

PRODIGY  
VENTURES

DENVER, CO



year of  
**BELONGING**



Prodigy Ventures  
3801 E 40th Ave  
Denver, CO 80205

**2021** annual report

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Prodigy envisions an economically equitable Denver with a new generation of thriving, healthy, innovative community members who have experienced upward economic mobility and live in diverse neighborhoods.

## MISSION:

Through high-caliber professional development and hands-on learning in a Prodigy enterprise, marginalized young adults develop mindsets and skills for sustainable careers, economic mobility, and most importantly, to go forth and enrich their city.

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## CREDITS

### Photography

Kevin Mohatt - kevinmohatt.com

### Graphic Design

Hidden Pine Branding & Design - findhiddenpine.com

### Narrative Design & Writing

Marianne Manzler - mariannemanzler.com

## THE YEAR OF BELONGING: REFLECTIONS FROM PRODIGY'S FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I still can't get over it. The year 2021 was Prodigy's fifth full year of existence. Five years in, and still, on a daily basis, I am awed by this gift. Prodigy has been blessed by a force well beyond anything that I, or any one person, could ever create alone. Its beauty and depth are manifestations of a collective, communal, divine energy – of which you who are reading this – are an integral part. And, I am forever grateful to belong to this organization.

Prodigy has become a special place, one that is rich and multi-layered. In its basic form, **Prodigy is a workforce development organization.** To date we have trained over 200 young adults and hired 80 apprentices, who were all previously disconnected from traditional school and/or workplaces. These young adults are running a coffeehouse that has generated over \$1.6 million in sales. Collectively, apprentices have earned over \$775,000, money that is circulating into families and contributing positively to communities, and returned over \$600,000 back to Colorado in taxes. 90% of graduates are employed after Prodigy as they move into stable careers, earn above living wage and continue to overcome tremendous obstacles. Prodigy has become a valuable pipeline of talent for local employers, who are recruiting Prodigy apprentices at a high rate. Employers know apprentices are highly skilled, persistent, reliable and have powerful workplace mindsets that make them strong contributors to any team.

And, yet, Prodigy is more than a workforce development organization. This year shows this clearly: **Prodigy is a place of deep personal development.** Here, young adults create space to step into their inherent greatness and into their voice and power as they become powerful leaders and life-long learners. This year, we intentionally deepened personal development learning experiences, where apprentices studied: Coffee + Colonialism, Cultural Identity, Power + Oppression, Collective Liberation, and Civic Engagement. Summer Davis, an apprentice graduate and current Manager Trainee, reflected on her experience this way: "Prodigy has shown to me that there is a possibility where us young people of color can reclaim space to open up to other people of color, to other people who have felt pressure or discouragement in a typically white space. Prodigy encourages the leader within us to show up and I'm happy to be a part of it."

Throughout this Annual Report, and particularly in Malinda's feature story, you will see examples of the searching apprentices have done outside of their barista shifts, to explore their identity and heritage. This depthful, sometimes heart-breaking work is essential to the healing of these emerging leaders, and of our communities.

**A**nd, most importantly, **Prodigy is a place of belonging.** Our proudest 'measure of success' is that apprentices want to be here. While most employers are struggling with the 'Great Recession,' we have seen the largest number of apprentice applicants in four years, and the highest retention/graduation rate. Much of this is to do with cultivating a place where everyone is honored for their authentic selves. In this culture of peer-learning and peer-teaching framed by 'spiritual hospitality,' every person belongs.

2021 began with great promise. We as a nation hoped for the end of the coronavirus pandemic, an economic recovery, movement toward racial healing and mental health healing after a traumatic 2020. However, 2021 proved to be another devastating year. At Prodigy, we were challenged with multiple COVID-positive cases, which resulted in numerous cancellations in programming, delays in hiring, and a business closure. We grappled internally with vaccinations. We experienced acute and sometimes debilitating mental health struggles due to racial tensions at the national level and disturbing racial outlashes by customers in the shop, due to isolation and death and an inability to gather as large groups. Despite these challenges, we found solace in each other. Apprentices stood strong, steadfast and leaned on one another in our greatest time of need.

*"Apprentices are the exact type of leaders this city wants and needs."*

We chose the theme for 2021's Annual Report, **The Year of Belonging**, because belonging was the salient experience at Prodigy, despite the challenges. Now, this isn't the type of dualistic 'belonging' that implies an in-crowd and an out-crowd. No, this is an all-encompassing belonging that apprentices experienced and co-created. A type of belonging similar to that which Father Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries, describes in *Tattoos on the Heart*: "Inching ourselves closer to creating a community of kinship such that God might recognize it. Soon we imagine...this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased."

On a personal note, I was particularly transformed this year by studying *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Marie Brown. In it, Brown explores the concept of 'coevolution through friendship.' She writes: "Often the biggest support **we need is to speak the truth out loud to those who will hold it with us from a vantage point of unconditional love.**" In this way, "we evolve in relationships of mutual transformation." I feel this at Prodigy so deeply. This is what's happening under the guise of a cute little coffee shop or even as a workforce development organization. Apprentices are studying and living out the type of belonging for which we all long. When I think about the type of Denver that I desire to live in, I can't help but see that apprentices are the exact type of leaders this city wants and needs.

Throughout this Annual Report, you will see glimpses of apprentices creating a culture of belonging within themselves and for each other. Virgyl: "Knowing the [team] is there for me and cares for me shows me how important it is to surround yourself with positive people and a work environment that wants to see your success and growth." Elani: "I am learning about what belonging to a community means, and how I want to take full advantage of this experience and be able to make it my own. I bring the best energy and attitude to work, and even on my worst days, I still find ways to bring a smile or laughter to everyone around me." And, 2021 graduate, Erionna: "Now I'm learning the importance of connection, authenticity, and advocating for my needs and desires...Prodigy helped push me, but more importantly supported me in the hardships I had to overcome and in the celebrations I have with the milestones I've completed."

I am daily inspired by the wisdom of this next generation of young leaders, by this ever-growing community of belonging. And, we are so excited to share that we are opening a new coffeehouse. Projected to open August 2022, Prodigy's second coffeehouse will be located at 4500 Broadway in the community of Globeville. We are humbled to be a part of this community and strive to be an asset to longtime residents.

