your Water Bill* and *Installing Water Efficient Devices*. Properties are now at liberty to get the information needed from this project to reduce costs and ultimately improve sustainability.

Since the pandemic, Leanne has been busy offering advice to other entrepreneurs grappling with staying relevant and making sales during this crisis. "Do some research and talk to your existing customers to learn what their current needs are, have a local and global perspective and seek to solve issues to get through now, while you look at trends and strategize how to take advantage of the opportunities you've found in your research". With the advice she shares to other entrepreneurs, she extends her gratitude to the Branson Centre. Having joined our programme in January, she continuously sings praises about the support provided through our workshops and CEO meetings.

The future is bright for Instant Save; water availability and hygiene is a growing concern which therefore creates an opportunity to address water challenges with new and innovative products. "Ultimately helping our customers reduce costs and helping our environment sustain its water resources for generations to come. We operate with the triple bottom line, people, planet and profit".



YARDIE DIVERS ADVENTURE

When Branson Centre launched its Blue Economy programme last year, we wanted to support impact-driven entrepreneurs who wanted to be a force for good in sustaining the health of our oceans. Llewelyn Meggs and Jaedon Lawe are two such entrepreneurs. Through *Yardie Divers Environmental Conservationists Ltd.*, these passionate marine biologists offer marine conservation tours, environmental education, SCUBA training, dive excursions, and environmental consultancies guided by the motto “Discover, Educate, Conserve”.

Having completed our training, Meggs and Lawe managed to secure a grant that gave them the means to do upgrades to their boat. “Getting the grant was a game-changer for us, our operational costs were through the roof, and by getting the four-stroke engine, it means our gas bill has been cut in half,” said Meggs. The dynamic duo says that the grant made a significant impact on how they operate their businesses, having become free from the pressure of paying off loans and debts, they can focus on how they want to improve. Lawe also had a few words to say about getting the grant,

“Getting that grant money at that time hugely helped us and allowed us to implement some of the things we learnt from the programme”.

Lawe expressed his appreciation for the Branson Centre, saying that “it was very fulfilling knowing that somebody created a programme which was very practical and geared towards blue economy entrepreneurs. They weren’t just using a template they found online, it was tailored specifically for what we needed to grow”. Meggs added to the praises by sharing how the programme benefited his outlook on the business, “Going through the programme was very rewarding, I learnt a lot and I’m a better person for the task ahead now that I know the necessary steps leading up to the goal”.

As a thank you, they invited the team on an ocean tour of Port Royal. This was the first time in months the team got a chance to see each other in the flesh due to remote working brought on by COVID-19.



It was great to come together for such a fun and educational experience - from learning about the history of the Sunken City, the importance of mangroves to the ecosystem, as well as Llewelyn's and Jaedon's misadventures with pesky jellyfish, it was a fantastic day.

The upsurge of the pandemic has both negatively and positively impacted the businesses, but Meggs remains positive and committed to Yardie Divers' growth. "COVID-19 came at a time where we weren't necessarily able to meet the demands of the public because our boat was down and we had to be outsourcing other boats. This gave us a chance to prepare ourselves fully for our customers, but then again, people are trying to be cautious and we are also trying to maintain the guidelines that have been set".

Yes, COVID-19 has created an undeniable barrier between the customers and the entrepreneurs but even during this difficult time, the entrepreneurs are still ready to grow their businesses, diversify

“ They weren't just using a template they found online, it was tailored specifically for what we needed to grow. ”

their products, attract more investors, and get themselves on a larger market. "One of the big plans on the horizon is to market, market, market. It doesn't make sense you have a business nobody knows about so we plan to roll out a marketing campaign hopefully before the end of the year".

SHIFTING TO RECOVERY MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

We shifted our focus from business acceleration to recovery planning and management in March to meet the immediate needs of our entrepreneurs grappling with the effects of COVID-19. This included delivering 100% online training and support focused on three business development areas: **finance**, **strategic planning**, and **marketing**.

It wasn't easy, but we banded together to get it done. Our Board Chairman, Christopher Williams, applauded us for our quick response to challenges. "Given the increasing confirmed cases within Jamaica, the team started working from home and took measures to minimize disruptions to its current cohort by delivering its programme online within days after the office was closed. These sessions have been an excellent support system as Branson Centre's training invigorates and empowers entrepreneurs to continue achieving goals".

"We knew that this pandemic has been the cause of stress and upheaval for individuals and businesses alike, and services like ours would be critical in the recovery period," said our CEO, Lauri-Ann Ainsworth, "which is why it was paramount to share resources on business sustainability and resilience".

In addition to providing online support to our cadre of entrepreneurs, we developed a series of free public webinars to educate business leaders and their teams during the global crisis. The series focused on recovery, resilience, and growth by pulling together industry experts to share solutions to some of today's challenges.

COVID-19 has presented new dilemmas to Caribbean businesses. Many have had to scale back operations, and entrepreneurs still face difficult decisions regarding layoffs and reduction in salaries. "We wanted to support entrepreneurs so that they could be better equipped to withstand rapid operational change," Lauri-Ann continued.



"This meant taking a look at incorporating wellness in one's daily routine, as well as remote work considerations and strategies for sustainability. Our goal was to cultivate innovative thinking and encourage strategic action so that businesses could not only survive but thrive during and after the pandemic".

While some businesses have had to close doors, others have experienced an increase in demand. Branson Centre entrepreneur *Danielle Thompson* of **Nature My Therapy** – a vegan food distribution company known across Jamaica for its all-natural immune-boosting juices, is one such example. Others have taken inventive measures to remain competitive within the marketplace. Given that working from home has become the new normal for most persons; Leanne Spence of **Instant Save** created water-saving kits as a means of conservation and solution to reducing costs; Gariel and Gillian Ferguson of **The Ribkage Grill** restaurant have implemented delivery services to support social distancing efforts; and Dwayne Watson of **Connect Critical Infrastructure Solutions** has been supplying high-efficiency air filters for commercial buildings to slow the spread of bacteria and has sights on setting up fever scanners for high traffic areas such as BPOs.

