

Episode 23

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SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Liz Nusken, Ethan DeLeon

- L Liz Nusken** 00:00
We've trained close to 700 people across the state, so schools, educational service centers, youth-serving organizations, faith-based groups, and we're really excited to get this curriculum and training into the hands of more people so that high school students can, one, meet this graduation requirement, but two, have an entrepreneurial mindset.
- E Ethan DeLeon** 00:29
Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon and I'm here with our founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we have Liz Nuskin on with the Ohio Afterschool Network on the show with us. We want to welcome you to the Small Nation podcast where we share some of the valuable lessons with what we have learned about entrepreneurship, real estate, economic development, and more. The point of this podcast is to create value for you, the listener, and to create a space to learn, talk about what's trending, and inspire others.
- L Liz Nusken** 00:55
Thank you, Ethan.
- J Jason Duff** 00:56
Hey, thanks, Ethan. Liz, welcome to the studio today.
- L Liz Nusken** 00:58
Thank you, so excited to be here.

J**Jason Duff** 01:00

It is great to have you. Um, we're going to talk about a topic that I'm really excited to talk about, and it's youth entrepreneurship. I got introduced to Liz and her collaboration partner Kelly, which is unable here to be here today, but we're gonna give her a shout out because she's kind of awesome and a big deal. Um, but, uh, they reached out to say, hey, we are very passionate about engaging students and learning about entrepreneurship, and we like what you guys are doing at Small Nation. We should jump on a Zoom. And we connected, and from that Zoom there was lots of collaboration opportunities. We invited you and Kelly to come take the tour here in Bellefontaine to meet other entrepreneurs that are, um, maybe have been involved with family business. Some of them have not been exposed to entrepreneurship and have opened up some of their first businesses in town. But, uh, I think there isn't, you know, anyone probably that's not listening that maybe they have kids or they have kids in their life that, you know, there's a path to learning about these skills, but like, where do you go? And so I'm just really excited for Liz to share a little bit about Ohio After School Network and also some of the entrepreneur initiatives that she and, and her collaborators are, are doing. So Tell us a little bit about yourself, Liz. What, how, you know, tell us about your background. How did you get started doing the work that you're doing today?

L**Liz Nusken** 02:23

Well, thank you for that question, Jason. It's kind of by accident, serendipitous. I am a person who has been affected by experiences that took place in school and outside of school. So some experiences that helped form me were volunteering at COSI.

J**Jason Duff** 02:42

Um, I loved COSI. Oh my gosh, yeah, I don't care what generation that you're from. And for those of you that are listening, COSI is the Center of Science and Industry, and it happens to be, um, started in downtown Columbus at a different location. I, I remember the Wendy's that was right across from the original location. And Ethan, you're probably not old enough, not for that location. I definitely took field trips and things like that to COSI, and even, you know, when I went to college in Columbus, we go by the Scioto Mile down there, and that has a beautiful building out there today.

L**Liz Nusken** 03:15

It sure does. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 03:16

That's awesome. So you, COSI.

L**Liz Nusken** 03:18

Yeah, so volunteering there, I was an exchange student to Germany in high school, and it really helped me realize that experiences that we have out of school really form our personalities, our interests, our passions. Thanks to volunteering at COSI, I'm interested in natural world. Thanks to being an exchange student, I'm interested in other cultures in the world. As a parent, my kids have had some really important experiences, not in school, well, in school, but also out of school. My youngest son was a wrestler. That teaches some really important life lessons that he's carried with him. My oldest son was on an outdoor leadership experience on a glacier in Wyoming for a month, and that really impacted his life. So I think we can all agree that we learn and develop at all times. Yeah. As children and as adults, and not just in school. And so that really got me interested in the out-of-school-time field. It's a really diverse, interesting sector. There are faith-based groups, there's museums, there's camps, there's Boys and Girls Clubs, there's 4-H, and it's just a really interesting field to be in. I kind of fell into it by accident, but I've loved it so much I've been in it for 20 years now.

J**Jason Duff** 04:35

You know, after school, and it's amazing how things have changed. And there are some districts and programs that, whether it's athletics or music or those extracurriculars, they have well-established programs. And there are some districts that do not. And I think there's a lot of research and data that shows that, I just admire you saying there's more learning that has to happen than just in the classroom. Was that— what was the process for, for starting the Ohio Afterschool Network? I mean, what, what was it that kind of clicked that says we, we need to identify, you know, what that problem is and how our organization can, can make an impact?

