

# PRODIGY VENTURES

THE YEAR OF OVERCOMING

To Defeat

Persevail

GET to the BETTER of

2020

ANNUAL REPORT

DENVER, CO



# CON

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**VISION:** 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, disconnected young adults develop mindsets and skills for sustainable careers, economic mobility and, most importantly, to go forth and enrich their city.

## THOUGHTS ON

# Overcoming

## A LETTER FROM AN APPRENTICE

**H**ello, my name is Nayeli Dimas. I am a current Barista and Shift-Lead-In-Training at Prodigy Coffeehouse. I love plants, I love to hike and my dream in life is to help heal and reconnect with my surroundings.

For me, overcoming means going through a cycle. Acknowledge, Action, Aftermath. You start off by acknowledging the problem, how that makes you feel and what you need to bounce back. After that you take action, push through and continue to ask for help. At this point you would be at the climax of a story, everyone's favorite part, but my favorite part is the aftermath. This is the part where you realize you just overcame something. You get to relax, breathe, congratulate yourself and the most important, get ready for the next challenge. Life is full of challenges you

never thought you could overcome, but once you realize how much you've actually done for yourself, it's easier to praise oneself. We overcome things every single day.

The past year for me has been full of obstacles I've had to face with the support of family and friends that I've truly developed a trusting relationship with. I think the biggest challenge I have overcome, and still overcoming to this day, is the search for self love and self worth. I have found myself in a lot of dark moments, trapped in my own thoughts, drowning in anxiety, suffocated by self doubt and contempt. Hopelessly going through the motions of life until one day I decided to advocate for my health and well being. I started a journey of overcoming. I understood the problem, I mentally hit rock bottom and I was all

alone, I needed the support from loved ones to pick me up. So I showed up for myself, I surrounded myself with people I could truly be my authentic self with, I put myself in uncomfortable situations where I know I would need to ask for help, and I kept pushing forward. I think you don't actually realize you overcame something until you take the time to reflect. It can especially be hard to see the growth happening when you are still working on it. But it is essential to take a moment to recollect yourself, celebrate and plan ahead.

I never forget to thank and show my appreciation to everyone that has encouraged me to invest in my success, and most importantly I never forget to keep on dreaming.



# OVERCOMERS

## THE OVERCOMERS

At Prodigy, apprentices are building a foundation to be transformational leaders, by tapping into their inherent greatness. Together, throughout their 6-18 month apprenticeship we are living out a new way of doing work and learning. If you ask apprentices, most of them

will tell you they are growing and transforming at Prodigy. But what 2020 revealed is that they have already arrived as our city's most courageous, inspiring, tenacious leaders. We have come to see apprentices for what they are: spiritual warriors.

**Apprenticeship Experiences:** Youth Celebrate Diversity Youth Summit, Internship at Allegro Coffee Roasters, Prodigy Outreach & Communication Team, Manager on Duty

"OVERCOMING IS BEING AWARE AND REFLECTING ON THINGS YOU SHOULD BE PROUD OF. IT IS LETTING GO OF THE NEED TO CONTROL EVERYTHING, BEING HUMBLE AND SURROUNDING YOURSELF WITH SUPPORT. I HAVE OVERCOME NOT USING MY VOICE. BEING TOO SHY. I PUSHED MYSELF TO FIND MY VOICE THROUGH ACTIVISM ON ONE END, AND AS A LEADER HERE AT PRODIGY ON THE OTHER. I SLOWLY SEE MYSELF AS A MORE OUTGOING, CONFIDENT AND ACTIVE PERSON."

JAMIE, COHORT 13



### TYREE

**Apprenticeship Experiences:** Speaker at Homeboy Industries, Internship at Allegro Coffee Roasters, Prodigy Outreach & Communications Team, Manager-on-Duty

"OVERCOMING IS BELIEVING IN MYSELF THE WAY OTHER PEOPLE BELIEVE IN ME. I AM WORKING ON GAINING CONFIDENCE AND NOT DOUBTING MYSELF. I AM PROUD OF WHAT I WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE ON MY TEAM IN 2020. I HAD SOME HARD TIMES AND I WAS ABLE TO BE A LEADER HERE AND KEEP LEARNING."

TYREE, COHORT 8



### NAVELI

**Apprenticeship Experiences:** Shift Lead in Training, Internship at Allegro Coffee Roasters, Prodigy Design Team for second shop location

"OVERCOMING IS A CYCLE: ACKNOWLEDGING, KNOWING WHAT YOU NEED, THEN TAKING ACTION. OVERCOMING IS RECOLLECTING AFTER OVERCOMING SOMETHING, ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR PROGRESS, RESTING, AND GETTING READY FOR WHAT'S NEXT. I THINK THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE I HAVE OVERCOME, AND STILL OVERCOMING TO THIS DAY, IS THE SEARCH FOR SELF LOVE AND SELF WORTH. THROUGH ALL OF THIS I HAVE TRULY STARTED SEEING THE POWERFUL INDIVIDUAL I AM WHEN MY PHYSICAL BODY IS IN-TUNE WITH MY SPIRIT AND ITS SURROUNDINGS."