We are happy that our shift to recovery planning and management continues to support entrepreneurs as they pivot and digitize processes.



AQUAWORX SERVES CUSTOMERS IN NEW AND EXCITING WAYS

Narda Ventura established Aquaworx with the hope of creating water lovers who understand the benefits and practice of ocean conservation. Aquaworx takes a unique approach to teach swim lessons for persons of all ages so that they can discover their inner mermaids.

The pandemic has encouraged her to pivot the business and dive into new and exciting ways to serve her community. Though her plans are to have Aquaworx become the premier Aquatic School, and the household name of choice in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean, those plans were temporarily thwarted by COVID-19. However, Ventura and her team at Aquaworx developed two new programmes to limit the number of persons at their facility and also help parents with monitoring their children during online classes: Swim@Home and @HomeMonitors.

Swim@Home delivers Aquaworx swim classes to you, at the comfort of your pool. With this programme, consumers could rest assured that they are swimming in a clean and safe environment.

@HomeMonitors on the other hand put a spin on the usual Aquaworx services. @HomeMonitors bring peace of mind to parents while their children are tuned in to online classes. Parents were able to breathe easy, knowing that they had the power to ensure their children were logged into their classes and engaging. The monitors also provided parents with the opportunity to ensure assignments were completed and submitted.

The team at Aquaworx during the pandemic also implemented a mandatory mask and sanitation policy for the parents and guardians of all guppies who visited the Aquaworx facility.



MAKING AN IMPACT TOGETHER

BRANSON CENTRE GRADUATES RECEIVE US\$10,000 GIFT FROM **YELLO MEDIA GROUP**

Yello Media Group awarded some of our recent graduates US\$10,000 worth of marketing products and services to help them weather the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic.

20 businesses from across the Caribbean benefited from free consultations from Yello's pool of experts valued at US\$500; this was done to ensure that the entrepreneurs have the right marketing mix to generate more sales and revenue opportunities.

"Yello Media Group is very excited to be working in partnership with the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship - Caribbean and provide support to the ongoing growth of Caribbean based businesses," said Chief Revenue Officer, Christopher Armistead. "We share a common and ambitious vision which is to provide entrepreneurs with access to the tools needed to reach their business goals".

"When Yello Media Group approached us, we knew right away that they were committed to the development of Caribbean entrepreneurs", said Branson Centre's Development and Communications Manager, Gizelle Riley. "When most companies are conserving resources, Yello Media Group continues to step up to the plate and offer support wherever possible," Riley continued.

The announcement happened in a private online ceremony. Branson Centre's CEO Lauri-Ann Ainsworth kicked off the occasion marvelling on how the partnership quickly blossomed from a live stream event she did with Yello Media Barbados a few months earlier. Thereafter, Yello Media Group's Senior General Manager (Jamaica) Jessica Campbell made the official announcement.

“When I look at what Branson Centre is about, I see where it aligns beautifully with the language that is spoken here at Yello and our overall outlook about businesses and our passion for businesses,” said Campbell. “Every year, Yello serves more than 20,000 businesses in the Caribbean, and throughout the pandemic, Branson Centre and Yello continue to support the Caribbean entrepreneurial ecosystem”. Jessica dubbed the award as the entrepreneurs’ official entry to the Yello family, and concluded by saying that “once you go Yello, it is hard to go back”.

Our entrepreneurs were beyond grateful for the opportunity the partnership presented. Each was selected based on the immediate needs and innovativeness displayed by each entrepreneur as they navigate the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. “COVID-19 has really changed everything, but there are still a lot of opportunities,” said Instant Save’s CEO, Leanne Spence. “This

partnership sounds as though it is working towards helping my business to serve our customers better and build messages that resonate with them; I am very excited to see what else it brings”.

This is one of many initiatives we have collaborated on to make a bigger impact on the Caribbean’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. Others include launching a series of joint-webinars focused on marketing, leadership, and operational management, as well as Yello Media Group lending its digital advertising expertise to bolster awareness of our virtual summit. “Yello Media Group continues to provide unwavering support to the Branson Centre,” said Lauri-Ann. “We aim to provide small and medium-sized entrepreneurs with our combined skills, knowledge, and training so that they can be better equipped and lead a thriving operation as they adjust to this new normal”.

We share a common and ambitious vision which is to provide entrepreneurs with access to the tools needed to reach their business goals.

FREE WEBINAR

HOW TO MARKET YOUR BUSINESS DURING A CRISIS

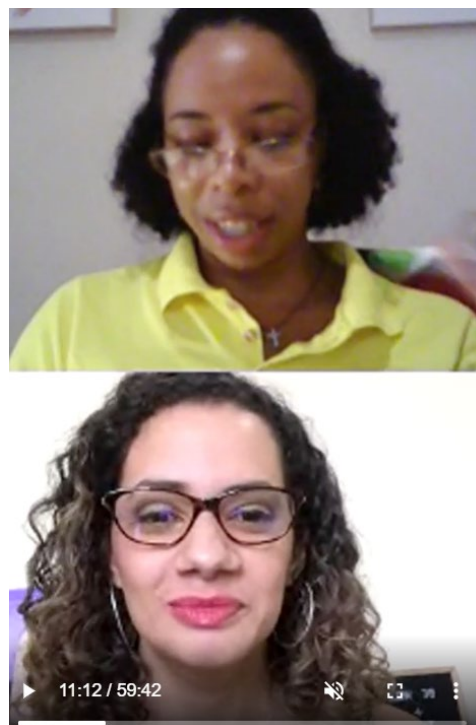
Live Webinar: Thursday October 1st at 2:00PM (GMT-5)

Rashied Girvan
Digital Sales Manager
Imagine Digital

Gizelle Riley
Development and Communicators Manager
Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship Caribbean

Anika Repole Wilson
Managing Director
Chic Digital

Yello Media Group has partnered with the Branson Centre to deliver a joint webinar on how businesses can market during a crisis. This is the first of many initiatives we will implement together to make an even bigger impact on the Caribbean's entrepreneurial ecosystem.