L**Liz Nusken** 05:16

So, um, I was involved with, um, another organization in the out-of-school time field as the Ohio Afterschool Network was being formed. So I was on the, the sidelines a little bit, and I think what prompted Ohio to come together is the need for more quality and affordable out-of-school time programs for kids. So we know parents of means value those kinds of experiences and they pay for them. I think the average is like \$1,500 per child, but for families who don't have means or don't have programs or opportunities for their children, there, there's an opportunity to come together and support that.

J**Jason Duff** 05:54

I, I love that, um, you know, and I think when I think back to my time in school, I'll be honest, I wasn't maybe the best academic student, um, the way that I learned and the way that I was being taught at the time. Like, I learned best by doing, and so the, the, the types of classes that had labs or had things beyond the book work, I would excel in. But if it was just memorizing information and kind of being tested on that. I actually scored academically pretty poor. And I think there, there are probably a number of people that are listening that maybe you're thinking like, well, you know, I was in that boat. Or, um, you know, what we're learning more about education now is that people learn differently. And we in the world, in life, need people with different skill sets. So there's been a lot of research showing that people that are generally entrepreneurial there's a reason why maybe they didn't conform to rules of following the standard way to accomplish something. And for, for a lot of us that kind of grew up in that environment, um, we might have been punished. So like, you know, there were a number of recesses where I was always the one that would probably talk to the other students and like, you know, I had ideas, I wanted to, to like be creative and not fit in the norm. And so I did spend a few recesses inside, like, staring at a corner. And we think about that today, and I think that's how the world has somewhat changed, is we're understanding how the brain works. And, and I also think that's a question for a lot of parents and those that are raising children. It's— there's a movement now to, you know, not just look at traditional public education. It's also seeing other ways that we can teach and inspire and, and raise kids to think, uh, differently. How do you look at that? I mean, you're a parent, and, you know, the— when you kind of look at the field and the sector and even the work that you're doing with the Ohio Afterschool Network, what are some of the things that, that has you excited about that shift in those changes?

L**Liz Nusken** 08:09

Well, first of all, I want to say out-of-school time is a great opportunity for kids to to learn and develop, and entrepreneurship is a prime example for students to have project-based learning, hands-on experience, connections with the community. And that is, that helps kids learn, develop their passions, think about careers. And I think that research is showing that the jobs of the future and not too distant future show that those kinds of skills are needed that are not maybe traditional book learning, but things that you learn through experiences like that.

J**Jason Duff** 08:45

That makes me feel so better right now. That statistic is changing. So you're not a screw-up, Jason. Okay, thank you. Thank you. I feel like that just needed to be said. I kind of needed that too. Thank you.

L**Liz Nusken** 08:55

You're just ahead of your time.

J**Jason Duff** 08:57

Yeah, well, you know, just sharing a funny story, you know, even in high school, luckily I had some administrators that recognized I was good at selling things. And so, you know, my situation— I think this is why a topic that I'm— I just appreciate us discussing this today is I had grandparents and parents that took me to work with them, but gave me tasks and jobs that I could kind of build my own thing. So one of the coolest experiences, you know, I learned to kind of sell with raising money for our uniforms for our T-ball team. So like the coach gave us the form and I can't remember the time we sold peanuts or it was something. Again, today probably people have peanut allergies, so we couldn't sell peanuts, but like it was it was some kind of like, like product that we raised money. Oh yeah, schools and organizations know how to leverage students to sell things. Well, and for me, like, there was a reward to it, and I think that was as a kid, like, they had like, if you sold so many peanuts, you like earned, I think it was like this little mini radio.

L**Liz Nusken** 10:03

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 10:03

Oh yeah, it was something you could buy at like probably Walmart for less than \$10, but if I sold \$500 worth of stuff, I got the gift. I was a Boy Scout, so you're preaching to the choir here. Selling popcorn every year, you know, calling up all my aunts and uncles. And if you happen to be listening to this today, thank you for supporting me. Got my little, little pocket knife. Like you said, it's probably like \$5 from, you know, local store, but meant everything to me. And I think it's that connection for a lot of folks that the risk-reward, or like if you work really hard and you do this, there's there's rewards that come, but it's not going to just come from your parents selling everything. Yeah, like you have to learn those skills to do that. So for me, that was kind of the first taste of it. And then luckily I had a support system around me that said this— we were excited that you're excited about this. Let us teach and support you with doing other little projects to make money. And then it started asking questions. What do you want to do with your money? Like, is it You've got a goal to put it in a savings account. You got a goal to buy something with it. And I think that's where if you're not provided the support, some folks don't understand that that's a path or an option for them. Yeah, so Liz, what are some of those things that you do with your different programs, you know, like that you engage kids to teach them those kind of skills?

L**Liz Nusken** 11:25

So the Ohio Afterschool Network is working with out-of-school time programs across the state.