Finally, I want to say thank you to you. Thank you for reading this, for believing in apprentices, for coming into the shop, for volunteering, for donating, for spreading the word. Together, in these micro-actions, we are building a city of all-encompassing belonging.

  
STEPHANIE FRANCES  
- FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# APPRENTICE TRAJECTORY

**PRODIGY'S MODEL:** Prodigy is a network of high-standards social enterprises offering apprenticeships to young adults from Denver disconnected from traditional school and work structures. Our first enterprise, Prodigy Coffeehouse, opened 2016 in Northeast Denver. Prodigy provides technical and applied skills training and professional development modules taught by educators, business mentors and coffee experts. Youth who complete the Pre-Apprenticeship Intensive are offered paid apprenticeship. Here, the intentional learning environment and pursuit of mastery continues in the highly contextualized learning environment: on the job and in the classroom, throughout a year-long paid apprenticeship. Instructional strategies are focused on acquisition of transferable 21st century workplace skills for professional employment opportunities and longer-term educational attainment.

## PRE-APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Young adults are introduced to foundational mindsets and skills for success in the workplace during a deeply intentional, 4-week program in order to set apprentices up for success in a transformational way.

## LEADERSHIP MINDSETS

Apprentices study six transformational leadership mindsets and demonstrate them within the Prodigy community.

## PEER LEARNING TEACHING

Learners are more attuned to learning in a social context with their peers. Peer teaching is a meta-cognitive skill that requires not only an understanding of the content, but the ability to articulate it to others, build relationships with learners, and customize teaching strategies for different personalities.

Peer teaching and learning is associated with greater psychological well-being, social competence, communication skills, and self-esteem.

## SCA CERTIFICATIONS

Apprentices can become certified by the Speciality Coffee Association, an internationally- recognized organization that launches baristas into careers in craft coffee. They receive specialized training on topics such as the Foundations of Espresso Making, Brewing Methods, Latte Art, and more.

## GRADUATION

Apprentices graduate with the ability to secure meaningful employment in their community. Graduates continue to have access to Prodigy's staff and resources indefinitely after graduation.



## BARISTA LEVEL 1

Apprentices focus on becoming functional baristas. Their learning follows the Barista 1 Certification, scaffolded into four basic evaluations that build upon each other, including: *Coffee Knowledge, Customer Interactions and Point of Sale competency, Espresso Bar Skills, and Professional Evaluation.*

Apprentices work at their own pace within small peer groups with our Director of Professional Learning and Operations Manager to achieve this first significant milestone.

## MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

We believe Mental Health and Wellness is critical in a work and learning space. Apprentices are paid to engage in individual and group activities centered on liberation and healing. All have the option to engage in weekly 1-on-1 therapy with a clinical therapist. Prodigy partners with community organizations, therapists and higher education programs to provide workshops, healing experiences and therapy.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODULES

Apprentices participate in group and individual professional development modules on topics such as, Coffee & Colonialism, Personal, Cultural and Social Identity, Intersectionality, Power & Oppression, Collective Liberation, Book Club, Civic Engagement, Train the Trainer, Financial Literacy, Real Life Skills 101, and Storytelling & Healing.

## JOB DEVELOPMENT & TRANSITION TO WORKFORCE

Prodigy provides paid experiences outside the shop such as guest barista shifts, job shadows, internships. The apprenticeship also includes portfolio and job development in preparation for graduation.

In addition to the elements on this timeline, we have built four key learning science components into Prodigy's model. This is how we tap into the innate desire to engage deeply in learning and work:

**TIME ON TASK AND DELIBERATIVE PRACTICE:** Mastery requires deliberate practice. At Prodigy, apprentices work and learn for an average of 1,000 hours with a 2:1 student-to-teacher ratio.

**CLEAR, RELEVANT, AND ONGOING SUCCESS MILESTONES:** Learning requires setting clear standards and providing scaffolded teaching to help learners achieve success.

**GENERATIVE FEEDBACK:** On the first day of Pre-Apprenticeship, young adults learn that feedback is not their enemy. At Prodigy, feedback is a natural, dignifying, and essential part of continuous learning.

**COMMUNITY OF SPIRITUAL HOSPITALITY:** All of these learning strategies exist within a culture of spiritual hospitality: "We create space for people to be authentically and fully themselves."

The word **'PRODIGY'** means: *A young person endowed with exceptional abilities.*

The organization **Prodigy Ventures** was crafted by a team of educators in Denver, Colorado, on the conviction that the city's next great contributors are already here: the young adults just beyond our periphery, those disconnected from our institutions.

# MEET THE CURRENT APPRENTICES

WE ASKED EACH APPRENTICE:

**“What does belonging to your community mean to you?”**



**Gabe, 24**

**GLOBEVILLE**  
Apprentice Barista | COHORT 23

To me, a strong community is people coming together, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic background. Belonging means feeling like you fit in to the community and you feel that you can connect with others and have things in common.



**Madison, 19**

**COMMERCE CITY**  
Apprentice Barista | COHORT 22

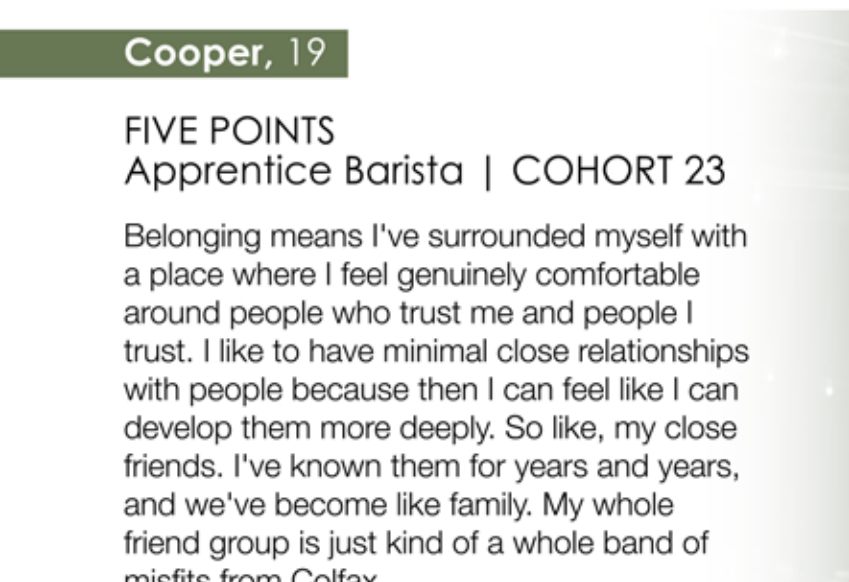
To me, belonging means feeling comfortable in a place. Most days, I would rather stay home. At Prodigy, I'm learning how to step outside of my comfort zone and trust the people I work with.