yellobbd • Following

yellobbd Yello Barbados IG LIVE with Lauri-Ann Ainsworth

17w

michellerbowe Thanks @kazrollins for asking the right questions. A very informative and educational interview with lots and lots of amazing tips. Many thank to you both 🙌

17w 1 like Reply

240 views

JULY 2

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JOELLE SMITH LAUNCHES KINGSTON CREATIVE HUB



In 2015, Joelle Smith gave up her corporate career in accounting to pursue her passion for interior design with her business *If Walls Could Talk*. Joelle, who has always had a passion for creating spaces that double as both beautiful and functional, recently co-founded the *Kingston Creative Hub* (KCH) co-working space. As a graduate of our 2019 cohort, Joelle was able to receive support from the Centre to get a DBJ IGNITE grant, which funded the KCH project. The grant funds up to \$4 million or 70% of the project cost, and is geared towards fostering entrepreneurship innovation and support for the creation and growth of new firms in productive sectors among MSMEs, from start-up to growth stage.

Reflecting on her time with the Branson Centre, she notes that our programme has played a critical role in her business' growth since inception. "We also participated in Branson Centre's *Made of More Challenge* (MOMEC) a few years ago and we benefited greatly from the training and mentorship through that initiative," Joelle said.

Kingston is believed to be the creative capital of the Caribbean. KCH provides ready-made office spaces, neatly tucked away upstairs the historic Swiss Stores in the heart of Downtown. The KCH community also benefits from capacity-building workshops.

KCH is a 2200-sq ft space that hosts six offices, a hot-desk lounge, a podcast booth, and a conference room. The conference room also doubles as a photo studio and is fitted with drone photography by Jamaican artist Yanic Barrett. Joelle also portrayed her passion for beauty in functional spaces by spotlighting work from other Jamaican artists such as Tamara Harding, Kianne Hutchinson, and Rebecca Levy in KCH.

Since COVID-19, KCH has had to digitize its operations like many other businesses. The space has been retrofitted to now include a COVID-friendly setup that encourages social distancing while working. Masks are also required. "We have taken our workshops to the digital space, so our community can still benefit

from the wealth of information and a sense of community while remaining at home. We have also created a clean physical environment that safely encourages social distancing through its COVID friendly layout. Masks are also mandatory for everyone's safety. We have also facilitated several businesses with a virtual mailing address, while they are out of office," Joelle noted.

Preparing for life after COVID, Joelle says that KCH plans to continue rolling out several satellite spaces across Downtown that can facilitate meetings, concerts, maker spaces, dancing, theatre, and much more, while making a positive impact on the livelihoods of our creative community, and the economy.

We share a common and ambitious vision which is to provide entrepreneurs with access to the tools needed to reach their business goals.



BRANSON CENTRE SUMMIT EDUCATES OVER 3,000 WITH BUSINESS BUILDING CONTENT



We impacted over 3,000 people worldwide with *Leadership in a Digital Age!* The virtual summit took place during Global Entrepreneurship Week on November 17-18. Through a mix of on-demand webinars and livestream panel discussions, our attendees got the opportunity to learn actionable strategies from global experts and digital entrepreneurs on how to grow a business online and navigate the new normal brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

“It is extremely gratifying to witness the global impact of this event,” said Joanna Banks, *PanJam Investment Limited’s* Senior Vice President of New Business Development and Strategy. “PanJam has been a longstanding partner of the Branson Centre because of our shared commitment to innovation and entrepreneurial development, and *Leadership in a Digital Age* perfectly represents those ideals,” she added.

Yello Media Group also partnered with us to produce the dynamic event. “Those in attendance were able to learn best practices and walk away with

actionable marketing strategies to grow their business,” said Yello Media Group’s General Manager, Jessica Campbell. “Branson Centre’s summit has proven that when different organizations have a common goal and pool resources together, they can achieve amazing results”.

Dubbed as a “crash course on leadership, branding, and marketing for SMEs”, this digital experience featured entrepreneurs with million-dollar online businesses, including Adam G. Force, founder of the multi-media digital brand *Change Creator*; Barrington McIntosh, founder of *BaLance eCom* which trains multi-million dollar sellers on the Amazon marketplace; as well as Jamaican-born podcaster, Nicaila Matthews Okome of *Side Hustle Pro*; as well as leadership and marketing experts from the Caribbean, United States, and Canada. Speakers include, Heneka Watkis-Porter from *The Entrepreneurial You*; Nadine Liverpool, personal branding and online marketing strategist; Keron Rose from *Droid Island*; Robby Polk from Yello Media Group, among others.

"I am extremely humbled to take part in a great keynote discussion for the summit," said Adam G. Force. "Entrepreneurs and small businesses are two of the most important solutions to rising global challenges, and that's why meaningful businesses that solve these challenges are more important than ever before".



"We gathered the best of the best for *Leadership in a Digital Age*," said our proud CEO. "This was a free event, but the value of the content is priceless," she continued. "It was our intention to inspire SMEs as well as provide practical training that attendees could implement with ease. Even though we shifted our focus from business acceleration to recovery management, we wanted to show SMEs that opportunities are still out there to help them get on the path for growth".



Lauri-Ann commented that another event objective was to give more Caribbean faces the opportunity to showcase their expertise on a global stage.

Leadership in a Digital Age hosted two livestream panel discussions. '*Leadership marketing for Caribbean entrepreneurs*' highlighted how Caribbean entrepreneurs can stand out in a noisy digital world. When asked what it takes for entrepreneurs to position themselves as thought leaders, panelist and *Digital Disruption* CEO Kadia Francis stated, "You can't be a thought leader if nobody knows what your thoughts are. You have to start exercising your expertise, people have to actually know what it is that you know. The magnificent thing about the age that we live in is that there are no gatekeepers anymore, it's your audience that decides your relevance, it's your audience that decides that you're good". Other experts adding to the robust discussion included Kemal Brown, CEO - *Digita Global Marketing*; Gabriel Heron, VP Marketing - *JAMPRO*; and Sherron Washington, CEO - *The P3 Solution*.