NAVELI, COHORT 13



### BRI

**Apprenticeship Experiences:** Internship at Allegro Coffee Roasters, Prodigy Outreach & Communication Team, Graduated Apprenticeship February 2021

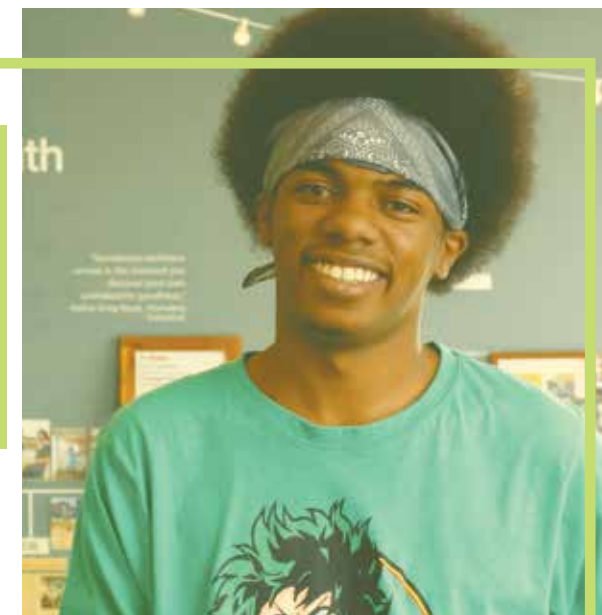
"OVERCOMING IS GOING THROUGH THE STORM AND FACING FEARS THAT COME WITH IT. YOU FEEL ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS MUCH AS THE HARDSHIPS. I AM PROUD OF OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF BECOMING AN ADULT. 2020 HAS TAUGHT ME A LOT, AND YES, I'M STILL LEARNING HOW TO ADULT BUT I'M NOT AFRAID ANY MORE. I'M READY FOR THE BIG RESPONSIBILITIES LIFE GIVES ME."

### EUGENE

**Apprenticeship Experiences:** Peer Teacher and Trainer, Shift Lead in Training

"OVERCOMING IS ACCOMPLISHING THINGS, SMILING AND KEEPING A GOOD SPIRIT. I'M PROUD OF BEING A MORE OPEN PERSON. I AM ABLE TO TALK TO PEOPLE MORE WITHOUT BEING SCARED OF WHAT THEY ARE GOING TO SAY. I GOT MORE DATES BECAUSE OF THAT."

EUGENE, COHORT 13







**ERIONNA, COHORT 16**

**ERIONNA**

**Apprenticeship Experiences:** Peer teacher for high school cohort, Prodigy Design Team for second shop location

"OVERCOMING IS THE ABSENCE OF SHAME AND FEELING GOOD ABOUT ACCOMPLISHMENTS. OVERCOMING FOR ME RIGHT NOW MEANS HAVING A GOOD DAY, BEING PRODUCTIVE, AND HAVING BETTER TIME MANAGEMENT. THIS HELPS ME BE THE BEST VERSION OF MYSELF, WHERE I'M GETTING GOOD GRADES. I'M LEARNING THAT 'THE BETTER YOU KNOW THE BETTER YOU DO.' THIS MEANS, THE MORE YOU KNOW WHAT WORKS FOR YOU IN EVERYDAY LIFE, THE BETTER LIFE WILL BE. IF YOU HAVE GOOD THOUGHTS THEN YOU HAVE GOOD ACTIONS. THAT BRINGS OUT THE MORE COMFORTABLE AND GENUINE VERSION OF MYSELF."

**ASHLEY**

**Apprenticeship Experiences:** A new apprentice with many opportunities on the horizon

"OVERCOMING IS ACCEPTANCE AND ADAPTABILITY TO YOUR CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES. RIGHT NOW, I'M IN THE PROCESS OF MOVING INTO MY FIRST APARTMENT AFTER BEING HOMELESS FOR ALMOST A YEAR. WHEN I INITIALLY STARTED AT PRODIGY, I WOULD SHOW UP TO SHIFTS NOT KNOWING WHERE I WOULD SLEEP THAT NIGHT. HOWEVER, WITH A BIT OF A TIME AND A LOT OF EFFORT, I HAVE MANAGED TO OVERCOME AN OBSTACLE AS HUGE AS HOMELESSNESS WHILE WORKING AND HANDLING DAY TO DAY LIFE."