**Aja, 19**

**COMMERCE CITY**  
Apprentice Barista | COHORT 22

At Prodigy, belonging means I feel welcomed in a space and don't have to change who I am. A lot of people don't always like that I'm outgoing, down to do anything and bring a lot of energy, and so for me to find a place where I can be my authentic self has been amazing.



**Cooper, 19**

**FIVE POINTS**  
Apprentice Barista | COHORT 23

Belonging means I've surrounded myself with a place where I feel genuinely comfortable around people who trust me and people I trust. I like to have minimal close relationships with people because then I can feel like I can develop them more deeply. So like, my close friends. I've known them for years and years, and we've become like family. My whole friend group is just kind of a whole band of misfits from Colfax.



**Fabian, 20**

**THORNTON**  
SCA Barista 1 | COHORT 21

A strong community is a group of people who feel comfortable around each other. No judgement of one another. Prodigy is made up of lots of young people, and I feel like we can all connect about similar interests and topics.



**Leslie, 21**

**PHOENIX**  
SCA Barista 1 | COHORT 21

Belonging means people accept who you are, love you for who you are, and make you feel wanted in that space. Around Halloween at Prodigy, I was talking with Nayeli and Summer [the Managers in Training], and I started expressing myself and being more open. They are the best listeners. They really understood where I was coming from, and that's when I realized, holy shit, if they can do that, everyone can be like that in a workplace. They don't judge you and that means a lot to me.



**Xavier, 20**

**PARK HILL**  
SCA Barista 1 & Peer Trainer | COHORT 20

Friendship. Loyalty. I belong to the Ogala Sioux tribe. To belong means you have a purpose. It doesn't matter if you don't belong to anyone, as long as you belong to yourself and you have your purpose and get it done.



**Yoss, 22**

**THORNTON**  
SCA Barista 1 | COHORT 21

Belonging means you are not alone. Maybe not everyone shares the same experiences, but those people can still relate to the emotions you're feeling.

**Virgyl, 20**

**FIVE POINTS**  
SCA Barista 1 & Peer Trainer | COHORT 19

I belong to the Five Points community. I belong to the African American community. A community is a place where you know you're safe or you feel safe, where you're unified with the people you love. It's the feeling that you're welcomed, and you know that you are supposed to be in that place.



**Elani, 19**

**NORTHEAST PARK HILL/CLAYTON**  
SCA Barista 1 | COHORT 21

Belonging to me means to have something of your own that is fully yours. It means being somewhere where you're welcome and don't have to ask more than once for something.



**Malinda, 20**

**FIVE POINTS**  
Shift Lead, Manager on Duty & SCA Barista 1  
COHORT 18

Belonging means you have to first accept and appreciate who you are. True belonging feels energetic, happy, and supportive. You are loved and love others with no judgments. You are able to feel safe, needed, and free. Prodigy is a main community for me that has shown me how to accept myself for who I am and be proud of all the good work I do.



# IMPACT & OUTCOMES

**PRODIGY'S IMPACT GOAL:** Apprentices secure meaningful, sustainable employment and experience economic mobility.

93% of apprentices

## INCREASED EARNING POWER

We're not just interested in apprentices getting a job after Prodigy. We're successful if they are confident in their skills and abilities, use their voices to articulate their stories and build a career that inspires them. Apprentices increase earning power by building technical skills, earn industry-recognized certifications, and promotions. As a result, they graduate with the ability to earn a living wage and be leaders in their homes, communities and workplaces.



90% of apprentices

## BUILT TRANSFERABLE SKILLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ECONOMY

Experiential learning is key to supporting businesses, workers, and learners. By equipping apprentices with digital literacy fluency, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, intensive work-based learning experiences like a Prodigy apprenticeship ensure a student maximizes their learning growth, potential, and acquisition of skills and mindsets for future positions. We are creating a more well-rounded, skilled workforce for the state of Colorado and beyond. At Prodigy, we measure our ability to equip youth with these skills using the Essential Skills and Dispositions framework from the National Center for Innovation in Education. It includes measures of communication, collaboration, creative problem-solving, and self-direction.



84% of apprentices

## INCREASED SOCIAL CAPITAL

Our research shows us that bridging social capital, or ties that cross groups, are important for overall economic mobility. Understanding the assets in your community, how to leverage them, and increasing your community may be more powerful for economic growth than your education or work experience. At Prodigy, we intentionally design the apprenticeship to include activities that increase apprentices' social capital and sense of belonging.



65% of apprentices

## EXPERIENCED HEALING

We understand that economic mobility cannot happen from increasing earning power and foundational/transferrable skills alone. Personal and cultural identity development and healing from inequitable systems is necessary to thrive. At Prodigy, apprentices engage in mental health and wellness, like healing circles, identity-based groups, and therapy. They study power, oppression, and liberation. They can attend 1-on-1 therapy (paid for by Prodigy). They use their voices to change leadership and shape the culture in the shop for customers and employees alike.



**\$18.50**  
AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE

**38**  
YOUNG ADULTS ATTENDED PRE-APPRENTICESHIP INTENSIVES

**23**  
YOUNG ADULTS WORKED AS APPRENTICES

**4**  
APPRENTICES PROMOTED INTO LEADERSHIP

# PRODIGY GRADUATES

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



## TYREE

COHORT 8

Aside from making everyone around him laugh and smile, Tyree's lifelong passion has always been food. After graduating Prodigy in early 2021, he was hired into a Chef position at Room for Milly, an upscale cocktail bar. In this role, Tyree has joined passion, craft to jumpstart a career in culinary arts, while earning a living wage with health and retirement benefits.

