Justice-Impacted Entrepreneurs Launch New Businesses in Toronto

From incarceration to entrepreneurship: 36 Black founders launch new businesses Sept. 12.



TORONTO, ON, CANADA, September 9, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Saturday, September 12, new businesses created by graduates of Street Entrepreneurs 3.0 will open their doors to the public at the University of Toronto Schwartz Reisman Innovation Campus, 108 College Street. The founders are graduates of a sixteen-week business incubator run by Toronto's Urban Rez Solutions Social Enterprise for formerly incarcerated and justice-impacted persons and their families. Every founder is now open for business.

More than a traditional trade show, the Street Entrepreneurs Showcase is an interactive marketplace where visitors can meet 36 entrepreneurs, explore new products and services, hear live business pitches, connect directly with founders, and celebrate the launch of a new generation of Canadian businesses. Founders will demonstrate their products and services, take orders, build new business relationships, and compete in live showcase presentations throughout the day. Admission is free and open to the public.

Visitors will have the opportunity to meet and shop from 36 new businesses, watch live entrepreneur pitch sessions throughout the day, hear a featured keynote presentation on entrepreneurship, celebrate founder achievements during the Closing Remarks and Awards Recognition, and connect directly with entrepreneurs, community leaders, and business supporters.

Street Entrepreneurs graduate Summer Young, Founder of Sevynn Shades Inc., will return to the program as the 2026 Showcase keynote speaker, sharing how resilience, overcoming adversity and building with purpose have shaped her entrepreneurial journey.

Sixteen weeks ago, most of these founders were sitting in front of a Zoom camera with an idea. Today they have registered businesses, websites, customer management systems, and in a growing number of cases, their first paying clients. The 2026 cohort of Street Entrepreneurs is the third since the program began, and the first to close with a public trade show.

Urban Rez Solutions Social Enterprise, the Toronto-based social enterprise that runs the program, is co-led by Co-Executive Directors Roderick Brereton and Farley Flex Nwaigbo. Street Entrepreneurs 3.0 is funded by the Future Skills Centre through the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

"You watch people go from an idea in a notebook to a business you can buy from. Sixteen weeks. Every one of them fought for it. The Showcase is where Canada gets to meet them. Visitors won't just browse booths. They'll hear entrepreneurs pitch their businesses, meet the founders behind them, and witness what is possible when opportunity meets determination," said Farley Flex Nwaigbo, Co-Executive Director of Urban Rez Solutions Social Enterprise.

Every business launched represents one more pathway to economic reintegration, stronger families, and safer communities.

WHY IT MATTERS

Street Entrepreneurs 3.0 builds on that model by moving beyond employability to entrepreneurship, equipping participants to build businesses, create jobs, and strengthen their communities.

Nearly four million Canadians live with a criminal record, according to federal government estimates cited by the John Howard Society. Programs that create direct routes to ownership represent one of the most effective and durable pathways to economic reintegration and long-term family stability.

Statistics Canada and the Office of the Correctional Investigator report that Black Canadians make up 9.2 per cent of the federal custody population while representing 4.3 per cent of the general population. In Ontario, Black individuals represent 17.4 per cent of the federally incarcerated population and 16.3 per cent of those under community supervision, according to Correctional Service Canada. Street Entrepreneurs 3.0 was developed to help address these disparities by creating pathways to entrepreneurship, economic participation, and long-term community reintegration.

The program delivers sixteen weeks of hands-on business training covering planning, financial literacy, marketing, e-commerce infrastructure, and customer management. The program is supported by co-hosts Khalil Dorival and Kadaesha Lindsay, both graduates of Street Entrepreneurs who have returned to help deliver the program. Khalil Dorival also serves as a mental health and wellness specialist, demonstrating the lasting impact of the program as graduates return to mentor and support future participants.