**ASHLEY, COHORT 17**



**ERIC, COHORT 16**

**ERIC**

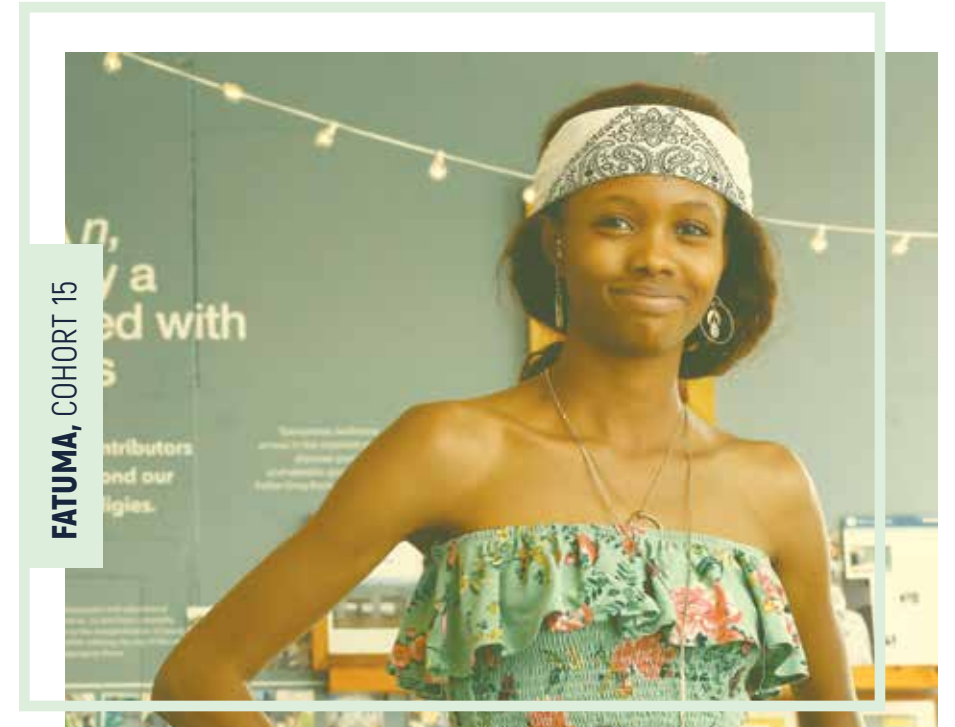
**Apprenticeship Experiences:** A new apprentice with many opportunities on the horizon

"TO OVERCOME IS TO DEAL WITH A PROBLEM OR SITUATION AND HAVE A SUCCESS. THE SITUATION I OVERCAME WAS WHEN MY PARENTS LEFT AND MY DOG PASSED AWAY. THIS LED ME TO MOVE FORWARD AND BECOME BETTER THAN I WAS BEFORE TO MAKE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE."

**FATUMA**

**Apprenticeship Experiences:** Back-of-House Apprenticeship

"OVERCOMING IS BEING A BETTER PERSON FOR MYSELF, SO I CAN BE BETTER TO OTHERS. I NEED TO WORK ON MYSELF SO I CAN HELP MY FAMILY AND PEOPLE WHO ARE IMPORTANT TO ME. I HAVE BEEN OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC SPECIFICALLY, BUT ALSO MY ENVIRONMENT. I AM PROUD THAT I AM OVERCOMING AND MAKING PROGRESS TOWARD INDEPENDENCE AND REALLY BEING MYSELF"



**FATUMA, COHORT 15**

**ADDITIONAL APPRENTICES**

**DAVID, Cohort 10**

**KYRA, Cohort 8**

**ANDREW, Cohort 8**

**SHANNON, Cohort 10**

**DEANDRE, Cohort 6**

**AUDREY, Cohort 7**

**CLAUDIA, Cohort 1**

**TEIRA, Cohort 12**

**DREJON, Cohort 12**



# The legacy of an Overcomer



PHOTOGRAPHY & STORY BY KEVIN MOHATT

## HOW ONE APPRENTICE FOUND STRENGTH IN HER FAMILY TO STAND AGAINST INJUSTICE

For many of us, 2020 was a challenging year, and that was particularly true for 21-year-old Jamie Cordova, an apprentice in her 12 month at Prodigy. Her struggles were intensified by the recent death of her grandmother who was a central figure in her life. "She was like my second mother," said Jamie.

Jamie describes her grandmother as an independent, hardworking woman. Losing such a strong role model was understandably tough on her. At the time, she wasn't going to school, and with the exception of the occasional nanny job, she wasn't working either. Jamie began to feel lost and angry. "I had doubts of myself, that I wasn't growing as a person," said Jamie.

Her cousin, Emilia, who also works at Prodigy, noticed how Jamie was struggling and pulled her aside to tell her about Prodigy. She encouraged her to check it out because she knew her cousin could be a hard worker but just needed a little push.

Prodigy's approach to empowering youth to find their inner strength while also giving them a place to vent and express their emotions was exactly what Jamie needed.

"Prodigy helps me feel like I have a voice," said Jamie. "Once I started working here, I started finding myself."

It was the push that Jamie needed. At Prodigy she appreciated the diverse group of people she could relate to. For her, it's been more than a place of work. Over time she's built relationships with people she feels she can depend on. "We all work so well together," said Jamie when speaking of her fellow apprentices.

That sense of empowerment and finding her voice is partly what motivated her to step out during the protests for racial justice over the summer. "I felt like I had to do something. I felt like I needed to go down there," Jamie remembers.

On May 30, She showed up to the demonstrations near the state capitol building. It was the first night of curfew in Denver and on that day the police used a lot of force to try and break up the masses of people. Roughly an hour and a half prior to curfew, law enforcement pulled into formation and began advancing on the demonstrators. Jamie recounts being approached by an officer and staring right at him just before he pepper sprayed her in the face. After that she was grabbed by police and pushed to the ground. She remembers the screaming and the sounds of gunshots and flash bang grenades. She left by the time curfew rolled around but the experience was traumatic for her. "To this day, I can't look at a cop," Jamie said.

That incident has shaped her views in multiple ways. On the positive side, it gave her a sense of power and a desire to continue to speak out and to stand up in the name of justice. She talks about the possibility of one day becoming a journalist in order to help inform the public.

Jamie also has a desire to be a leader but recognizes now is the time for her to learn. "I'm educating myself while healing myself," she said.

However, the opportunity to become a leader may come sooner than Jamie was expecting. Right now, Jamie is going through training to become a manager.

