

Partnership Aims to Craft Career Pathways in Sustainable Design

Grant Blvd and the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) Unveil "Fashion the Future Forward" Pilot Program

PHILADELPHIA, PA, UNITED STATES, January 30, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- University City District's West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) and Grant Blvd, a West Philadelphia-based sustainable fashion brand, announce the launch of a groundbreaking pilot partnership - "Fashion the Future Forward." This collaborative initiative aims to recruit, train, and employ formerly incarcerated women in sustainable career pathways that provide a living wage.

Formerly incarcerated women, [58% of which are mothers](#), face a myriad of challenges upon reentry into society. One significant hurdle is the high rate of recidivism, where individuals return to criminal activities after release. This cycle is often perpetuated by the difficulties women encounter in securing stable employment due to the stigma associated with their criminal records. The struggle to find decent housing, coupled with limited access to educational and vocational opportunities, contributes to a higher likelihood of reoffending. In the context of poverty, many of these women experience economic hardships, impacting not only their own well-being but also that of their families. In Philadelphia, where these challenges are pronounced, poverty rates further exacerbate the struggles of formerly incarcerated women, making it imperative to address the systemic barriers that hinder their successful reintegration into society.

The WPSI and Grant Blvd partnership seeks to leverage WPSI's proven track record in connecting talented Philadelphians to meaningful jobs with Grant Blvd's commitment to supporting formerly incarcerated individuals with meaningful employment. Simultaneously, it provides a pathway to scale for Grant Blvd, the first Black-owned certified B-Corps in the North American fashion space. At the program's conclusion, graduates will be placed in positions within the Grant Blvd team as sewists making goods for the hospitality industry and for the fashion brand's customer base nationally.

"Big, fundamental issues like mass incarceration can feel insurmountable when approached alone. It is through partnerships like the one that has been built with the Grant Blvd team that we can build solutions," shared Cait Garozzo, Executive Director of the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, "United by our shared values, we identified what it is we each do best and are leveraging our strengths and resources to challenge systems of oppression."

Dr. Kimberly McGlonn, founder and CEO of Grant Blvd, has an equally valuable insight, "It's undeniable that the fashion industry is responsible for an incredible amount of harm to people and to the planet, most of which occurs at the expense of women and girls of color. Our mission is to tackle this by being intentional about reimagining the power that fashion has to address not just deep local poverty, but the hopelessness it creates. Intersectional solutions, ones that center the most marginalized women, are the only way forward for the common good and for our planet. We couldn't be more excited to partner with WPSI in such an innovative and impactful way."

The Grant Blvd team will be opening their doors on March 7, 2024 for an open house at their new space in MaKen Studios South. Guests will be able to tour the manufacturing and training space, hear from Dr. Kimberly McGlonn and her team, and build coalition around a future where living wage work is realized through the fashion industry.

About the Sewist Program

The 14-week-long program combines the proven WPSI professional development model, technical training with the Grant Blvd team, and mindset, career, and self-care activities (such as yoga, meditation, horticulture, and financial literacy). These activities are designed to holistically support participants as they connect to work and each other. Working with Episcopal Community Services's Mindset Coaching Program and Fruits of the Family Table Case Management Team, the program brings together a robust coalition of organizations to create a truly supportive experience for participants.

Made possible through the generous support of a \$250,000 Fair Chance Hiring Workforce Solutions Grant from the city of Philadelphia's Department of Commerce, Fashion the Future Forward has been selected as one of three programs to receive funds. Investments were made in programs from organizations that holistically address the specific challenges that justice-impacted people face when preparing for and entering the workforce.

Fashion the Future Forward represents a powerful step towards a more inclusive, sustainable, and community-driven future in the fashion industry.

About Grant Blvd

Founded in 2017, Grant Blvd is a Philadelphia-based apparel brand and the very first Black-owned B Corp in the fashion space in North America. We're on a mission to construct sustainably sourced garments & artisan home goods produced in Philadelphia. Even better? Our team supports women who are formerly incarcerated through job training and living wages. In addition to designing directly for consumers, we also partner to design textiles for the hospitality sector to produce textiles for restaurants. We believe that if we demand more, if we think differently about not only what we buy, but who we buy from- we have the power to challenge not only the social issues exacerbated by mass incarceration, but to more meaningfully address the climate catastrophe. Find out more by visiting www.grantblvd.com.

About the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative

The West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) is one of the nation's most successful workforce development organizations. For over 10 years, WPSI has solidified its role as one of the highest performing workforce intermediaries in the country by building customized talent solutions that bridge the divide between unemployed Philadelphians seeking opportunity and employers seeking talent. WPSI focuses on professional development and career coaching for adults. For more information visit www.philadelphiaskills.org.

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