The second panel focused on the topic '*How Caribbean businesses can thrive in a digital world*'. The discussion spotlighted the evolution of leadership in this digital age and the way forward. Oliver Sabga, CEO of *Term Finance*, a web-based credit institution operating in the Caribbean region, offered an empowering yet thought-provoking statement: "Take the risk and pivot from employment into entrepreneurship, but dot your I's and cross your T's in your business plan and be realistic". Other panelists included Janette Brin, CEO - *Caribbean POSH*; Larren Peart, CEO - *Blue Dot*; and Melissa Smith, CEO - *Association of Virtual Assistants*.

The summit got rave reviews. One attendee, Christine Gyles, said "the sessions I was able to join were awesome. As a budding entrepreneur, I learned valuable gems from your expert presenters. I was grateful that I was able to view some of the sessions I missed. It was time well spent. I look forward to another summit in the future. Thanks to you and your partners for making it possible for me. I did not know of your company before, and now I will not forget you, because you have added value to my life".

Leadership in a Digital Age is Branson Centre's first virtual summit. "The numbers don't lie. It's clear that taking our signature event online was a step in the right direction and that SMEs are craving this kind of content," said our Development and Communications Manager, Gizelle Riley. "Entrepreneurs have to be agile and multifaceted leaders in this fast-paced digital age, and *Leadership in a Digital Age* reflects that in an educational and inspiring way".

ADRIAN LOPEZ CREATES A 360 VIRTUAL REALITY PRODUCT



Adrian Lopez is the founder of Liquid Light Digital (LLD) and a graduate of last year's accelerator programme. LLD has been Jamaica's premiere one-stop film, animation, and visual effects company since 2002. Through his company, he has worked with major global brands such as BBC, CNN, Disney, The Discovery Channel, Warner Bros, NBC, ScotiaBank, Nokia, Royal Caribbean Cruises, and many others.

Adrian is a producer, screenwriter, director, animator, and visual effects artist and has produced over 450 award-winning commercials, short films, television series, and music videos. He also has several feature-length films and anthology projects under consideration by international investors. Always seeking new opportunities, he formed BLiNK, a 24/7 360° advertising agency, and with his partners, landed internationally funded public messaging campaigns for government agencies and corporate clients.

His latest endeavour, ADVRT360 was born out of necessity in the new socially distant world of COVID-19. The company develops virtual experiences to help industries showcase their products to consumers in innovative ways; creating captivating and immersive experiences that drive consumer engagement.

Adrian was first exposed to Virtual Reality during a visit to a Virtual Reality (VR) Experience at a London Shopping Mall in the early '90s. The limited technology of the time required a 10-pound headset and 20-pound backpack. It was an uncomfortable but inspiring look at what may be possible. In the years following, Adrian experimented with coding his own virtual reality experiences in game engines, then combining VR with his film expertise to produce immersive virtual reality short films.

When COVID-19 hit, the Jamaican film industry, like so many others, took a downturn and interfered with Adrian's plans for his film and animation business. However, he saw an opportunity to develop and target his VR products at businesses looking for new ways to reach customers. ADVRT360's virtual tour products are easily accessible from any phone, tablet, or computer, and Adrian and his team continue putting in the work and developing more options for customers and businesses.

He is developing virtual experiences for a broad range of clients, from virtual escape rooms, virtual training simulators, virtual automotive showrooms, construction site assessment and monitoring, and even e-learning applications. Lopez is positive that this product can enhance any business or industry in one way or another. With the most obvious being space showcases, automotive retail, real estate, commercial, and tourism. Since its launch, they have seen applications sent in for restaurants, corporate training and recruitment, e-learning, urban planning, customer and employee orientation, and much more. Major brands have already started to engage with the ADVRT360 such as Toyota, Fidelity Motors, Stewarts Automotive Group, and many hotels and private villas.

Adrian is proud of all his endeavours, but the advent of COVID-19 was a catalyst for creativity in a new direction. You could say that Adrian is at the top of his game; innovative ideas, brilliant initiative, and complex skills that are driven by passion and attention to detail. His hard-earned reputation proves his capabilities and what can be accomplished with the right mindset.



Image from Adam Slama

Story Credit: Holly Branson
@ Virgin.com

TRADING BURNOUT FOR BALANCE

I reached out to Lauri-Ann Ainsworth, CEO of the Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship in the Caribbean, after discovering that she is known as the 'Wellness CEO' among her team. I'm so glad I did as I've officially added a new female idol to my list!

Wellness became a focus for Lauri-Ann after she experienced the hectic juggle that comes with being a mother of two young kids while trying to balance business and life. It made her realise the importance of self-care and looking after every side of yourself – not just your professional self. After this realisation, Lauri-Ann became passionate about helping the 'whole entrepreneur' and making sure people place their wellbeing at the forefront of any business plans. As she said to me:

"There are human beings behind these businesses and if we only focus on the business, the revenue, the profits and not the people, then we're not doing the business a service".

We spoke about the importance of entrepreneurs staying connected in 2020 while navigating our new 'virtual' normal, so they can learn and grow from their shared experiences. We also discussed how important it is for leaders to check in on their team members. Not just about their workload, but about their lives too. While we work remotely, this feels more important than ever and I know it's something I miss a lot about the office!

I loved getting to know Lauri-Ann better and it was amazing to see how aligned we were in our beliefs. Her focus on helping entrepreneurs thrive in all aspects of life aligned so perfectly with our mission at Big Change to help young people thrive in life, not just exams. It's wonderful to see this holistic extension of learning – which is something that shouldn't begin and end at school!

Lauri-Ann focuses on what she calls The **3 S's** to help entrepreneurs avoid burnout. These are:

SYSTEMS:
where can you create automated systems in your business and where can you outsource tasks?

SUPPORT:
lean on people and learn to delegate so you can focus on high-value and revenue-generating activities.

SELF-CARE:
bake it into your day. Figure out your 'rhythm of productivity' and schedule your day around that.