"What motivated me after my grandma died was that I wanted to keep her legacy of being a hard worker, and being independent and being smart."

"I'm educating myself while healing myself."



ABOVE Jamie Cordova poses for a portrait outside her grandmother's home in Denver

ON OPPOSITE PAGE Jamie Cordova poses for a portrait near the state capitol while holding the sign she used during the protests for racial justice over the summer. The sign still shows white marks from the eye solution Jamie used to flush pepper spray from her eyes.

BELOW Jamie Cordova holds the rosary that was one of her grandmother's favored possessions





# THE LOCAL NEWS

Challenges in 2020 were numerous, as we confronted the coronavirus pandemic, the racialized violence pandemic, economic collapse and current recession, a tough election, and ensuing mental health crisis, violence and death. Days for apprentices in 2020 included struggling to find or keep housing, bearing the responsibility of being the only breadwinner in the family, caring for sick

family members, the devastating loneliness of quarantine isolation, the incapacitating fear of the unknown virus that disproportionately terrorizes communities of color, watching the person you love the most in the world fade away under the rapture of addiction, a loved one gunned down in gang violence.

## JANUARY

**NICARAGUA TRIP:** Three Prodigy team members accompanied the Allegro crew to "source," where some of Allegro's coffee is grown and harvested. They learned about farm operations, harvesting techniques and coffee growing strategies. Traveling out of the country, staying in a cloud forest resort and bird sanctuary was an unforgettable experience.

## FEBRUARY

Partnered with Dream Create Inspire for series of song-writing workshops, and with Starbucks Hora del Cafe for a series of storytelling and community-building experiences.

## MARCH

Decided to close the coffeehouse for 2 months due to COVID uncertainty, but apprentices continued paid daily work and learning from home. We retained all apprentices on payroll through the pandemic.



## APRIL

Created an internal COVID Health & Safety Training & Certification where every apprentices studied how to best care for customers and each other as we prepared to re-open the shop. In order to return to shift, apprentices had to be certified and received a hazard pay hourly increase.

## MAY

Prodigy hired 23 additional young adults for a paid month long virtual training: Preparing for a Post-Pandemic Workforce.

## JUNE

George Floyd protests against racialized violence introduced both the trauma and healing that apprentices encountered this summer.

## JULY

Launched BIPOC affinity groups and all-staff healing circles with guidance from consultant, Angell Perez.

## AUGUST

Apprentice Design Workshops began to guide design decisions at Prodigy's Globeville location to open in spring 2022.



## ALLEGRO COFFEE ROASTER INTERNSHIP

A right of passage for apprentices, the month long internship at Allegro's Tennyson St. shop has apprentices embedded with their dynamic team. Our crew gets to hone their espresso game, learn the basics of roasting, rock the Mod Bar to make some great pour overs and learn the ins and outs of another great shop.



## SEPTEMBER

Developed and launched **PRODIGY HOUSE BLEND COFFEE** with Allegro Coffee Roasters

## OCTOBER

Prodigy hosted a voting party for apprentices to grapple with issues on the November ballot.

## NOVEMBER

Drive Thru operations began and online retail store opened.

## DECEMBER

Billboard on Colorado Boulevard went up and Prodigy ended the year in a strong financial position and poised to grow.

# HEALTH COLUMN

HOW PRODIGY'S COMMUNITY OF HEALING PROVED CRITICAL THIS YEAR

This year was an all out assault on mental health.

As a community, we bound together. We were bound together in our overcoming. The ebbs and flows of overcoming created a greater need for intentional wellness practices for the Prodigy team. Understanding the weight of a global pandemic, continued racial injustice, and the daily stresses each of the apprentices were dealing with, taking care of self became a top priority for the learning side of the apprenticeship. Even as we moved to virtual learning, we incorporated more restorative practices to honor each person's mental and emotional health. We added a unit exploring identity and societal structures to allow each of us to have the language to express what we have experienced, what to ask for, or even to demand what we need.

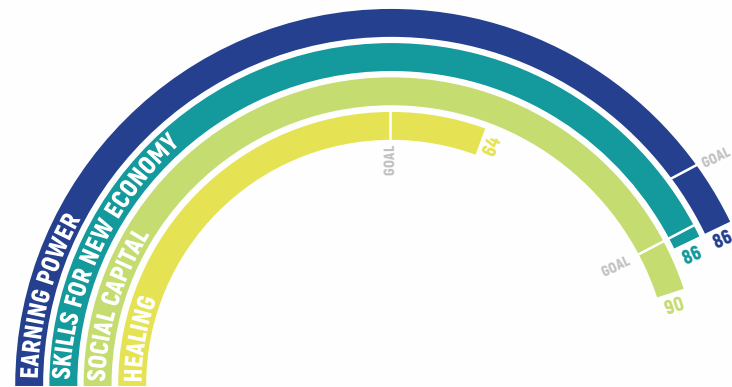
To unpack the harms a white supremacist society causes, we also worked with a racial equity consultant, Angell Perez. With Angell's facilitation, each of us participated in workshops, affinity groups and healing circles to give us all tools to create change. While opening conversations about how white supremacy shows up at Prodigy specifically, apprentices and leadership both spent time not only naming our perspectives, but contributing to the development of a 2021 equity plan.