PRODIGY GRADUATES



## JAMIE

COHORT 13

During her apprenticeship at Prodigy, Jamie was a powerful leader and learner. After graduation, she took her talents to Blue Sparrow Coffee, where she is working as a craft coffee barista. Jamie joins three other Prodigy graduates on the Blue Sparrow team.



## VIRGYL

COHORT 19

Recent graduate Virgyl leads youth programming at the St. Charles Recreation Center in northeast Denver, where he is the Head Basketball and Soccer coach. In addition to bringing positivity and laughter to any space, Virgyl's passion lies in being a local vocalist. Throughout his apprenticeship, Virgyl also performed live with local artists and put out over eleven songs and musical collaborations.

### 2021 Graduated Apprentices:

**BRIANNA**  
COHORT 12

**NAYELI**  
COHORT 13

**ERIONNA**  
COHORT 16

**SUMMER**  
COHORT 18

**EUGENE**  
COHORT 13

**ERIC**  
COHORT 16

**ASHLEY**  
COHORT 17



# MEET THE MANAGERS IN TRAINING

**P**rodigy's model is designed to be dependent on the voice, experience, insight and leadership of apprentices to operate the coffeehouse. This reflects our core belief that marginalized young adults hold the potential to rebuild and heal our city— they are latent assets that can be leveraged to build a thriving, more equitable city.

In 2021, we took this belief to a new level. With a longtime goal to formalize a path to grow leadership from within, Prodigy created a Manager Training program. The two-year program trains apprentice graduates and community members to open and operate a business. The goal is that Manager Trainees earn a salary and are equipped to open and operate a successful craft coffeehouse of their own or manage one of Prodigy's shops.

This year, Prodigy kicked off its pilot Manager Training program with two apprentice graduates, Nayeli Dimas and Summer Davis. Both underwent a rigorous application process, which included designing their own seasonal drinks, profit margin analysis, and a public presentation. Hiring two Manager Trainees at a time was intentional; we wanted to upend a typical manager training program structure. This was designed as a collaborative experience, where two emerging leaders could work together to learn and execute at a high level, rather than the typical model where one person experiences the weight of intense responsibility on their shoulders alone.

Nayeli was hired because of her natural leadership instincts, her desire to grow and step into her own voice, her compassionate mentoring of other apprentices, and an intense work ethic motivated by contributing to the team and the organization beyond what was expected. Summer is a natural leader with her upbeat and gentle spirit, drawing people to her. As an apprentice, Summer showed up as a humble learner, despite having previous coffee experience. She built a reputation as an effective and trustworthy leader with her teammates. Both strive to contribute to something bigger than themselves and create a meaningful work experience for themselves and their community.

Brady Grant, Prodigy's Director of Learning, designed and leads the program. Emilia Cano, Prodigy's Operations Manager, supports on-shift learning and skill-building. Both act as daily mentors as Nayeli and Summer navigate this experience. They are constantly pushing their craft coffee skills, customer experience, testing new brewing methods, inventory and ordering, and determining apprentice roles and responsibilities.



### MEET THE MANAGERS IN TRAINING

**A**s part of the program, Summer and Nayeli attend University of Denver's University College Frontline Manager Essentials class, alongside other business managers, to which DU has provided scholarship dollars for tuition. Manager Trainees also meet weekly with Stacy Elwell-Chalmers, a Business Operations and Organizational Leadership Consultant.

Nayeli and Summer are in charge of day-to-day operations of the coffeehouse. One of the most challenging aspects has been optimizing apprentice talent on-shift and providing generative feedback. When they aren't in class or on-shift, Nayeli and Summer support Prodigy's Pre-Apprenticeship training, facilitating workshops for young adults. Here they teach variables of extraction through science experiments and introduce the concept of 'spiritual hospitality' to young adults in their community. Both also sit on Prodigy's Equity Planning workgroup and Summer attended the Board of Directors Retreat in 2021.

Nayeli describes the Manager Training program as "preparing young adults to be leaders in a management position. This program allows us to shift and take ownership of our work environment and learning. I am learning how to operate a business day to day. I'm learning how to support and create a trusting team. With the new responsibilities of managing the shop, I'm looking forward to supporting my team, fellow Manager Trainee and leadership team by giving me the patience and inspiration to learn."

Their role at Prodigy will be crucial as the second shop in Globeville opens in the summer of 2022. According to Summer, "The [Globeville] shop is going to provide so much more opportunity and responsibility for everyone in leadership roles. I am looking forward to this shop being a space where I can start utilizing all of the things I've learned so far in the MIT program on a larger and more challenging scale. I see myself growing as a reliable trainer and operational support. By the time the second shop opens, I will have more knowledge on leadership/training and operations, and hope to have a stronger role in growing Prodigy as an organization. Then, once the Manager Training program is complete, I can take my experience and certifications and help another organization that I am equally as passionate about."





# FEATURE THE METAMORPHOSIS OF MALINDA

How one apprentice found a sense of belonging through her love of dance

Story by Marianne Manzler  
Photography by Kevin Mohatt

Somewhere in the midst of a global pandemic, 2020 rolled into 2021. Colorado, as well as the nation, is still addressing both the ongoing crisis and aftermath of COVID-19. 2021 was a year of searching and finding. 2021 was a year of undoing all your shit and getting it together anyway.

For Prodigy apprentice Malinda Medina, 2021 was about growing.

During COVID, she felt defeated. She struggled with the switch to virtual learning and retreated from her family and friends. She dealt with debilitating depression and emotional and mental health challenges that were only exacerbated by the pandemic. She struggled with the lack of support and resources she needed to access her schooling, especially with the overwhelming burden of helping her family pay for essentials. As a Native American and Latinx woman, she felt the impacts of the pandemic acutely.