J**Jason Duff** 11:31

Yeah.

L**Liz Nusken** 11:31

With our partner Young Entrepreneur Institute, where Kelly Bigger— Yeah, okay. And then VentureLab and others. And we have a train-the-trainer model. So we have free curricula, training, coaching, brainstorming, thought partners, anything that out-of-school time programs need to bring entrepreneurship education into their programs. And we're working with a lot of schools and educational service centers as well. And then also some non-traditional partners. And one of, One of our first partners around the entrepreneur education work connected to college and career readiness was the Jagga Growth Partnership. And so for years they had a summer internship program, internship program for their high school students. And when COVID popped up, they needed to pivot and reinvent that experience for the high school students. So they thought fast, somehow we got connected. And they helped us pilot a virtual entrepreneur education program with high school students since they couldn't go into the local businesses. Yeah. And that's really blossomed into a countywide project where the Geauga Growth Partnership is working with all the school districts in the county around entrepreneurship with some grant funding from the Ohio Department of Education. So it's really great to see Schools, youth-serving organizations, faith-based groups, and economic development groups, seeing that entrepreneurship is a fourth E. So you hear a lot about enrollment, enlistment, um, let's see, employment, employment. Yeah. And then entrepreneurship as the fourth E.

J**Jason Duff** 13:12

And for many years it was just three, the three E's. And I, and I do think creating that path, and we know coming out of COVID the amount of new business startups has rocketed. Yeah, because the, the, the tools that are available with technology— so like, for, for me, you know, 20, 30 years ago, it was maybe being able to buy a product at like Sam's Club in bulk and then selling it in a physical location. Today, things have been virtualized, and the creativity that students have leveraging how they create content, how they, you know, shoot video, um, graphic design. Like, they're building websites and e-commerce is so easy.

L**Liz Nusken** 13:55

Just Etsy, just thinking about Etsy, eBay, all these new tools.

J**Jason Duff** 13:59

Yeah. And then what ages do you typically— what grades and ages do you typically address with the Ohio After School Network?

L**Liz Nusken** 14:07

Uh, we work with students grades K through 12. One of, um, the, um, serial entrepreneurs that we've worked with who started Young Entrepreneur Institute, Greg Melkin, feels like the, the sweet spot is middle school. And I think that is probably a time when identities are being formed and students are thinking then about what classes are they going to take in high school to help, um, uh, take them into their careers.

J**Jason Duff** 14:34

And I think finding, you know, thinking of those that are here we probably— there's a lot of folks around, I know, in this table and others that are listening that have been invited to speak, maybe at their alma mater or their high school, or it could be a church group. One of the things I just encourage you to do is I know how busy life gets, but if you think back in time to those pivotal identity, you know, dreaming kind of face-offs, it's when you heard the story from someone else, when they spoke to you about what they do, you know, why they do it, you know, what the day-to-day looks like. I think that being a speaker and sharing can be one of the most valuable ways to impact other people. I'll share a story. I was at a 2nd grade class here locally, and the teachers, all 3 of the 2nd grade teachers decided to do an entrepreneurship class where they kind of explained to a second grader language of what that means, and they encourage the students to develop a business idea. Well, they invited me in to speak a little bit about what I do in helping renovate real estate and start new businesses, and then I got a chance to ask the students what they would do. And as we were going around, it was, it was good diversity. Like, some people wanted to do a comic— like, it was comic books, like, that was like a vintage thing, right? Yeah. A lot of people want to create games. Some folks had the idea of like they would make stickers. But there was one little girl, and she said to the class as they were listening, she's like, I am going to open up a pickle store. The whole class laughed at her. And she— and I kind of just singled her out in a good way. I said, tell me more about your pickle store. And she said, well, I love pickles because there are sweet pickles, there are dill pickles. She's like describing all the different brands that she and her family enjoy. And I complimented her and I said, that was the most unique idea I have heard all day. And let me share, instead of laughing, why that one is my favorite. Yeah. And in a little bit of way, I could share with the group is that embracing your weird and being different, like, that is a good thing in this space. Do you run into that a lot working with students? Like, generally, like, we know about entrepreneurs, we kind of don't fit the mold. So how do you identify students and like bring them in to get excited about the topic or even explain what the topic is?