Get To Know
**OUR FANTASTIC
ENTREPRENEURS**

JL FARMS
Wartland, St. Catherine
Tel: 876-816-6518

SPORTI

Leanne Spence

INSTANT SAVE CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS LTD.



Instant-Save Conservation is a family-owned water conservation company. We provide water-saving solutions for property owners and managers, helping them lower utility costs and helping the country improve its water management by addressing overuse and inefficiency in residential, commercial and institutional sectors.

We conduct building water use assessments, fix leaks and retrofit or replace plumbing fixtures to their high-efficiency counterparts resulting in a reduction in water, energy and sewer costs and supporting sustainable water supplies.

Growing up, my father Richard Spence, proprietor of The Deck (formerly Friends on The Deck) ensured that the family participated in stock taking, staff meetings and other areas of the business. When he encountered a water issue in 2013, we saw it as an opportunity to help other businesses who may be having similar challenges.

The more I learned about water conservation and efficiency was the more I felt driven in the business because of its importance for sustaining the human race. We continue to forge ahead because with global concerns of water scarcity, droughts, environmental degradation and increasing water rates, our business is our environmental responsibility.

Jonathan & Daniel Barcant

VETIVER TT ECOLOGICAL ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS LTD.

Vetiver TT Ecological Engineering Solutions provides green and cost effective plant-based solutions to solve many soil and water-related challenges.

We combine geotechnical and water resource (civil) engineering expertise with the use of vetiver grass as a bioengineering tool, given its fibrous root system which grows up to 10 ft deep within 2 years, to help with slope stabilization, erosion control, soil and water conservation, and infrastructure protection – think natural retaining walls that cost 20-30% the price of rock, steel and concrete!

In many cases, we are therefore able to help clients save significant amounts of money and implement green, sustainable and attractive solutions as compared to more expensive traditional methods. We supply, design, and install solutions to residential, commercial and public works projects, and also work in the NGO space taking these solutions to rural communities and farmers on hillside lands.

I **[Jonathan]** am a civil engineer specializing in soils, water, and environment. After graduation, I began my career working with a large engineering firm in Canada – where our biggest clients were in the mining industry. I had the chance to work internationally and saw some good project examples in certain parts of the world, but also some very destructive ones – the last one which saw 10,000 acres of virgin rainforest being taken down to build an open-pit copper mine. This experience drove me to face some bigger inner decisions, and ultimately to shift my career to

environmental conservation and climate action - and having discovered vetiver grass, Vetiver TT was born!

One of the most important things that running a business has taught me is the immense value of good human resources. Good team members play such a critical role in business success; but also, I've gained an appreciation of the very large range of tasks and areas of expertise needed to run a business well, and therefore the value and strength of growing your team and having different persons to handle different roles and responsibilities.



Gariel & Gillian Ferguson

THE RIBKAGE GRILL



The Ribkage Grill is a full-service, casual dining family restaurant that specializes in BBQ and grilled foods. The concept was started in 1995 based on Gariel's passion for barbecue and the lack of its availability in Kingston, Jamaica. While there were options for jerk chicken and pork, he and his wife Gillian saw an opportunity to enter the market segment by making BBQ Ribs. The idea and concept have earned over 17 years of success.

Gillian: My passion for seamless hospitable service started in high school, where I got the opportunity to go on an overseas work experience programme in the summers to hotels in South Beach, Miami. There I got the opportunity to work in all aspects of the hotel, but was drawn to the food and beverage department, with my greatest fascination for the dining room.

Gariel: I am a self-taught cook with a love for BBQ and grilling. My passion for the business came from working in restaurant kitchens from the age of 13 and visiting my favourite restaurant, Tony Roma's while I was living in Florida.

Dwayne Watson & Tashauna Brennan

CONNECT CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE SOLUTIONS

Connect Critical Infrastructure Solutions (CCIS) is a Caribbean based company with its office located in Kingston, Jamaica that provides critical infrastructure solutions to businesses. We have experience supporting, implementing and designing solutions or services in Barbados, Haiti, Bahamas and Trinidad & Tobago.

Established in 2018, born from the desire to provide better value to our partners in various industries, our experience gives us a unique perspective and enables us to drive the development of the business directly towards meeting customer needs head-on.

Our passion for business started with controlling the operations of a similar organization. The thrill of making processes more efficient and seeing the results unfold through compliments from suppliers and customers alike sparked the need to develop these processes on a larger scale.

“

...our experience gives us a unique perspective and enables us to drive the development of the business directly towards meeting customer needs head-on

”



Sharon Elliott

THE BOOK MERCHANT

I started my working life as a teaching assistant in a primary school. I later went to Teachers College and became a fully trained teacher. After teaching for 2 years, I went to work in the US for 2 years. Upon my return in 1988, I got a job in publishing where I was exposed to the education system and resources in the US. I have since wanted to bring what I was learning to the people of the region. I stand firm in my belief that education is going to change our world.

The Book Merchant was established in 1993 when myself and George Davis joined forces. We both had worked in the book industry for some time and had secured agency contracts with Pearson Education and Heinemann Publishers, two of the leading educational publishers in the world. Together, they covered the Caribbean region from early childhood to university spaces by providing representation services for other publishers. In 1999, we signed a contract to also represent Scholastic, the world's largest children's publisher.



“

I stand firm in my belief that education is going to change our world.

”



Courtney Spence

CAPTURED MOMENTS

Captured Moments was founded in 2018 out of the desire to consolidate my trading as a limited liability operation. After leaving high school in 1987, I ventured into selling photographic supplies. This came about as a result of the demand identified by me in my video club venture that I started in school.

What started as the desire to meet my personal need evolved into a distribution of media equipment and supplies, incorporating the photography and videography industry. However, with the rapid evolution of the digital age, this has seen all our resources stretch to the limit as our business was now knocking on the door of a different segment of the creative industry. We ventured into the print and design of signage, souvenirs, as well as RFID Cards for government entities such as JUTC Smart Card and Voters IDs.

“

After leaving high school in 1987, I ventured into selling photographic supplies. This came about as a result of the demand identified by me in my video club venture that I started in school.