From understanding oppression, discrimination and injustice, to empowering one another through liberation, the learning is continual and strategic. We know that our individual liberation is tied to our collective liberation, so we are taking the small steps and making the adjustments to be our best while supporting one another in their journeys.

# IMPACT

**Prodigy's impact goal is: Apprentices secure meaningful, sustainable employment and experience economic mobility.**

Research from the Urban Institute, Stanford University, and the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty indicates that economic success, power and autonomy, and being valued in community are essential levers for economic mobility. Prodigy's impact goals follow this framework. In 2020, despite having to close our coffeehouse doors for two months and the fluid limitations on dining throughout the year, we were still generating impact, and exceeded our outcome goals.



## ADDITIONAL MEASURES

- 40** YOUNG ADULTS TRAINED IN TRANSFERABLE WORKPLACE SKILLS
- 16** YOUNG ADULTS WORKED AS APPRENTICES
- 86%** HIRED APPRENTICES WERE RETAINED OR GRADUATED

### 86% INCREASED EARNING POWER

- **78%** Apprentices received raises, promotions, and increased responsibility
- **82%** Apprentice graduates were employed within 1 month of graduation

### 64% EXPERIENCED HEALING

- **64%** Showed growth on Shift & Persist and Psychological Wellbeing Surveys
- **95%** Apprentices participated in paid Mental Health & Wellness activities including group wellness classes, healing circles, and/or 1-on-1 therapy

### 86% BUILT SKILLS FOR THE NEW ECONOMY

- **93%** Apprentices earned an industry-recognized certification, including Specialty Coffee Association Certification & COVID Health & Safety Certification

### 90% INCREASED SOCIAL CAPITAL

- **90%** Apprentices have a quantifiable professional network







Where are they now!

David, a graduate of Prodigy's apprentice program, now works as a barista at Amethyst Coffee in Denver on December 8, 2020

➤  
DEANDRE

DeAndre, *Cohort 6*, graduated in March 2020 from his apprenticeship, just as the coronavirus pandemic hit, which meant his three job offers were rescinded in the downturn. In the summer local business owners, Steve and Katie, wanted to hire an apprentice after their experiences at Prodigy as customers. Through this connection, Dre began work as a shop assistant with Protea and Pine. Here he is developing woodworking skills and helping the business produce their most popular items with increased efficiency. Dre is thankful that this opportunity has proven to be strong a great fit for his skills and passions.



◀  
DAVID

During his apprenticeship at Prodigy, David, *Cohort 10*, delved into learning the craft of coffee swiftly and profoundly. Within six months, he secured a second job at Amethyst Coffee. After 15 months in his Prodigy apprenticeship, David was hired into a full-time salaried position with benefits at Amethyst Coffee Company. David reflects on 2020 this way: "Last year, has been me overcoming my own self-limiting beliefs. I am talking about all aspects of my life. One of the biggest things I am learning is to trust myself more authentically."





# BUSINESS

**BUSINESS UPDATES:** While 2020 was a very challenging year, Prodigy remains in a strong position financially and was able to not only succeed with its mission, but set ourselves up to serve more young adults and meet challenges head-on in the coming years.



## *In Globeville*

### A SECOND COFFEEHOUSE TO OPEN IN 2022

2020 brought us the opportunity to meet the demand for more apprenticeships and the demand to elevate more leaders—a second coffeehouse location. Here we can double the number of apprenticeships offered to disengaged young adults, deepen leadership opportunities and build a more equitable community.

**LOCATION:** 4500 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216

**CONSTRUCTION BEGINS:** July 2021

**PROJECT OPENING:** Spring 2022

**FEATURES:** The building is a unique stand-alone, former motorcycle maintenance garage, expansive enough to build a patio with permanent shade, a walk-up window, and an office. Most exciting is the addition of a Coffee Learning Lab and certified Specialty Coffee Association training space where community members can learn about craft coffee from apprentices.

**INSIDE SCOOP:** In 2020, we formed a Design Team, comprised of Prodigy apprentices and staff. They are working together and learning from community members to design a space that they have determined should: Pay homage to the recent history of Globeville, be 'Anti-Gentrification,' welcome all cultures, and feel comfortable for neighborhood residents.

## 2020 COFFEEHOUSE HIGHLIGHTS

**PRODIGY BLEND:** Allegro Coffee Company worked with our apprentices and staff to develop a custom blend called the Prodigy House Blend. The process included several cuppings and strategy sessions to choose the origins and flavor profiles. It culminated with dialing in the grind settings and designing the label for this brilliant coffee. We couldn't be more proud to serve this daily in our shop and to see it for sale on Allegro Coffee Company website as well as our own. To purchase a bag visit our new online gift store at [prodigyventures.org](http://prodigyventures.org).



**DRIVE THRU:** In October, Prodigy punched a hole in the side of the wall and set up operations for a drive thru. Thanks to the timely completion of the drive thru, we were able to continue to generate revenue while adding additional apprentices to payroll.



**BILLBOARD:** In December, Prodigy unveiled a billboard on Colorado Boulevard, one of Denver's highest trafficked streets. Within days, we saw an uptick in traffic to our coffeehouse.