When Malinda graduated from high school, she took this opportunity to reflect on how she fought through three years of intense medical and mental health issues to be the first person in her family to not only graduate from high school, but survive virtual schooling during a pandemic. She wanted to commemorate this monumental accomplishment by designing a skirt that represented both her internal struggle and outer journey to womanhood and independence. It was **“a reminder that if we do fall back into depression, if we do spiral, we know we still have life to live, we still have so much to still do.”** The lace material represented the delicacy of life and her determination to not take anything for granted. Malinda thought the **“metamorphosis of the butterflies symbolized how majestic and beautiful and transformative life can be. In order to get to that final stage, they have to stay in their cocoon and grow and focus on themselves in order to get their wings and actually expand.”**

Soon after graduating, Malinda began her barista apprenticeship at Prodigy, which allowed her to find some direction while becoming economically self-sufficient for the first time. Throughout her time at Prodigy, Malinda regained a sense of belonging and purpose and began to set more boundaries for herself. She grew her responsibility at the shop by becoming Shift Lead and the Weekend Manager on Duty.

She learned how to take difficult situations in stride and not feel overwhelmed by the pace of the shop, difficult customer interactions, or managing other apprentices. She re-engaged in hands-on activities she loved such as beading, sewing, and dancing. She learned how to use her voice and advocate for herself as she sought recognition within the Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma, where her mother’s side of the family originated from.

In her darkest moments, she relied on her Prodigy community and the healing art of dance to get her through. Malinda began dancing at 12 years old, when she first learned the Fancy Shawl Dance and performed it as part of the teen competitions at the Denver Pow Wow, an annual gathering of all local tribal Nations to come together, sing, dance, tell stories, and celebrate Native culture. In the cover photo, Malinda wears an iconic, colorful, fringed shawl as she practices this traditional dance for her performance at the 46th Denver March Pow Wow. The graceful, swooping beauty of the dance, with the high energy moves and spins, imitates the lightness and flight of the butterfly, all while keeping time with the music. Malinda shares “I would go to dance practice after school and join a dance group called Medicine Heart Dancers. The group name Medicine Heart Dancer comes from the healing of our dances that we do. For example, the story of the Fancy Shawl tells of a Native woman who once lost her warrior husband. In sorrow, she went into a shell, like a cocoon. But soon she realizes that she must go on, and like a butterfly, emerges from her cocoon, in full flight to face the world with renewed hope and courage.” The story behind the Fancy Shawl Dance teaches us that pain and beauty are integral parts of life, but that we each have the strength within all of us to find our own path forward. Each person’s journey is messy and courageous and impactful in its own way.

Now, she’s dancing with the danza azteca group, Danzantes De ColorAztlán. The movement and physical activity of dancing allowed Malinda to feel alive and free. Through traditional dancing, Malinda felt more connected to her body and her ancestors and enjoyed the process of getting to know what each dance symbolized and expressing that story in her own way.

**“I was dancing for life. I was dancing while praying. To give me strength to make it I was dancing for survival. I was dancing for new growth, new healing. I was dancing to fight against depression. In doing all that movement, I realized that I can release all the emotions that I’ve been holding onto. Each step that I take reminds me of how far I’ve come. Each new fancy move that I learn is like a new blessing coming my way. Dancing taught me to trust myself: I am going to finish this dance. I am going to make it to the end of this song. I am going to make it to the other side.”**

In this photo, Malinda looks confidently to the future wearing her high school graduation skirt.



# IN GRATITUDE

to our 2021 donors

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- Wend Ventures
- Anonymous

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- Woody & Georgia Garnsey

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- Judd & Nicole Nutting
- Julie Voyles
- Laura Brinkman
- Laura Rhea
- Lena Schmidt
- Lionires Montoya
- Lisa Brus
- Michael McGuire
- Michelle Sturm
- Mike Domenighini
- Nurses for Sexual and Reproductive Health
- Paula Gallegos & Doug Landreth
- Raezelle Maestas
- Responsible Jane
- Scott Griebing
- Soccer Electric
- Sylvie Rupp
- Tanner Sandoval
- Tina and Kevin Peterson
- Tonic
- Warren Boizot III
- Whole Foods Market
- Anonymous
- Anonymous

# 2021 FINANCIALS

## COFFEEHOUSE REVENUE

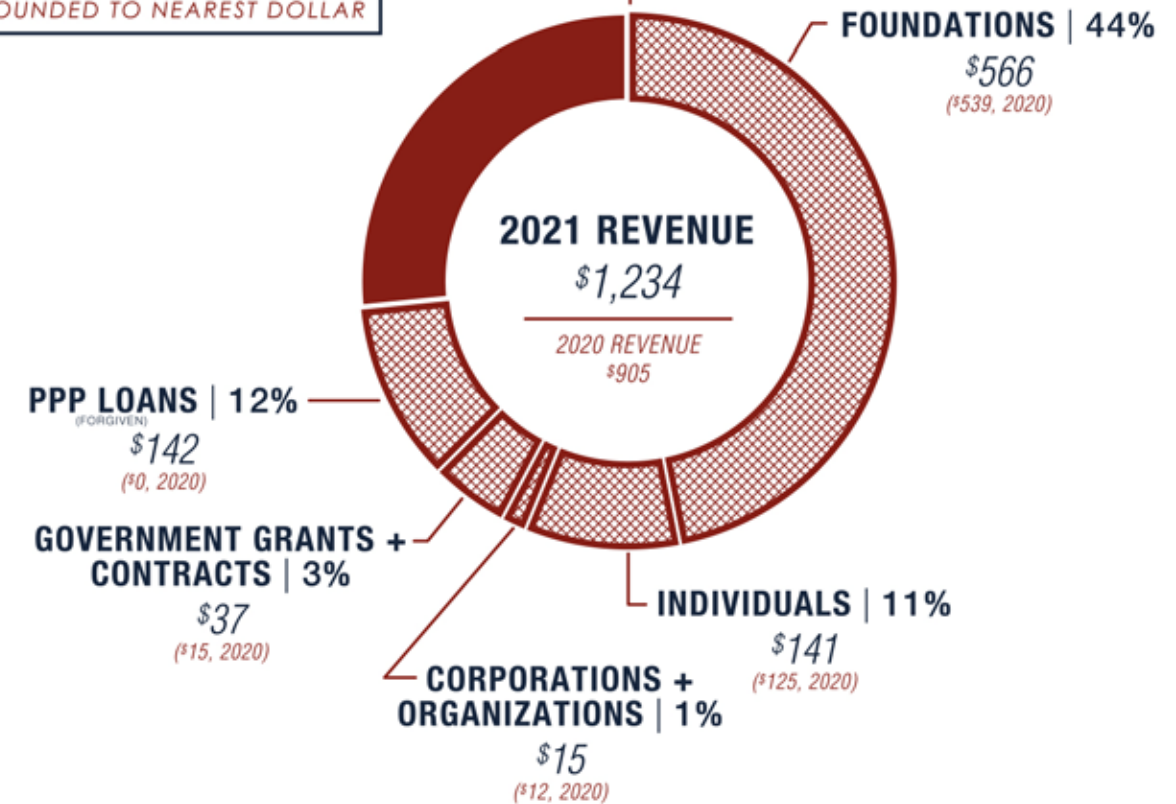
\$333  
(\$211, 2020)