”

Nasheika Guyah

LITTLE'S HOBBY HUT SAFARI AND FISH FARM

Little's Hobby Hut Safari and Fish Farm is a recreational fishing facility that has been in existence since 1997. Initially, it was operated by my father 'Mr. Little' and brother, after which the operations portfolio was passed on to me in 2011 when I graduated from university. As a marine biologist studying fisheries conservation, I was elated that I was given a platform to promote inland fisheries as well as ecotourism.

The fish farm has been a part of my childhood since I was 5 years old and when I was 6 years old, my dad taught me to fish and set up my first fishing line. He carried me every weekend to the farm as well as to the Pelican Cays located on the South Coast of Jamaica to go fishing. Since then, my love for the ocean grew into a passion for protecting it. This fuelled my dreams into becoming a marine biologist and to learn more about the ocean. I started to study about fisheries conservation and marine protected areas. After graduating from university and taking over the family business, I started promoting fisheries conservation throughout inland fisheries.

What makes our product unique is that we are the only farm in Jamaica that rears saltwater, Tilapia which is a delicious alternative to sea fish. This fills a void created by the intense fishing pressure on the coastal fisheries.

Besides conservation and ocean protection, Little's Hobby Hut provides a relaxing atmosphere for patrons who want to unwind after a busy week with the scenery, cool breeze with dancing coconut trees, and lazy boy benches which provide a relaxing space for patrons. You are even taught how to fish and handle your catch, which we then cook for you at our on-site restaurant.



Daniel Colahar

JL FARMS LTD.



JL Farms is an agricultural based business focusing on supplying meat products to restaurants in Jamaica. Currently, our meat products include fish (saltwater tilapia) and pork. The business was initiated in 2015 in response to a shortage of pork in the latter part of 2014. As one of the executive directors for my family's business, Sakura Express Jamaica, I was constantly searching for pork suppliers or farmers that could consistently supply pork to the chain of restaurants and while maintaining a high standard. This venture proved impossible, as a result, I decided to start producing and supplying pork for the restaurants.

My passion for business began when I was 17 years old while solely managing a restaurant. Running your own business provides a sense of independence, and seeing that you can create a product that consumers love and that you can earn from your creation, a sense of accomplishment takes over and keeps you craving more. It also gives you challenges that make you have to think outside of the box. So for these reasons, I've developed the love for business.

“

Running your own business provides a sense of independence, and seeing that you can create a product that consumers love and that you can earn from your creation, a sense of accomplishment takes over and keeps you craving more.

”

Thomas & Sundar Guyah

AQUATIC ORNAMENTALS

Aquatic Ornamentals deals with the production and supply of ornamental fish species and provides accessories such as fish tanks and plants. The business started as a hobby that quickly grew into a self-sustaining entity as the demand for ornamental fish increased over the years.

Since graduating from high school, I [Thomas] started to manage the family business, which was an aquaculture facility, at the age of 19. Over the years, I started to experiment with the breeding techniques for small ornamental fish species such as Mollys as a hobby.

This eventually turned into a lucrative business as I started to grow different species, including different varieties of Japanese Kois. Utilizing my engineering background, I started to design and build aquariums and supply these to different pet shops and fish enthusiasts. Although operating the farm is a labour-intensive process, I enjoy every minute of it, it is my therapy.



Travis Graham

ORACABESSA DIVE SHOP

We're working hard to make a positive impact in the town of Oracabessa. Our business was established in 1997 with the mission to catalyze the sustainable development of Oracabessa and its environs. Today the Oracabessa Foundation is focused on making an impact in three critical areas:

More People Working: Our strategy to increase the number of people in Oracabessa who have good jobs has revolved around providing vocational training so persons can be workforce ready.

A Healthy Bay: Jamaica has some of the most depleted fish stocks of any country in the world. A healthy bay is an incredibly important resource for the many stakeholders in the community.

Positive, Engaged Youth: Unattached youth is a major problem across Jamaica. Our strategy is to create a positive environment where they can find their first taste of success.



“

Our strategy to increase the number of people in Oracabessa who have good jobs has revolved around providing vocational training so persons can be workforce ready.

”



Ruth Gutierrez

ANGEL LISA COSMETICS

Angel Lisa is an organic seaweed skincare line that uses incredibly nutrient-packed properties of Gold Seaweed farmed behind the Belize Barrier Reef. The farming of the seaweed has been an alternative livelihood for the fishermen of the Placencia Seafood Cooperative.

The founders of Angel Lisa are Mary Tao, M.D., Terry Tao and myself, Ruth Gutierrez. Each founder has a different and unique role. Dr. Tao is a medical doctor with a background in biomedical engineering. She worked with chemists to formulate Angel Lisa as a high-end product that is all-natural. Terry Tao is an attorney who addresses the legal aspects of the business, including import and export, licensing, and food and drug approvals. I am an ocean aquaculture scientist, so in addition to overseeing the daily operation, I do extensive research for product development.

Our goal is to enhance Belizean livelihoods since ocean resources are dwindling due to climate change, poaching from neighbouring countries, unsustainable practices, and overfishing.



*Danielle
Thompson*

NATURE MY THERAPY

Nature My Therapy is an organic vegan disruptor in the food industry, providing fun, healthy and delicious organic vegan convenience food at an affordable price. We make it easy for people to incorporate healthy plant-based food options into their busy lifestyle and we take the guesswork out of healthy eating.

Narda Ventura

H2O WORX (AQUAWORX)

Aquaworx is in the business of creating water lovers. Our core programmes teach young people how to swim as well as water safety. We also offer programmes for adults and upcoming athletes. Aquaworx was born after seeing a clear gap in the market based on the traditional approach taken to learn to swim.

With a past in national competitive swimming, water polo, and a presence in scuba diving, I enjoy taking on the challenge of converting water fear to water love. The connection with love for the water and respect for it is clear. If you love water, and love to participate in water-based activities, then you will have a keen interest in protecting it through ocean conservation.