# FINANCIALS

## REVENUE

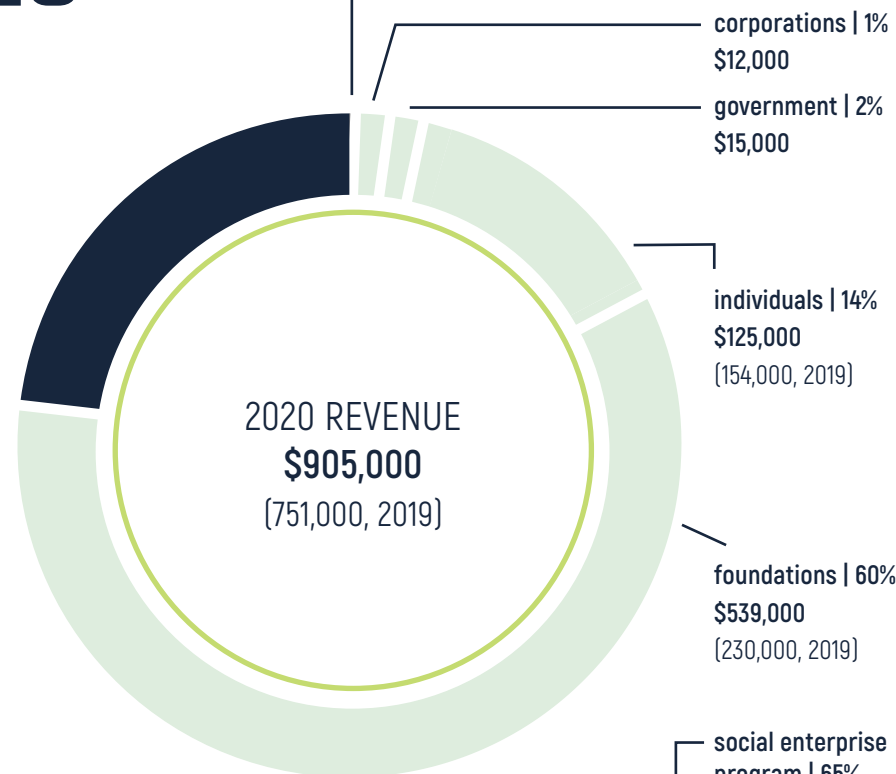
Coffeehouse Sales | \$211,000  
 Total Contributions | \$691,000  
 Foundations | \$539,000  
 Individuals | \$125,000  
 Corporations | \$12,000  
 Government | \$15,000  
 Fee for Service | \$3,000  
 Total Revenue | \$905,000

23% | COFFEEHOUSE REVENUE

\$211,000  
 (\$340,000, 2019)

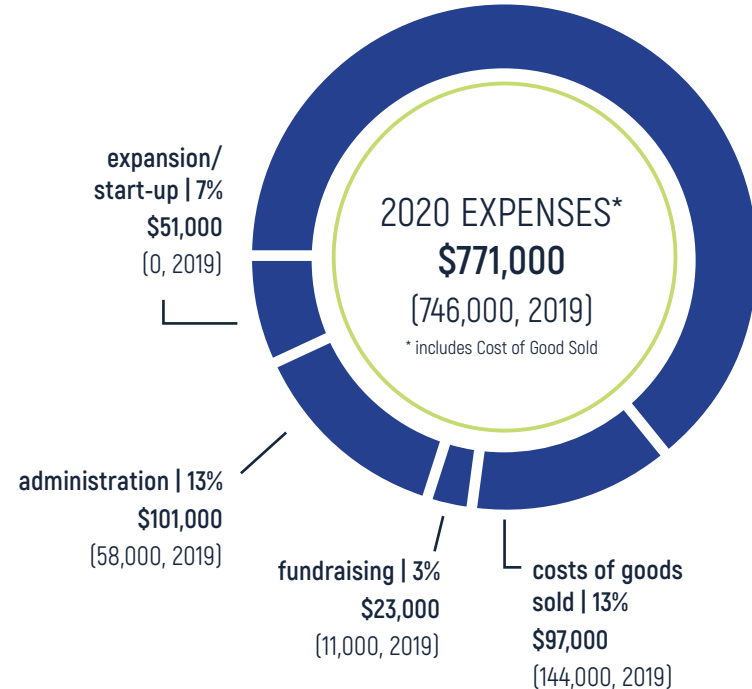
77% | CONTRIBUTIONS + FEE FOR SERVICE

\$694,000  
 (\$411,000, 2019)



## NOTES

- Due to concern about the coronavirus pandemic, the coffeehouse was closed March-May. When we re-opened, we had to navigate a variety of limitations on dining for the remainder of the year. Therefore, internal revenue in 2020 was -38% year over year.
- In an amazing outpouring of generosity from the foundation community, Prodigy was able to continue creating impact in this highly tumultuous year. Contributions in 2020 grew 69% year over year.
- Prodigy received a CARES ACT PPP forgivable loan for \$71k, which is not reflected in the revenue numbers above, as it is still a liability until we are able to apply for full forgiveness.
- \$6,941 was returned to Colorado donors through tax credits via Colorado Enterprise Zone Contribution Program.