## CONTRIBUTIONS

\$901  
(\$694, 2020)

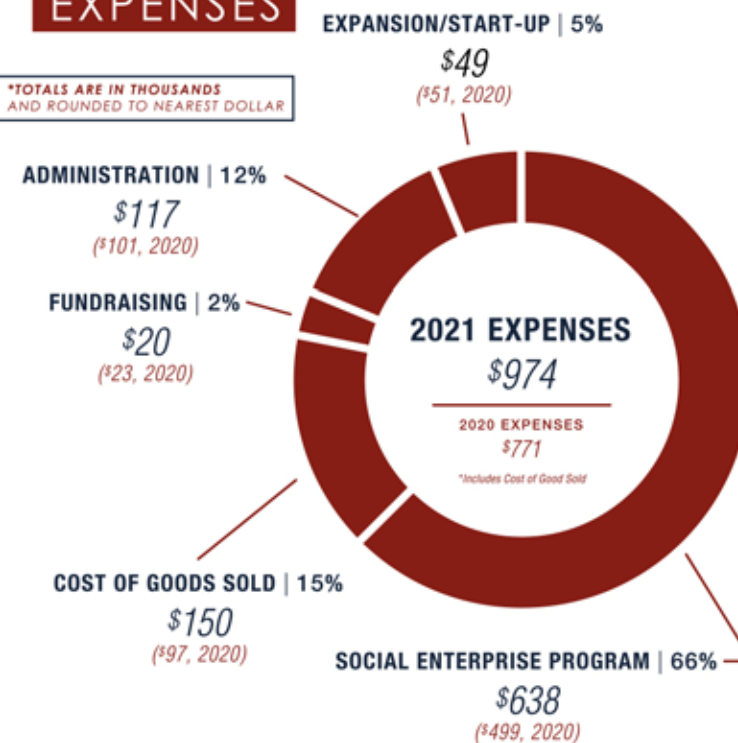
## REVENUE

\*TOTALS ARE IN THOUSANDS  
AND ROUNDED TO NEAREST DOLLAR



## EXPENSES

\*TOTALS ARE IN THOUSANDS  
AND ROUNDED TO NEAREST DOLLAR



## NOTES

- Of the total \$901,000 in donations and contributions, \$294,000 was restricted or designated to the Expansion Campaign in 2021.

- 2021 was a tough year to run a business. With increasing prices, uncertainty of labor availability for COVID exposures and affected individuals, inconsistent vendor availability, vaccination debates, and lower than normal customer transactions per day, we are proud to be weathering the pandemic and still generating internal revenue. In 2021, coffeehouse revenues covered 36% of Prodigy's operating expenses (excluding Expansion Campaign revenues and expenses), but was not able to generate a net profit on the business side.

- \$10,312 was returned to Colorado donors through tax credits via Colorado Enterprise Zone Contribution Program.

# MEET PRODIGY LEADERSHIP & BOARD MEMBERS

LEADERSHIP TEAM



**DESTINY HARDNEY**  
EDUCATOR

**BRADY GRANT**  
DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

**STEPH FRANCES**  
FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**EMILIA CANO**  
OPERATIONS MANAGER

**MARIANNE MANZLER**  
EDUCATOR

"Belonging is a deeply and universally human experience. It's the act of 'longing' for something. This is at our essence as humans, to have a thirst for a dream for a vision for the future that is guttural in a sense. In a way, we are all longing for the same things: acceptance, community, purpose, love. So, belonging becomes both a communal act and an aspiration at the same time."

**STEPH FRANCES**  
Founder and Executive Director

"Belonging means being included in something that is bigger than all of us. We get to collectively contribute to the growth of each other and this place while truly looking out for one another."

**BRADY GRANT**  
Director of Professional Learning

"Not very many places let you speak on the injustices that surround our communities and our people of color. Prodigy allows my voice to be heard and respects my insight as an indigenous woman of color serving my community."

**EMILIA CANO**  
Operations Manager

"As an educator, I always seek ways to make deeper, more meaningful connections with people, and for ways to promote humanity and equity in all learning environments. I love how creative, passionate, thoughtful, generous, and real our community is with one another. I love that people at Prodigy can be their weirdest, most authentic selves and come as they are."

**MARIANNE MANZLER**  
Educator

WE ASKED OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

**"What does community or belonging mean to you? What makes you feel connected to the Prodigy community?"**

You are welcome in this space and to the people in it. You have the same access to the opportunities, resources, celebrations and heartbreaks. Your heritage, history and experience is just as relevant as all others in this space. When you tell your story, the people in this space will not only listen but they will hear you.

- **JOHNNIE WILLIAMS**, Board Trustee Executive Director, Gang Rescue And Support Project (GRASP)

To both be known and to know others in the community. To embrace others and be embraced by them when equipped with that knowledge. I felt most connected to Prodigy when a special off menu item was created for me because of my coffee drinking proclivities in the summer. It was my "Norm" from Cheers moment.

- **DERRICK KELSEY**, Board Trustee Senior Consultant at Apex IT & Pastor at The Embassy Church

Safety, belonging, and prosperity for all community members.