Like many of us born in the 1970s, I walked the road of tradition where I got degrees and a good job. Despite following the herd, I have always needed to earn extra. My first summer job was not enough, so I taught math to prep school students. Being a full-time student was not enough, so I started a gift basket business while on campus. Having a 9 - 5 was not enough, so I started teaching swimming during my lunch breaks, which evolved into the business I own today.

“ If you love water, and love to participate in water-based activities, then you will have a keen interest in protecting it through ocean conservation.

”



Michael McCarthy

CLEAN HARBOUR GROUP

The core function of the *Clean Harbour Group* is the dynamic and systematic cleanup and restoration of natural harbours and gullies and streams. We're on a mission to provide cleaner oceans across the island of Jamaica and have targeted focus on the Kingston Harbour as our pilot project.

Given my career as a navigational officer, I noticed how other countries implement environmental regulations for keeping harbours clean and safe; I saw no reason why Jamaica shouldn't or couldn't do the same. With the large increase of merchant's vessels calling to our ports, there is a need for a company to step up and deliver world-class service geared towards cleaning the harbours and preventing pollution by ship-generated waste - Clean Harbour is that solution.

My passion for business began many years ago when my uncle explained the ins and outs of the business world. He expressed why being successful was so important in a man's life as it was through the medium of business that one would be able to provide consistently for yourself and family. However, it is my ultimate love and passion for the sea which led me to undertake such a venture, and I can say that being able to boldly stand as a representative for my Clean Harbour brand means more to me than most would understand.

So far, being an entrepreneur has taught me that patience is a virtue that seldom few people possess, and that despite how difficult things may get in any aspect of one's life, dedication and patience will take you a long way.





IT TAKES A *Village...*

You can't build empires on your own. Thanks to our dedicated mentors and coaches, we were able to act fast to support our entrepreneurs as we took our programme online. The experiences and expertise they shared during a critical period in history were a valuable resource in more ways than one.

Our entrepreneurs were not only exposed to international perspectives, they got the fuel needed to take on challenges with gusto.

Royan Campbell

MANAGING DIRECTOR
SURE FINANCIAL SERVICES LIMITED

Why was it important to share your expertise with our entrepreneurs during the coronavirus pandemic?

The success of one is greatly dependent on the success of all. We are all in this together. Businesses are interdependent and interconnected. Whatever expertise or wisdom I have in operating in a hostile business environment, there is no better time to share it with everyone. In doing so, I might just be saving my own business.

What advice would you give entrepreneurs on surviving and thriving post-COVID 19?

There are a lot of uncertainties in the marketplace, a lot of uncertainties always presents a lot of opportunities for those who are optimistic. Remain optimistic and do not be afraid to change your business model as the times might demand. Remember, change is constant. Also, remember that cash will remain king during and after COVID-19. Therefore, keep that in mind when making all your business arrangements and negotiations.



“

**We are all in this together.
Businesses are interdependent
and interconnected.**

”



Roxanne Watters

“

Remain optimistic and do not be afraid to change your business model as the times might demand.

”

Why was it important to share your wisdom with our entrepreneurs during the coronavirus pandemic?

It is during times of challenges and uncertainty that we most need reassurance from others to help us maintain our motivation and focus on the reason we chose to start and what we are working to achieve.

What advice would you give entrepreneurs on surviving and thriving post-COVID 19?

There will always be unprecedented challenges. Ask for help, you don't have to know everything and do everything, plan as best as you can with the information that you have but remain fluid. Make sure to explore and adopt new ideas and make good use of the tried and true methods that apply, and always remember that downs and ups don't define your worth.



*Beth C.
Richardson Esq.*

ATTORNEY ENGAGEMENT
VOLUNTEER LAWYERS PROJECT

Why was it important to share your wisdom with our entrepreneurs during the coronavirus pandemic?

I was a young professional during the crisis of 9/11 and learnt so much from working through that time. It was my hope that the Branson Centre entrepreneurs would learn from my experiences dealing with unexpected crises, like how to manage people who are scared but still need to work; how to balance financial decisions with empathy; how to balance the stress of managing a business along with the need for self-care. I wanted to help them learn from my mistakes so they can come through the period stronger and wiser.

What advice would you give entrepreneurs on surviving and thriving post-COVID 19?

Involve your employees in developing ideas, strategies and next steps. The more they feel you respect their experience, the better their work will be and the more likely they are to stick with you through the tough times. Encourage them to share their concerns by sharing your own. Vulnerability can be an incredibly motivating characteristic.

“

**Involve your employees
in developing ideas,
strategies and next steps.**

”

Chukwuemeka Cameron

FOUNDER
DESIGN PRIVACY

Why was it important to share your wisdom with our entrepreneurs during the coronavirus pandemic?

The pandemic gave us all time to learn, everytime I share my expertise I learn twice as much. In this information age, it is the entrepreneur that learns the fastest who will succeed.

What advice would you give entrepreneurs on surviving and thriving post-COVID 19?

Accept the unknown, embrace failures and learn fast.





Anika Repole - Wilson

MANAGING DIRECTOR
DIGITAL CHIC

Why was it important to share your wisdom with our entrepreneurs during the coronavirus pandemic?

We place too much emphasis on the ending of the success story and not the pitfalls along the way which paralyze us. Honestly, I was terrified, and I believed others felt the same way. In my heart, I knew in helping others, I would be able to help myself. Validating their fears and showing them what to do to get going again, helped me to validate my own and move forward. Helping others became my own means to survival.

What advice would you give entrepreneurs on surviving and thriving post-COVID 19?

This year has been a tremendous one for growth and opportunities depending on how you look at it. I would encourage anyone who suffered setbacks, to recognize them as hidden opportunities. Within that sense of lack is abundance waiting to be reaped. Evaluate how much humanity has shifted during this time in terms of priorities, hopes and fears and then tie your business into opportunities which will help others to thrive. 2020 was a year of reckoning and reconciliation with creating more meaning and impact in the lives of others – if you are doing that, if you can do that – there's no stopping you.



Robert Thompson

CEO

UPOINTUNE

Why was it important to share your wisdom with our entrepreneurs during the coronavirus pandemic?