L**Liz Nusken** 17:09

So it's interesting. Girl Scouts did a national study and found that 75% of girls are already interested in being entrepreneurs and 84% are interested in doing social entrepreneurship, making a positive difference in the world. I think kids today have grown up with Shark Tank. So, you know, that's in the ecosystem. They see that. They are, you know, the Elon Musk and Steve Jobs and Oprah Winfrey. Those are heroes for many students. There's some groups in Ohio, youth groups that have started because youth are interested in entrepreneurship. And in Northwest Ohio, there's a group called Start Huddle, started by two high school students who wanted, who are entrepreneurs and wanted to teach other high school students about entrepreneurship. They got funding from some local charities. They have a pitch challenge. They award some funding, some startup funding for entrepreneurs in Northwest Ohio. And then in Meigs County in Southeast Ohio, there's a group called the, what is it called? I'm going to blank out on the name here. Okay, now here it is. Meigs County Innovative Youth Society. How's that for a name? And they meet monthly. They bring in people from the bank, the chamber, entrepreneurs to talk to them. They have a stand at the local farmers market that was paid for by a local church so that teens can sign up and take turns selling their wares at the farmers market. So I think it's all— it's part of— it's organic already. You know, kids are interested in entrepreneurship. To help get kids excited about entrepreneurship, or to introduce them to entrepreneurship, in addition to talking to some of those, talking about some of those famous entrepreneurs, we get kids to think about entrepreneurs in their own lives. Like they have entrepreneurs in their lives, their parents, their neighbors, their siblings. Maybe they're mowing lawns or babysitting. Pizza shop. Right, exactly. The favorite, you know, pizza or coffee shop or whatever. And so introducing the fact that those are entrepreneurs can also help feed that interest as well.

J**Jason Duff** 19:20

Yeah, you know, I think that that doesn't ever really go away either. You know, you talk to anyone and I feel like somewhere at one point they had a business idea, um, for a lot of adults at least I come in contact with. And my, my church just started, um, a small group and we're doing like an entrepreneurship, but it's kind of turning into more of like a mastermind kind of thing where we can kind of just share, you know, what our struggles are, in our, you know, as we discovered this business and how it's impacting our personal lives and what our fears and holding people accountable and things like that. So I think it's really cool. And, you know, I think it would be a mistake to oversee that in our youth as well.

L**Liz Nusken** 19:57

Kids have great ideas. They see the problems in the world around them. And through the pitch challenge that we've had and some other pitch challenges, it's really interesting to see inside kids' minds what are the problems that they see? So some examples would be worries about head injuries. And some students pitched special helmets that are attached to an app and track blows to the head for coaches. GPS embedded in a hairband for kids who are concerned about human trafficking. Around the pandemic, kids, there was a lot of pitches related to social isolation. Yeah, loneliness, depression. So it's also very illuminating when you get kids engaged in entrepreneurship and get them thinking and talking about the problems they see in their lives, in their communities, to see it through their eyes.

J**Jason Duff** 20:57

I love that, Liz. You— when we work with a lot of communities and economic development professionals, we find that getting the younger folks involved in the process of what's missing in their community or ways that they want to activate ideas is oftentimes overlooked. So if you look at the local city council or chamber board or a lot of those traditional groups and organizations, they are unrepresented with youth. And I use the word youth, it could be 40 and under, like. And so, um, doing those focus groups, and that's something to think about, that to prepare your— if you're a business, prepare what your marketing should be, or what, you know, what the trends are. That is a really important voice, definitely. So you and I talked a little bit before we began the podcast today, and, and one thing that is a big debate in the entrepreneurial community is, is entrepreneurship Is it something that people are born with or is it something that they're taught? How do you think about that? A little nature versus nurture here. Yeah.

L**Liz Nusken** 22:07

I think it's some of both. I think that there are some kids who think differently, you know, maybe kids who aren't the traditional good students or they have a learning disability and they've developed workarounds or they maybe have zoned out from school and they've developed their own interests.. But I think you can learn about entrepreneurship too. And so I think it's some of both.

J**Jason Duff** 22:31

I agree with you on that. And I think the kinds of skills that you can learn about entrepreneurship, whether it is the ability to sell something— so sales, for the longest time in the education world, was a dirty word. You would never want to use the word, let's teach sales. But another way to say is, let's teach persuasion, or let's teach the idea to be passionate about something and define why you're passionate about. A lot of higher education schools and universities, their traditional admissions practices to bring students in, those methods aren't working unless you have a way to differentiate what your school is doing differently from anything else. So I do think how your organization is shaping and changing education and also all of the graduates and students that you've had kind of through your program, the ripple effects of that is significant. Have you any stories or examples with students that you're really proud of, of maybe how they came into the program, how they've changed, or what maybe they're doing now?