# WITH GRATITUDE PRODIGY

*Thanks*

# OUR DONORS.

**\$1-\$999 DONORS** Anonymous · Robert Albrecht · Anonymous · Emily, Adam, Maya, & Matias Bailon · Warren Boizot III · Lisa Brus · Bessie Castro · Liz Clark · Chad B Cookinham · James & Cindy Cookinham · Portia Curlee · Joshua, Keri Hannah & Levi Deixler · Preston Dickey · Robert & Cheryl Dixon · Tracy & Eric Sondermann Dunning · Thomas & Janine Erickson · Anonymous · Matt & Michelle Farmer · Foothills Bridge Company · Anonymous · Nathan & Nikki Gardner · Claire Gerrish · Karoline Greenwall · Scott Griebing · Dr. Jamie & Mr. Cory Halliburton · John Hite · Vicki Hulstrom · Nikki & Doug Kennedy · Kate Koschoreck · Anonymous · Dean McCabe · Anonymous · Michael McGuire · Michelle Minard · David Moke · Claire Morrow · Frank Nowell · NREL · Judd Nutting · Meghan OConnell · Charlie Owen · Andrea Palmer · Tina & Kevin Peterson · Pamela & Patrick Prag · Kelci Price · Responsible Jane · Laura Rhea · Harris Rollinger · Abby Rupsa · The Saints Family · Coree Schmitz · Matt & Christina Skinner · Jeremy Sluyters · Jason Stoddart · Michelle Sturm · LuAnne Sugar · Hank & Judy Thierry · Dr. Tolanda Tolbert · Tondra Veas · Julie Voyles · Lois Walton · Anonymous · Jaclyn Westland · Whole Foods · Law Office of Stephen Wilson LLC · Adele Work & Jennifer Caldwell · Caeleon Work · Patricia Zarnikow · Reuben & Rachel Zylstra

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 THE COLORADO HEALTH FOUNDATION  
 WEND VENTURES  
 2020

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 ROBERT E & ANNE T SNEED FAMILY FOUNDATION

## WAYS TO GIVE

ONLINE [prodigyventures.org](http://prodigyventures.org)

CHECK Prodigy Ventures / 3801 E 40th Ave. / Denver, CO 80205

Prodigy Ventures is included in the Enterprise Zone Tax Credit program through the State of Colorado. This means that financial gifts to Prodigy over \$250 may be eligible for a 25% tax credit on Colorado state income tax.



# Building the Post-pandemic Economy



BY STEPH FRANCES, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRODIGY VENTURES



In 1998, Edward Galeano wrote “a ferocious, poetic, mischievous, and chilling survey of political and economic systems.” In this book, *Upside Down*, he lamented the “twin totalitarianisms [that] plague the world: the dictatorships of consumer society and obligatory injustice.” (Read: [Our economy is broken](#)).

If Galeano were to write an updated version, he might wonder why little has changed. As the wealthiest country in the world, why don't we ensure everyone has the basic needs in order to live in America? Why do one and a half million school children have no place to call home? (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018) Why do 17 million workers, disproportionately minorities and women, labor for wages “too meager to lift their households above the federal poverty line?” (New York Times, 2020).

Galeano might also satirically elucidate the *growing* racial wealth gap. Black families, due to a history of slavery, discriminatory laws, and practices—have only 10 percent of the wealth of White families. How the top 1 percent of wealthiest Americans is more than the combined wealth of the bottom 80 percent. How, for the past 40 years, Black workers have consistently endured an unemployment twice the rate of their white counterparts and 25–45 percent lower median incomes, regardless of education attainment and household structure. (The Economic Policy Institute)

Today, as the coronavirus pandemic exacerbates inequities, more people are awake to the reality that Galeano spent his life writing about. For many of us in this country, 2020 was not only the Year of Overcoming, but the Year of Exposure. It was a mass (re)vealing of our upside-down economy. And it was a call to action. With more eyes open and an unbearable truth (re)exposed, now is the time to overthrow some tables. (Read: [Build an equitable economy](#)).

An equitable economy is both a moral imperative and, in a beautiful opportunity of the moment, also a path to economic prosperity in America. (Read: [Caring deeply for people at work is profitable](#)). In its study of the future of work and America's imminent and immense demographic shifts, PolicyLink research shows an equitable economy will be a more prosperous economy: Reducing Inequality is Good

for Growth, Diversity is an Economic Asset and, Building a Skilled Workforce is Critical to Securing Our Economic Future. (2011)

When we ideated Prodigy back in 2015, it was clear to us that the way we ‘do work’ and ‘do school’ in this country is deeply flawed. We wanted to upend the normal, re-imagine ‘work’ and become proof of concept that a more equitable way is also a more sustainable way. So we launched a social enterprise apprenticeship: an experiment where we tap into the wisdom of innovative educators, community wealth-builders, forward-thinking economists, the emerging science of learning, and the leadership of young people. Here, we combine deep work and deep learning in a culture of healing. This experiment is elevating that which we love: marginalized young adults in Denver.

And at its best, Prodigy supports ‘community wealth building.’ Apprentices, 88% of whom grew up and/or live in northeast Denver, build wealth—the many ways wealth is defined—and invest that back into their families. They become lifelong leaders in sustainable careers with power and voice and influence their own communities.

Over these past five years at Prodigy, we have been experimenting with how to ‘do work’ differently. Here are a few that we find powerful:

**First, we do hiring differently.** We don't have interviews. If

you want to work as a Prodigy apprentice, you attend a paid training where you build transferable skills, meet potential co-workers, experience the culture and understand your expectations before you make a decision about working with us. Then, we hire those who aren't finding ‘success’ in traditional workplaces. Those less likely to stay employed elsewhere. We see this not as charitable, but rather unearthing latent talent that is essential to a thriving economy.