- **TAWNIA RAMIREZ**, Board Treasurer: Certified Professional Accountant & Consultant

Appreciating and valuing the unique gifts that everyone brings and helping them feel that they truly belong. At Prodigy, I think being part of the training with the first cohort of apprentices was the time when I first felt that this is not just a place where I belong, but where all belong. So cool.

- **CHAD COOKINHAM**, Board Chairman: Director of Foundation Relations, Achievement Network

Celebrating and honoring different cultures and traditions, while challenging, appreciating and supporting each person with dignity and sanctity. Discovering the background behind Prodigy's development, seeing and hearing the commitment and determination of the founders leading to the success of the past six years - and into the future.

- **ANGELA GARCIA**, Board Trustee: Retired from Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Between small talk with the baristas while checking out to nerding out on coffee with the staff while dialing in a new blend, it's the small interactions with the people of the Prodigy community that have inspired my feeling of connectedness the most.

- **TANNER SANDOVAL**, Board Trustee: Business Development Executive at IBM Security

Having a clear sense of purpose – knowing that we can do more together than we can by ourselves.

- **HEATHER LAFFERTY**, Board Trustee: Executive Director & CEO at Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver

No one being is above or beneath another. No one has more power, no one is smarter, yet all are valued. We believe strong community means strength built from collaboration, a community through a belief in each other, a strong community is a common work toward a equitable future that has not been written, a strong community unwrites and rewrites their story/history/life.

- **DR. PAULA GALLEGOS**, Board Trustee: Instructor & Site Professor at CU Denver School of Education and Human Development

A few weeks before Christmas, I went in to get a few pounds of coffee and other items for gifts, and the apprentices were laughing and sharing their holiday traditions in such a way that made the atmosphere feel like so much more than just a coffee shop. I believe in celebrating and inspiring community members' beliefs, values and history in order to create connectivity, support self-discovery, and enhance social relations.

- **SUMAYA VANDERHORST**, Board Trustee: Associate General Counsel at Real Capital Solutions

- **JULIE VOYLES**, Board Secretary: Owner at JVoyles Nonprofit Consulting

# PRODIGY IN GLOBEVILLE

## A CASE FOR EXPANSION

Prodigy Ventures has reached a historical moment. For the past five years, we have worked to prove that an apprenticeship program within a social enterprise focused on healing and professional growth could be a model to activate the inherent greatness of our city's young adults. This year, we have proof that it works. And now, there's a need to expand. We believe that Prodigy not only activates talent, but stands as a model for how to create workplaces that shape a more equitable economy.

Prodigy is doubling down on our commitment to provide stability and resources to young people marginalized by inequitable systems. These times are showing us that Prodigy's model is both sustainable and necessary. With a second location,

**WE CAN EXPAND OUR IMPACT:** With a second location, we can double the number of apprenticeships offered to marginalized young adults.

**WE CAN DEEPEN OUR IMPACT:** We can deepen leadership opportunities for longtime residents of NE Denver and emerging leaders of color through a Manager in Training Program.

**WE CAN LOWER THE COST OF APPRENTICESHIP:** A second location fits squarely into Prodigy's plan for scale. As we add new enterprises, the impact increases, while the cost per participant decreases. By the end of year 3, each enterprise is self-sustaining on the business side.

## GLOBEVILLE

In the summer of 2022, we plan to open a new coffeehouse and learning lab at 4500 Broadway in Globeville. We are humbled to be a part of this community. Angela Garcia, who has graciously joined Prodigy's Board of Directors, describes Globeville in this way:

*"Many of the early residents were Eastern European immigrants, including Austrians, Croatians, Germans, Poles, Russians, Scandinavians, Slovenians, and other Slavic peoples. After WWII, there were no longer large influxes from Eastern Europe, and Latinos and African Americans began to move into the area working jobs in smelters and meat-packing. In 1958, Interstate 25 was completed. By 1964, Denver completed the construction of Interstate 70, which cut through the community's heart, taking 31 houses with it. Early immigrants to Globeville sought relief from poverty and oppression, worked together to find a place in a new country, and did what they could to make life a little easier for the next generation. In Globeville, many residents continue to live in the homes that their great grandparents built. Today's residents continue a rich, beautiful diversity and hope to maintain what makes the Globeville community special: A diverse ethnic heritage, strong work ethic, and small-town neighborliness."*

*As a Globeville resident for most of my life, I'm so proud to live in this community, to live with neighbors who have such strength and tenacity, who work determinedly to make Globeville a place where the ancestors are proud to see that it is surviving and thriving - now and in future."*

## INTENTIONAL DESIGN

The building at 4500 Broadway is a unique stand-alone, former motorcycle maintenance garage. It is expansive enough to build a community meeting space, patio, classroom and offices. And, most exciting, a Craft Coffee Learning Lab and Community Training Space. The new shop design is informed by an Apprentice Design Committee. These are current apprentices, some of who live or grew up in Globeville, who have brought their unique perspective to the design process. Outcomes from the Design Workshops have determined the shop should:

**HONOR NEIGHBORS:** Those who live in Globeville want to come here. It builds connection.

**HONOR PEOPLE OF ALL CULTURES:** It's not too fancy or white-washed. People of color feel welcomed and represented here.

**HONOR LEGACY:** We pay homage to recent history of Globeville.

**HONOR LOCAL TALENT:** We hire talent from Globeville. We partner with local businesses, schools, families, and artists.

## APPRENTICE CULTURE

# Elani's thoughts on BELONGING

reflections from a current apprentice.

BY ELANI CASILLAS | COHORT 23  
Instagram: @elani\_photography23



### DEAR GRANDMA MARY,

Being in the coffee industry makes me feel a lot closer to you. As a kid, I remember getting ready for school in the morning, and you would be waiting for me in the kitchen, drinking your coffee with your sweets. I remember sitting with you and you asking me if I'd like a cup of coffee while watching sci-fi movies together before I left for school. I will treasure these memories forever.

You would be so proud of who I am becoming. I am a hard-working, strong, independent person. I am proudly from Denver, Colorado, the Northeast Park Hill/Clayton area. At this point in my life, I am freshly out of high school and now working towards completing my apprenticeship at the Prodigy Coffee House. I was just certified by the Speciality Coffee Association in the foundations of espresso making. I am also striving towards schooling and programs that support my cosmetology and photography aspirations.