L

Liz Nusken 23:44

I want to back up just a minute. Yeah. So, um, one definition that I heard recently of an entrepreneur that I really love is people who do things with their ideas. So it doesn't have to be, um, starting a business like you're talking, being persuasive. It could be selling an idea, it could be, um, making a pitch, it could be me talking to you. I'm, I'm not going to make any money off of selling entrepreneurship education, but I would love to see more folks doing it. So people who do things with ideas. Yeah, that's good. And then one of the, the pieces that I really love about entrepreneurship is that it's about solving problems. It—

J

Jason Duff 24:24

our world doesn't have any of those. Yeah, we have an unlimited amount of those, right?

L

Liz Nusken 24:29

Right. And so seeing a problem and feeling like you can use your ideas to do something about it, not feeling powerless to make a change. So, um, so, uh Something you said made me think.

J

Jason Duff 24:41

Yeah, I love that. Yeah, well, and I think too, like, part of what I imagine has to bring you a lot of pride is to see the transformation and to see the impact that the work that you're doing is, is having. But I'm just curious, any— as you think back to the— would you say you've impacted or been involved with hundreds of students? Are we at thousands at this point? Like, probably a pretty significant number, probably.

L

Liz Nusken 25:05

Close to 1,000. So, and so I'm not actually working directly with the students. I'm working with the adults who work with students.

J

Jason Duff 25:12

Yeah.

L

Liz Nusken 25:13

So I can speak with pride about some of the organizations. Yeah. And how they've really embraced entrepreneur education. And one of those is CBI in Middletown. They had a high school leadership development program, and, and they have since incorporated entrepreneurship over the past couple years, and they have just done amazing things. And the superintendent in the Middletown School District now sees CBI as a premier partner because they're helping young people in their district see their futures and work towards it. And so they've done a great job of engaging the community in their work, local businesses, local entrepreneurs, economic development organizations. Millionaires in the community taking an interest in the students. So that's been really exciting to see how that has grown and developed over time.

J**Jason Duff** 26:08

I can share here at Small Nation, uh, you know, we've got— we're up to about 14 team members. And, you know, a few years ago I started to notice that some of the applicants that we were getting, they had a similar story when we were interviewing them. They would share that there was pivotal teacher at the local school that got them involved in a club. That particular club locally for us was DECA, which is a business entrepreneurship group that's in mostly high schools. Yeah. And the, the teacher, Katie Richter, uh, she was taking an interest in students that just kind of didn't fit the mold or didn't maybe have a background that was traditional, um, and she would invest in them. She would provide them teaching and training and travel opportunities to teach them business skills. And this pattern, after we hired a number of her students, they would be vulnerable and open up to share some of the challenges they had had in the past and how much Katie and that DECA program meant to them and how it changed them. And, um, I'm really, really respectful of and just so thankful of teachers and professionals like that that are oftentimes beyond their normal work day taking that extra time and, and donating, giving, serving to make an impact on the lives of others. A lot of the program directors that you work with, do they kind of sound like like the people like Katie.

L**Liz Nusken** 27:44

Yeah, people who care, people who want to make a difference.

J**Jason Duff** 27:47

How do we replicate that and then, and, and find and encourage more of that? Because I, I do think one of the mentalities that we're fighting— and it's just, maybe it's not purposeful, but we live in a very busy world. So, uh, the, the demands on time, the demands on family, the demands on, you know, all the things of life— how do we get people plugged in to, to find those folks that want to give and serve?

L**Liz Nusken** 28:15

So I would love to see more people in the community get engaged with their local after-school programs. Entrepreneurship education is a great way to do that, and I think it's also a manageable commitment for a professional or an entrepreneur to come in and teach a club, teach a class, you know, over a short period of time. Schools in Ohio have Business Advisory Councils, and that's kind of the intersection of local business employers and educators and making sure that students who graduate are prepared for the workforce. I think Business Advisory Councils are well positioned to come in and support entrepreneurship education, whether it's being a guest speaker, giving a field trip at their place of business, judging a pitch challenge, mentoring a student as they develop a business idea and create a pitch around it. I think chambers of commerce are well positioned to engage in this work as well. They can host a pitch challenge. They can host a youth market at a chamber event. They could recognize a local youth entrepreneur. They could have a youth entrepreneur membership level. And I just read this past week, Oak Harbor in Ohio, they do ribbon cutting for youth entrepreneurs in their community. So I think there's lots of opportunities in addition to schools and after-school programs for those people in the community who see— want to see youth succeed, who want to see local talent retained with youth who see a future for themselves in the community to get engaged in this way.

J**Jason Duff** 29:53

And what does that take? So if someone wanted to, you know, do this, and you say you have a, you know, you train the trainers kind of a model, does that just take one person to kind of say, hey, I'm going to take this on, and then they get connected with you and you give them materials and curriculum? Or what does that look like?