It was natural for me to share my thoughts, experience and creative skill to help others pivot during the pandemic. Creative thinking is paramount in solving problems. It was also great that the Branson Centre was able to still deliver valuable insights to its cohorts.

What advice would you give entrepreneurs on surviving and thriving post-COVID 19?

Be creative. Create new rules and then break them to continue reinventing oneself and your business. Care for others. Do good and be of significance.

“

Create new rules and then break them to continue reinventing oneself and your business.

”

Marcia Skerwin

Tell us about yourself. How did you start your entrepreneurial journey?

I started my mentoring journey in my late 20's, that makes it over 20 years that I have been in the mentoring business. I was paired with a mentor as a young person growing up in Jamaica, and it was in that relationship where I was able to settle down and have clarity of purpose. After the experience, I thought about how many people are like me who wished that they could be paired with someone so that they could start living a fulfilled life. That experience was the catalyst to starting my company 10 years ago, Connect Your Dots, which provides training, HR consultation, mentoring and coaching

What is your biggest takeaway that you've had as a mentor?

That I am changing lives through my own experiences, that I am able to put everything aside and focus on one goal, and that goal is to have a successful mentoring relationship. At the end of all that, you can walk away knowing you were on that journey with that entrepreneur.

What advice would you give other mentors to maximise their experience?

Come into the relationship open minded and prepared to put in the work, set smart goals early so that you both can see the achievable items being ticked off. One important thing is to also understand the role of a mentor - that is very important. Sometimes if you're not careful, we will assume many other roles that are not suitable for a mentor/mentee relationship.

Kathy James

Tell us about yourself. How did you start your entrepreneurial journey?

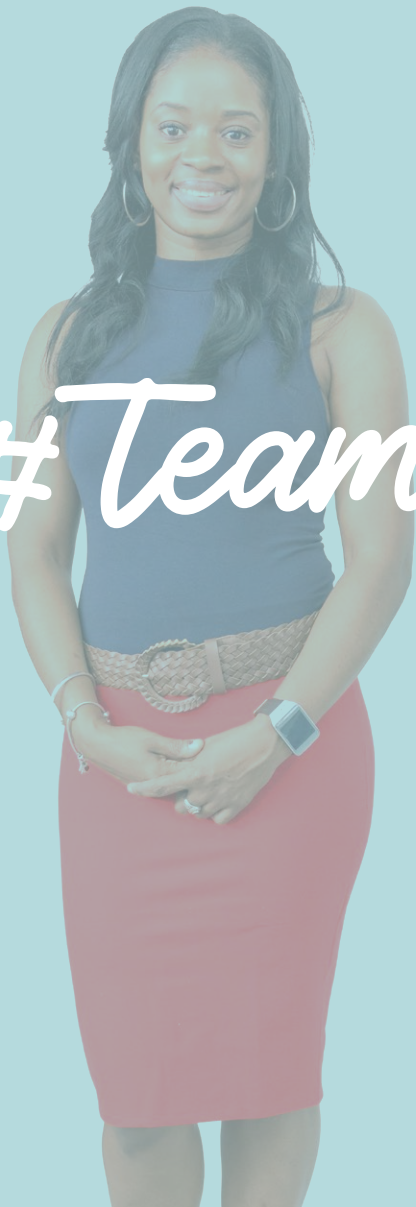
I think I get my entrepreneurial spirit from my dad Robert, who retired at 55 from nursing in Canada, enabled by moonlighting as a real estate developer. He always encouraged owning your own as a way to financial freedom, but importantly freedom and flexibility mentally, and even more importantly generational wealth.

What is your biggest takeaway that you've had as a mentor?

The mentor relationship is definitely a two-way street and the learning opportunities for both parties are enormous.

What advice would you give other mentors to maximise their experience?

Ask your mentees tough question. They will appreciate the effort that you are putting into the relationship. This is what they signed up for, and for that you will be held in high regard.



#TeamBransonCentre

OUR Board Of Directors



Christopher Williams
Chairman



Derek Gannon
Director



Pauline Wilson
Director



Lisa Lake
Director



Paula Kerr-Jarrett
Director



Mark McIntosh
Director

OUR *Team*



Lauri-Ann Ainsworth
CEO

Lauri-Ann champions the Branson Centre's mission 'To create dynamic Caribbean entrepreneurs.' Given the challenges presented with the global pandemic, she led her team through a major pivot by moving their programmes to a 100% digital experience. Before assuming the role of CEO, Lauri-Ann served as the Centre's Director of Development and Communications where she managed a growing portfolio of work in development, partnerships, fundraising and communications.



Tashaine Morrison
Programme Development Manager

Tashaine is a project management specialist with five years of experience in managing regional and international projects for various firms in the public and private sectors. Her main focus is incorporating innovative practices in strategic management to join the work smarter bandwagon. Tashaine is active in social development and currently serves as a volunteer with the USAID's Transitional Living Programme, working closely with children in state care across Jamaica.



Gizelle Riley
Development & Communications Manager

Gizelle Riley is a media and communications specialist, bestselling author, and podcaster. Gizelle's expertise in digital storytelling and public relations has supported the development of hundreds of entrepreneurs for over a decade. Passionate about superblasting entrepreneurs' stories to the masses, you can find some of her work featured in Huffington Post, Virgin, Thrive Global, Caribbean Posh, and many more.



Keisha Hudson
Operations Manager

Keisha Hudson brings to the Branson Centre 15 years of experience in the fields of information technology, accounting and operations management. She has worked in the technology, insurance and manufacturing industries, which gives her a well-rounded perspective on the challenges businesses face. She holds a bachelors of science in computing from the University of Technology and an MBA in general management from the Mona School of Business.



Coronía Taylor
Operations Coordinator

Coronía worked in the shipping industry as an accounting clerk, and within two years she was promoted to logistics supervisor. She is a graduate of the University of Technology, with a bachelor's degree in accounting. Her philosophy is "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail". She also believes that the road to success is hard work and determination.

Bawson

CENTRE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

CARIBBEAN