In my short period of time at Prodigy, I have learned a few things about myself. I am learning how to be more independent and advocate for myself. I am learning about what belonging to a community means, and how I want to take full advantage of this experience and be able to make it my own. I bring the best energy and attitude to work, and even on my worst days, I still find ways to bring a smile or laughter to everyone around me. I want to expand my knowledge while knowing I can handle all the responsibilities I have to juggle.

For the first time in a long time, I see myself stepping outside my comfort zone. I am usually uncomfortable with change and meeting new people. A challenge I have is being able to make eye contact with the customers. For a while, I struggled with the transition from school to adult life, but this experience has reframed for me what learning can look like. It's important for me to get a new point of view on life and see what the real world holds for me.

One thing I never want to forget is to see the bigger picture meaning. I don't want to be nearsighted, to where I'm being told that there is not much more I can strive for anymore when there is a whole world out there for me and everyone to see. In high school, a teacher said to me, "Even on your worst days, pick one good thing that has happened to you and make that the highlight of your day," and this has stuck with me ever since. This quote reminds me not to dwell on things that are out of my control and to allow the small things to brighten my day.

In five years, I see myself as a business owner. I want to learn the business side of things so I can be my own boss one day, whether that is in cosmetology (hair and nails) or in photography. I want my photography to take people to new places and show them the possibilities of our imagination.

To you and all the people who have supported me along the way, thank you!

Love,  
Elani



# Virgyl's top 3 songs to **STAY MOTIVATED AS A BARISTA**

My name is Virgyl Gerdine, and I'm from the Five Points area. I'm 19 years old and I am an SCA-certified barista at Prodigy Coffeehouse. I am set to graduate from the program at the end of March 2022. Something about Prodigy that I've noticed is the theme of belonging. Around the anniversary of my brother's passing, I wrote a song about the difficulties of losing him and showed my song to my other managers and educators, Marianne & Brady. They loved it, which gave me the courage to show the song to my colleagues, who gave me great feedback to upload to Soundcloud, Spotify, Apple Music. Knowing the staff is there for me and cares for me shows me how important it is to surround yourself with positive people and a work environment that wants to see your success and growth.

Music is my passion and defines who I am as a person. Here at Prodigy, apprentices get to set the music for the shop. Sometimes the music is more chill, sometimes the music is more upbeat. Music helps to create a seamless flow for the apprentices and sets the mood for customers, from the chill vibes of R&B to the uplifting beat of rock 'n roll. As an emerging artist myself, I love the storytelling aspect of music and coming up with melodies and beats that stay with the listener long after the song is finished. Here is my list of songs that help motivate me throughout the day:

## HERE ARE THE SONGS THAT GET ME THROUGH A SHIFT AT PRODIGY:

**HUSTLE & MOTIVATE - NIPSEY HUSSLE:** This song will get you ready to start your morning. Nipsey inspires me because everything he was doing from music to his personal life was about hard work and pure motivation.

**NOT AFRAID - EMINEM:** Play this song when there's a rush and your teammates need that extra push to stay on track.

**GIFTED - CORDAE:** Play this song when you're on the other side of a rush, and you can appreciate how well your team worked together. Don't be afraid to fill the gaps in the shop where you're needed. If you're slacking, this is a great reminder to finish your day strong.



# apprentice reflections **ON PRODIGY**

"When I arrived at Prodigy I was in a rough patch with my student life, personal life, and my professionalism. Now I'm learning the importance of connection, authenticity, and advocating for my needs and desires...Prodigy helped push me, but more importantly supported me in the hardships I had to overcome and in the celebrations I have with the milestones I've completed. I'm excited for Prodigy to start building a home in Globeville. I'm excited to see how Prodigy can support the young adults within the community like they have supported me." **ERIONNA**

"Prodigy has shown to me that there is a possibility where us young people of color can reclaim space to open up to other people of color, to other people who have felt pressure or discouragement in a typically white space...Since I began at Prodigy and learned about their mission and met the other apprentices who keep this shop running, I couldn't help but feel that I wish I knew about Prodigy sooner so I could bring my own young family in to help them grow as individuals, reclaim space, and step into their leadership. Prodigy encourages the leader within us to show up and I'm happy to be a part of it." **SUMMER**

"Having Mental health and Wellness is important for a work space, being able to understand and communicate with each other on what is affecting us and being able to see each other to lift up when needed. Having a community to care for and see you as a human means a lot. I don't feel alone when I come to work. I know that my wellness is cared for by my teammates and knowing if my team is good and happy in this way I am able to build on the relationship I have with them. The mentally 'I see you, You see me' feels good." **MALINDA**

Written to herself: "I am so proud of you for learning how to trust yourself again. You began a prosperous future when you became attuned with the natural born leader within yourself. You have grown tremendously during your time at Prodigy...[With the Manager Training opportunity at Prodigy], You will be able to continue Prodigy's mission of enriching your city...You are ready to show the world just how exceptionally endowed you are." **NAYELI**



# DONATE NOW

## YOUR MONTHLY DONATION SHIFTS THE WAY WE EMPLOY YOUNG PEOPLE.

People like you across the country are giving to Prodigy because they want to build a world where young people activate their inherent greatness.

### JOIN US.

- Each dollar donated is matched by \$1 generated internally through coffee sales.
- We'll share good news along the way of how your gift is creating transformational impact.

### WHAT IT COSTS:

An apprenticeship in a Prodigy enterprise costs approximately \$17,000 per apprentice. The internal certifications, in the moment coaching, professional development mirror a year of technical college. Except Prodigy graduates are equipped to sustain a career and transform our city.

Revenue from our coffeehouse covers the additional costs of running an enterprise and the living wages earned during barista and shift-lead shifts.

Gifts from generous donors, like you, pay for the top notch training, support, job development, certifications, identity development, social capital building, and healing needed for an apprentice to experience sustained economic mobility.

Join us today in fueling apprenticeship and creating a more equitable economy.

TO DONATE

[prodigyventures.org](https://prodigyventures.org)

PRODIGY  
VENTURES

[prodigyventures.org](https://prodigyventures.org)

3801 E 40TH AVE DENVER, CO 80205