L**Liz Nusken** 30:11

So it could be one person or it could be a club. It could be a group. We have— there's so many great entrepreneurship curricula out there. We talked about NIFTY, Junior Achievement, Young Entrepreneur Institute has one, VentureLab, others. So first of all, don't create an entrepreneurship curriculum because there's a lot out there already. Don't start from scratch. You can adapt what's out there. We can help you find the resources that you need. We can train you and we can work to connect you with local youth-serving organizations. But if you're in a church or a faith-based group, you could hold your own club or a library. It doesn't have to be a traditional afterschool program. Parks and Rec, summer camps. Wow, lots of opportunities.

J**Jason Duff** 30:58

Yeah, we go into some towns and communities that lack entrepreneurial spirit, and they're frustrated because they have empty buildings in their town. There are business owners that are retirement age that can't find anyone to take over their business. These are kind of common things as we go to towns and communities. And I, I think, you know, Liz, just to double down on one thing that you mentioned one of the secrets may be start investing in your youth and start building a pipeline to get them ready. If you do have an empty building to do a pop-up idea, like get them ready and thinking about doing an internship or an apprenticeship in involved in your community. So that might be that engine. If you think about it from a sports analogy, yeah, is there's a reason why we have Pee Wee League, you know, in our towns for football. It's that practice, that experience to get them ready to move from the minor to the major leagues.

L**Liz Nusken** 31:55

The pipeline, right? Starting early.

J**Jason Duff** 31:58

So, so I mean, that really is a key strategy for those that are listening. And if you don't have these things in community, what I love, you just mentioned 4 or 5 great organizations that we can find and use their playbook, right?

L**Liz Nusken** 32:12

Right.

J**Jason Duff** 32:13

That's awesome. Um, any other like cool projects that you, you know, recently have just come off of, um, and you know, that you'd like to share of examples that have done really well?

L**Liz Nusken** 32:25

So one thing I'd love to share is Ohio is requiring high school students to graduate with seals. So there's 12 different seals. Students need to have 2. One of them is the Ohio Means Jobs Readiness Seal. And it's an opportunity for students to demonstrate that they have work readiness skills.. And so we worked with the Ohio Department of Education, um, some leadership development groups, uh, entrepreneurial education groups. We created a 12-session curriculum so that adults can, uh, facilitate, um, learning sessions that culminate in a pitch challenge and demonstrate these work readiness skills, and then students can get that on their diploma. And so, uh, We've trained close to 700 people across the state. So schools, educational service centers, youth-serving organizations, faith-based groups, and we're really excited to get this curriculum and training into the hands of more people so that high school students can, one, meet this graduation requirement, but two, have an entrepreneurial mindset.

J**Jason Duff** 33:35

That's a newer thing coming up then, right? Or the, for the state curriculum, right?

L**Liz Nusken** 33:39

It's graduating class of 2022.

J**Jason Duff** 33:41

23. Okay, awesome. Yeah, so not only are you investing in your community like you're saying, but you're also knocking out requirements too. One of the ideas that you shared earlier, um, that I just was so impressed with, and I want to compliment you and your team, is the pitch competition. Uh, I had an opportunity to be a judge and to review these really incredible, interesting, eclectic types of business ideas. And you mentioned a few earlier on the podcast But the students not only produced a basic business plan, some of the, the plans that were a little more thought out had some numbers in it, which is amazing if you're observing a middle school or even a high school student's plan. But then the students, the pitch actually happened virtually for the judges. So they recorded a video that explained their idea. Some of the videos even had some PowerPoints that were narrating what they were doing. Some of them actually had— were very, you know, matter of fact, which is kind of the personality of whoever was presenting. Some of them were very abstract and creative. So I will share as a judge, it was actually— I mean, we had our Rubik's Cube to make that plan, but it was hard to narrow down to the top 3 or so. But I think for those that are listening, If you're curious, how do we find these students? How do we get people involved in wanting to do this? I found the idea of doing a pitch competition in the community and setting some, some reward to it and a process to it can be a great way to get people that are on the sidelines maybe out of the woodwork. Has that been a cornerstone for— now, is that with your program or is that with the YEI? The Young Entrepreneur Institute, is that collaboration between the two?

L

Liz Nusken 35:37

Uh, it's been a collaboration, and thank you for being a judge. Yeah, I was impressed. Um, and the Young Entrepreneur Institute previously had a pitch challenge only for Northeast Ohio, but now they've gone national, so we folded our competition into theirs. And in fact, um, an Ohio high school student was one of the top winners in their national pitch. Yeah. This is last summer.

J

Jason Duff 36:00

Well, and, and I think, how many years has that program— has the pitch competition been going? Is it, is it newer or has it been around for some time? Obviously going more national.

