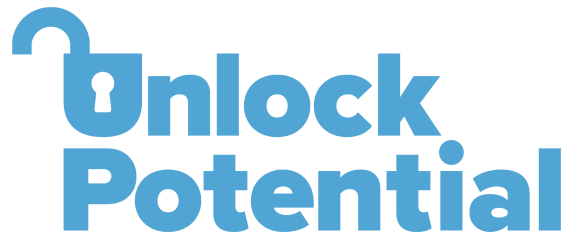


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PERSEVERE Awarded Walmart Grant to Advance Workforce Equity for At-Risk Youth

National Launch Event at SXSW on March 11 Includes Major U.S. Employment Partners Helping to Disrupt the Prison Pipeline

Memphis, TN (March 11, 2022) —Persevere, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been awarded a grant from Walmart.org. Funding will help Persevere create and build the National Institute for Unlock Potential (UP) capacity. The national institute will feature a network of experts, practitioners, and advocates whose overarching objective is reducing recidivism and improving opportunities for young people disconnected from school and/or work. The group's efforts will be guided by its development and implementation of a data-informed and racially equitable approach to workforce development. Unlock Potential (UP) reflects the optimism society should have about helping young people find pathways to economic mobility while positioning them to release the tremendous untapped potential they have inside.



This national initiative will officially kick-off “in concert” with Austin (Texas)’s South by Southwest (SXSW) annual event on March 11. In addition to its many musical attractions, SXSW will also feature major U.S. employers who will share hiring and other resources that help divert justice-involved individuals from the prison pipeline and place them into a workforce readiness environment.

With support from the Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity and a strong relationship with the Responsible Business Initiative for Justice (RBIJ), Unlock Potential aims to unlock opportunities for 4.1 million Opportunity Youth (OY) in the U.S. —young people between 16 and 24 — who are out of school and unemployed with lived experiences involving the juvenile justice and foster care systems, incarcerated parents, and human trafficking. The Institute's capacity building will be geared toward evidence-based, innovative, scalable models with collaborative approaches that feature wraparound services to increase the likelihood of meaningful employment. RBIJ's efforts will connect with major employers, prospective youth hires, and community partners, convening to design an evidence-based program to identify and support target recruits while teaching employers how to hire, nurture, and retain them effectively.

"We are proud to partner with the Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity while also stepping into a strong collaboration with RBIJ," said Sean Hosman, the Founder of Persevere. "By serving these young people before they've had the chance to make mistakes with lifelong implications, we can potentially prevent generations from entering the criminal justice system, which disproportionately impacts black and brown communities at significantly higher rates."

"We must be more intentional about creating meaningful opportunities for at-risk youth so we can break the cycle of incarceration for these groups of young people, particularly Black young adults," said Dr. Marvin Carr, Director, Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity. "The Unlock Potential program adds to a [network](#) of community leaders, nonprofits and policymakers working together to advance criminal justice prevention initiatives, made possible by the Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity."

“Businesses have an existential responsibility to engage on social issues like race and justice. By hiring and training this target group of young people, they can interrupt destructive cycles of unemployment and incarceration. Unlock Potential won’t just make our companies more prosperous and diverse - our communities safer - it will grow the next generation of leaders. That is something I’m very excited to be part of,” said RBJ CEO Celia Ouellette.

About Persevere

Founded in 2014, Persevere is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to empower justice-involved men and women and individuals at risk for justice involvement to succeed as productive members of society. They help individuals become employable within the technology industry by providing technological and entrepreneurship skills through education and employment, coupled with mentoring and wraparound support services. In addition, Persevere focuses on reducing disproportionate minority confinement within the criminal justice system and inclusion in the workforce, especially in black and brown communities with high concentrations of poverty and justice involvement. To find out more about the program and how you can get involved, please visit <https://perseverenow.org>.

For further information about the National Institute for Unlock Potential, please contact Karen Walker, Director, at kwalker@perseverenow.org or InstituteUP@perseverenow.org.

About the Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity

The Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity was founded through a \$100 million commitment over five years to address the drivers of systemic racism in society and accelerate change. The Center’s initiatives will fund research, advocacy, innovation of practices and tools, stakeholder convening, and non-profit capacity building focusing on four systems: finance, health, education, and criminal justice. To learn more, visit the Center for Racial Equity at <https://walmart.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/center-for-racial-equity>.

About Responsible Business Initiative

The Responsible Business Initiative for Justice (RBIJ) is a non-profit organization working to engage, educate, and equip businesses — and their leaders — to participate in advocacy on criminal justice issues, support policy-specific reform campaigns, and use their resources and operations to be a force for good in society. This work includes supporting BRT and 2nd Chance Hiring Business Coalition members. To learn more, visit <https://www.responsiblebusinessinitiative.org/>.

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