



MEDIA RELEASE

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LA County's Justice, Care and Opportunities Department and LISC LA Celebrate Success at 2nd Annual Pitch Competition for Incubation Academy Cohorts

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Justice, Care and Opportunities Department (JCOD) and Local Initiatives Support Corporation Los Angeles (LISC LA) are proud to announce the successful conclusion of the 2nd Annual Pitch Competition for the JCOD Incubation Academy.

The event took place on Thursday, March 28, 2024, at the Earvin “Magic” Johnson Park Event Center, bringing together passionate and innovative organizations committed to supporting justice-involved individuals.

Ten organizations from Cohorts 3 and 4 of the Incubation Academy took the stage to pitch their vision and the impactful work they are doing in underrepresented communities across Los Angeles County. Each pitch was a testament to the dedication and personal commitment of the staff, many of whom have direct experience with the justice system.

The energy in the room was electric, with an audience that was fully engaged and supportive of the pitchers. In recognition of the exceptional quality of the pitches and the importance of the reentry and support services offered by these organizations, the prizes for the top three pitches were increased by \$1,000 each. The winners of the competition are:

1st Place Prize (\$6,000)

Open Path Counseling

2nd Place Prize (\$4,000)

Ten Toes In

3rd Place Prize (\$3,000)

Defy Ventures

First Place winner, Open Paths Counseling, prioritizes the mental and emotional health of underserved Angelenos. Their goal is to eliminate financial, geographical, and cultural barriers to psychotherapy. “Thank you to JCOD and to LISC! Winning this fast pitch competition allows us to continue with the work we’re doing providing therapy for people who couldn’t otherwise afford it,” said Sierra Smith, Executive Director of Open Paths Counseling. “Specifically, this money will go directly to pay for therapists of color serving communities of color in South Los Angeles.”

Second Place winner, Ten Toes In, serves as a mentorship and domestic violence prevention program that assists formerly incarcerated men to reintegrate back into society successfully and help them to maintain a healthy relationship with their partner.

Third Place winner, Defy Ventures, has a mission to shift mindsets to give people with criminal histories their best shot at a second chance. Their vision is to cut the recidivism rate in half by leveraging entrepreneurship to increase economic opportunity and transform lives.

“I’m incredibly proud of the participants today. The enthusiasm from everyone in the room, seeing the wonderful work happening in our communities and being able to showcase these organizations was impactful,” said JCOD Director Judge Songhai Armstead (Ret.). “We really wish we could have funded everyone fully, but there are a lot of opportunities here for folks to connect and grow. We look forward to seeing what happens next.”

“We are incredibly inspired by the dedication of all the participants in this year’s pitch competition,” said Nicole Williams, Executive Director of LISC LA. “Their work is a vital part of our collective efforts, and I want to extend a special thank you to JCOD and Judge Armstead for your leadership in reimagining the justice system and supporting communities in need.”

The JCOD Incubation Academy continues to be a cornerstone of LA County’s efforts to support grassroots non-profit organizations, particularly those led by BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, or justice-involved individuals. The success of this year’s pitch competition is a testament to the strength and resilience of these organizations and their invaluable contributions to the community.

JCOD accepts applications for future Cohorts of its Incubation Academy on a rolling basis. CBOs can visit jcod.lacounty.gov for more information or to apply.

Photos from the event can be found [here](#). Credit: Nerris Nevarez-Nassiri

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About the Justice, Care and Opportunities Department:

The Justice, Care and Opportunities Department (JCOD) of Los Angeles County aims to address inequities in the justice system and enhance community safety by providing a continuum of care from prevention to reentry. JCOD focuses on granting community-based organizations the resources they need to support individuals and communities impacted by the justice system.

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