L

Liz Nusken 36:10

I think it's probably been going on for probably close to 10 years.

J

Jason Duff 36:16

Well, just for those that are listening, I mean, another shout out that I'll give is Springfield, Ohio, uh, one of Ohio's legacy cities is one of those communities that's really looking to double down and support entrepreneurship. So about, I think it's been 5 years ago, some leaders in the community got together and put some resources together to create the Springfield Hustles competition. So it was a pitch competition that was available to the region if you had a business idea. And they ended up at some point almost raising \$100,000. Wow. In cash and in-kind contribution from attorneys, from marketing agencies, so that the reward was significant. And then they, they produced it in a way that they got great photography, great video, and got the media around announcing when the competition was. And the outcome that I have seen by the community investing in doing that is overwhelmingly positive because many of the businesses from the whole Dayton, Cincinnati region started applying to say, hey, I've got this great idea. Maybe in this larger city or larger market, I'm not— I'm— it's kind of noisy here. But when I apply, and if I'm bringing this to Springfield and I'm being resourced in the ecosystem with, with not only financial means, but, but mentorship, coaching, training, a physical office space— wow. Yeah, like, and so I just want to highlight, like, if you're looking where to get started, it might be as simple of working with some educators at your local school, working with the Chamber of Commerce or economic development to plan some type of business pitch or entrepreneurship idea event, but put some kind of reward to it. I think that goes back to, for many of us with our school projects, how we learn to like, like to sell something is it was tied to some experience reward, whether it was the reward of accomplishing being the top salesperson for your school, or even just accomplishing earning enough money to get your team uniforms. But I have seen a lot of success for the communities that create the conversation about entrepreneurship and then design that pitch competition.

L

Liz Nusken 38:32

Yeah, I really see that with like cities that are looking to recreate them or reinvent themselves rather, like Lima. We've done a lot of work with the Allen County Educational Service Center and the school districts in Lima. A lot of interest in entrepreneurship there. And with the new Central District, they're bringing entrepreneurs in to talk to students. They have a makerspace that they're launching and really getting schools engaged in entrepreneurship.

J

Jason Duff 39:00

And even for if you think students are not interested or that they don't want to grow up to have their own business too, like I want to, you know, push beyond that. Think of all the soft skills that you're learning and attaining and growing by doing a pitch competition. Like, you know, as simple as like the confidence in yourself to actually do it or, you know, to believe in yourself to see it through and actually get something done and have that be a success that you got it in front of the judges. You know, like it's a different way. Like we have that for sports, you know, and a lot of times we have that for academics and for the arts depending on where you're at. But like I know in college, like I wish there were more people who— I went to a much smaller school and it was a startup campus. And, you know, there are times that, it got heavy to always be the one to bring in the new ideas and things like that. But, you know, people who go through those kind of situations at a younger age, I feel like I had some of that through scouting, through 4-H, through some of those programs, you know, and it kind of shaped and equipped me to be able to do that later on in life, in college. And, you know, now beyond, I, you know, I am someone who is interested in business and things like that as well. But I just think there are a lot of soft skills that also come along with that.

L

Liz Nusken 40:14

Totally. Those soft skills are so important. And there's also something called an intrapreneur, which is someone who uses their entrepreneurial mindset at work, not at their own business. And that's okay. What employer doesn't want someone who's a problem solver?

J

Jason Duff 40:30

Yeah. And that's, I think right now the perspective has maybe shift where maybe in the past, I mean, there's always different schools of thought, right? But where it's viewed as risky or, you know, maybe sometimes irresponsible to be on your own and start your own business and things like that. I feel like the current trend is that's the cool thing to do and that's exciting and wow, that person's got a lot going for them, like super successful. But like it is okay also to work a normal job. And I don't know if anyone needs to hear that, but it's okay to be good at what you do and where you're at in life too. But those skills are still very applicable in that kind of work setting.

L

Liz Nusken 41:11

A lot of people have side hustles. So my brother's a firefighter. He has a side hustle. I think every firefighter has a side hustle.

J**Jason Duff** 41:17

I love side hustles. That's great.

L**Liz Nusken** 41:20

And for people, for students who are going into the trades, chances are great that if they go into construction or HVAC or what be it, at some point, they're going to be an entrepreneur. They're going to launch their own business. So everybody benefits.