FEATURED PARTICIPANTS

Shianne Nazana Kumar has been financially impacted by a member of her family being incarcerated. She joined Street Entrepreneurs 3.0 to build her family's income and their next chapter together. Her business, G1gGl3z, is a neighbourhood laundromat with extended hours, planned for a Toronto community in East York that has been without a laundromat for two years. "I want to build a generational foundation for my children so I can teach them the value of being stable, all while helping and giving back to your community." - Shianne Nazana Kumar, Founder, G1gGl3z

Leon Powell is a formerly incarcerated founder whose talent for systems architecture and coding surfaced through the program's business planning modules. He is building OTB Entertainment, a blockchain-based royalty collection and distribution platform that helps independent artists track their content across social and streaming platforms, automate royalty claims, and receive secure, tax-compliant payouts. His story is a clear example of the talent this program helps founders bring to market. "Street Entrepreneurs has given me direction, structure, and a base network I can rely on to get my goals realized." - Leon Powell, Founder, OTB Entertainment

Bryan Hood is a formerly incarcerated founder who joined Street Entrepreneurs to build a business that creates access to Ontario's film and television industry for racialized and underserved communities. His business, The ReUp.ca, is a production logistics and infrastructure company serving Ontario's film, television, streaming, and commercial production industry. "What kept me going was the realization that my experiences could either become excuses or fuel for creating change. I chose the latter." - Bryan Hood, Founder, The ReUp.ca

"Entrepreneurship becomes real when an idea moves into the marketplace. Over sixteen weeks, these founders have tested their ideas, worked with mentors, built their business infrastructure and prepared to meet customers. On September 12, the public gets to meet the entrepreneurs behind these new businesses," said Roderick Brereton, Co-Executive Director of Urban Rez Solutions Social Enterprise.

"The progress of the entrepreneurs in this program shows how new models can unlock talent of Canadians who have often been overlooked by the labour market. This pilot with Urban Rez Solutions offers an opportunity to dig deeper on how tailored support affects the entrepreneurial path of justice-impacted Black Canadians, and what measures are needed to promote the full and effective participation of Canadians in training, education and employment," says Noel Baldwin, Executive Director of the Future Skills Centre.

On September 12, the public won't simply attend a trade show. They'll witness entrepreneurs reclaiming opportunity through business ownership.

EVENT DETAILS

Event: Street Entrepreneurs Showcase and Trade Show

Date: Saturday, September 12, 2026
Time: 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Location: University of Toronto Schwartz Reisman Innovation Campus, 108 College Street, Toronto, ON M5G 0C6
Admission: Free and open to the public
Media accreditation: Contact BrandEQ Agency (details below)

ABOUT URBAN REZ SOLUTIONS SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
Urban Rez Solutions Social Enterprise is a Toronto-based nonprofit social enterprise now in its twenty-second year of service. Urban Rez works in workforce development, community safety, and prevention. The organization has served more than 500 participants across programs supporting formerly incarcerated and justice-impacted persons and their families, at-risk youth, and community members seeking new pathways. Urban Rez is co-led by Co-Executive Directors Roderick Brereton and Farley Flex Nwaigbo. More information is available at urbanrezsocialenterprise.com.

ABOUT STREET ENTREPRENEURS 3.0
Street Entrepreneurs 3.0 is a sixteen-week business incubator for Black, formerly incarcerated and justice-impacted persons and their families, delivered by Urban Rez Solutions Social Enterprise. The 2026 cohort supports founders through 36 online sessions covering business planning, financial literacy, marketing, e-commerce infrastructure, and customer management. Each participant leaves the program with a registered business, a business plan, a website, and an online store. Street Entrepreneurs 3.0 is funded through the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program, delivered by the Future Skills Centre.

SOURCES CITED
Federal estimate of Canadians with a criminal record: Public Safety Canada, cited by the John Howard Society of Canada and CBC News (2024 and 2025).
Employment outcomes for people with a criminal record in Canada: John Howard Society of Ontario, Not in My Workplace (2023), and CBC News (August 2025).
Black representation in federal custody (9.2 per cent) versus general population (4.3 per cent): Office of the Correctional Investigator Annual Report and Statistics Canada, 2021 to 2022 data.
Ontario-region representation figures (17.4 per cent of the federally incarcerated population and 16.3 per cent of those under community supervision): Correctional Service Canada. A Summary of Staff and Client Experiences with the Black Social History Pilot in the Ontario Region (Research at a Glance R-485, 2025).
Recidivism reduction of up to 35 per cent from risk-need-responsivity interventions: Correctional Service of Canada, cited in Public Safety Canada parliamentary briefing notes (2024).

Nadine Spencer
BrandEQ Agency
+1 416-708-0521
email us here

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