J**Jason Duff** 41:33

We depend in the reshaping of the work that we're doing in a lot of towns. We depend on the side hustle economy. I mean, we we need cabinet makers that will build our displays, we need graphic designers that will create new logo packages for our clients. Like, it is— I, I can't emphasize enough how important that community is to the work that we're doing here. Um, the other thing I wanted to mention is that we talked about the pitch competitions and, and entrepreneurship competitions. I've made it a practice to follow up on who the winners are, but I'm not as concerned about who got first, second, or third. I'm actually more concerned about who didn't win. And here's why, is that I found even looking back on my life, maybe I always didn't get first, second, or third place, but it was that drive to say, I didn't win this time, I'm gonna win next time. And, um, for many of the— if you think about like, there's always going to be the celebrities who get everything, but I think it's also paying attention who, who got 4th place or 5th place, and maybe they need a little coaching or finessing. And the question is, are they coachable to be developed to take that idea further? Um, so just, just a strategy for those that might be listening, like it's not always about who is winning. It's, it's really who is willing to pivot, modify, be coached to eventually win the race.

L**Liz Nusken** 43:13

Yeah, yeah, that's, that's important. Maybe you, you need that first time as a practice time, and that's all about embracing failure.

J**Jason Duff** 43:21

Failure. And I think that— can I tell you, that's what keeps most students, because like it's the idea that you can't fail, or you can't get a bad grade, or you can't do something out of the mold. And I think it's teaching how to fail hard and fail fast. And especially if you've got— we've talked about a previous podcast of having youth on your side. Like, we've got to teach students it's, it's okay. Yeah, it's— in fact, let's celebrate it. And then ask them the question, what did you learn from this? Right? Yeah. Can they process what they learned? And what would you do differently next time?

L**Liz Nusken** 43:55

Yeah, we can also set an example for young people by doing that ourselves.

J**Jason Duff** 44:00

And can I tell you that I think the thing that I have loved about this podcast, it's being more real and vulnerable, where people on the surface think, oh, her job must be so easy, or he's always had it made, or whatever those narratives are. And we have really kind of been surprised. It's not always been that way. No, and in fact, like, when you when you really get real and vulnerable about it, vulnerable, it, it helps people, I think, reflect in their own life and say, well, you know, I've encountered that too. I just maybe wasn't comfortable talking about it. Yeah, yeah. Don't stay down. Get up and, uh, and go at it again. But, uh, Liz, we really appreciate you coming out today. What are some of the professional development resources such as books or podcasts? I know you mentioned that have been impactful for you and that you would recommend to our audience?

L**Liz Nusken** 44:52

Yeah, thank you for asking me, and thanks for having me here today. This has been great. So one of the podcasts that I want to recommend is Ohio v. the World. Have you— have you heard of that?

J**Jason Duff** 45:02

No, tell us about this.

L**Liz Nusken** 45:02

Oh my gosh, I just love that. It's history stories drilled down in Ohio. So stories about like an episode maybe for each president, talking about Ohio experience during the different wars, organized crime in Ohio. Each episode, I think—

J**Jason Duff** 45:23

I want to check this out. That sounds amazing.

L**Liz Nusken** 45:25

So interesting. So I love that just because I love Ohio. Yeah. And then there's tons of podcasts on entrepreneurship. There's one— I'm from Columbus, so there's Columbus Entrepreneur Podcast too that I enjoy as well. Awesome.

J**Jason Duff** 45:38

Yeah, thank you so much for sharing that. And where can people follow you and keep up with what's happening with your business or if they want to bring you to their communities. I know that's something that, you know, we're going to try to hook up some, some connections for you to be able to, you know, have some conversations and hopefully engage our youth around here as well. But where can people do that if they want to get a hold of you?

L**Liz Nusken** 45:57

All right, so I'm at the Ohio Afterschool Network, and we have a website, ohioafterschoolnetwork.org. I can be reached there, and I'm going to give you my email to go in the show notes to make it easy for people to find me.

J**Jason Duff** 46:10

All right, perfect. Thank you so much. Well, Liz, thank you. Um, the big thing I keep coming back to is this idea that you kind of opened up with, is being able to take that field trip and learning things out of the, the everyday. I think that lesson in life, if you're stuck in a pattern, you're doing the same thing every day, it is that important thing to you know, pull deep and, and think about doing something completely different. And, and, and that is taking a field trip to another town or community, another industry, or just investing in your own education. And while today's theme and topic was about youth, I think— and you provided some great tools and feedback for how to give back and how to serve— it is that reminder that No matter what age, we're all meant to focus on our learning and continue to grow with that. Um, but I, uh, I love the field trip analogy. I'm thinking the COSI and just, there's something emotional that you just get about that, like that shift, that new idea, that passion. But thank you for being a champion for entrepreneurship, for youth, and especially our great state of Ohio. Thank you. All right. Well,

E**Ethan DeLeon** 47:32

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