**Next, we do learning differently.** We start with two overarching

*With more eyes open  
and an unbearable  
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OVERTHROW SOME TABLES.*



goals for learning: 'Apprentices Learn to be Learners' and 'Apprentices Learn to be Teachers.' These are powerful acts of liberation—and smart talent development strategies. With simple shifts in focus and onboarding, we implement accelerated learning and tap into intrinsic motivation. On day one, apprentices are given keys to the shop and trusted to be integral part of the team. Each start in the same role, and have opportunities for meaningful promotions, raises, certifications and experiences, all of which can be accessed on their own timeline. Our educators provide generative feedback with an eye trained to witness and reflect back greatness. Apprentices are paid to learn outside barista shifts, in internships at other shops.

*earning power.  
transferable skill  
development.  
power and  
autonomy.  
being valued.  
in community.*

In development workshops apprentices build transferable skills and social capital. They present at conferences and give presentations to people around the country. Through this engagement, apprentices quickly add value to the business and social bottom-lines.

**We do culture differently.** We understand from research that economic mobility is not just about increasing earning power and transferable skills. Just as essential are 'Being Valued in Community' and 'Power and Autonomy' (Measuring Mobility, Urban Institute, 2018). **(Read: To prosper, we all need a sense of**

**belonging).** At Prodigy, apprentices are paid to engage in mental health and wellness, like healing circles, and therapy, if desired. They study power, oppression and liberation. They use their voice to challenge leadership and also to express 'spiritual hospitality.' They care for each other and for strangers, widening the circle of belonging. We activate young adults in this way, our economy gets the benefit of their talent, contribution and vibrancy, that was previously left on the sidelines.

**And, finally, we do 'HR' differently.** No one is fired. If an apprentice is struggling to meet the expectations on the job, they may be removed from the schedule for a time or engage in Restorative Employment, where they build a custom support plan. Or, they may

choose to take a break until they are ready. If they are able to show up to work as an engaged teammate and execute, there is always a position for them, even if it takes years. This strategy has not only supported apprentices, but increased retention and engagement.

**E**arning Power. Transferable Skill Development. Power and Autonomy. Being Valued in Community. For Those Whom The Current Economy Does Not Work. These are the power tools of the new way of 'doing work.'

Now, don't get me wrong. Prodigy is by no means the only way, nor are we executing flawlessly. Powerful stories of transformation are not the outcome for every Prodigy apprentice. And there are existential tensions to reckon with in this model: How can we run a competitive and profitable business while caring over-the-top inefficiently for apprentices? We fall short on both sides of this coin at times. How can we both build a culture of 'spiritual hospitality' and healing, and still prepare young adults to work in an inequitable, sometimes hostile world once they graduate? Apprentices are sometimes disoriented by this. How do we reconcile the inherent power dynamics built into our workplace, even when we're committed to nullifying those? In order to function as a business, we need leadership which brings power and that doesn't always sit right. How can an organization led by a white woman best build wealth and power for young people of color? And this is a real question.

This is complex and imperfect work. And, certainly, true reform of our economy requires transformation in all sectors of our nation. But, we do believe this way of elevating people is a powerful component of building an economy that works for all.

**And it's working.** Prodigy is surviving the pandemic and poised to open a new coffeehouse in Globeville in the coming year. In our five year history we have achieved proof of concept. We have trained over 200 young adults and hired 55 apprentices. Of those, 78 percent have graduated or are still in progress, 90 percent have increased earning power and 55 percent of have experienced healing. Graduates are in leadership positions throughout the city and are overcoming tremendous obstacles.

And, we're not the only ones who believe in this model in this moment. Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate (2006), said, "Before COVID-19 struck, the global economy was like a high-speed train heading for self-destruction. The pandemic has stopped the train and

given us an opportunity to redirect the tracks with social businesses in the lead." (World Economic Forum, 2020)

**N**ow is the time to build a better economy. We as a nation need to train our eyes to do away with the false dichotomies that have ruled us. Believe it is possible to put people first AND make money; to run a competitive small business WHILE creating deep social impact; to have privilege AND brandish it for collective liberation; to have high standards in a workplace AND high support for people; to create space for development of the next generation of homegrown leaders AND see that they are already leading us to our better selves.

It's time to wage an assault on an economy that excludes. Systemic change at every level in this country—and in our individual bodies—is

*Let's show the world that what once deemed foolish, like caring deeply for people at work, IS THE ONLY WISDOM.*

needed to build an equitable economy. Solutions are both emergent and available now. They are both complex and simple. And, we can start now, with simple acts of activism: Buy craft coffee from a spiritually hospitable young leader at Prodigy. Elevate businesses, movements, artists, banks, organizations, households led by and elevating Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islanders. Donate to community wealth-building entities. Invest in social enterprises. But also, change your business. Change your organization. Change

your department. Believe in the non-dualism of an 'equitable economy.' Explore options for employee-ownership. Decide to act as if every person was endowed with exceptional abilities and it's your job to activate it. Upend the way you 'do work' on the daily. And, then, go bigger. Risk it all. Let's show the world that what once deemed foolish, like caring deeply for people at work, is the only wisdom. **(Read: Let's right-side-up this economy).**







# AN APPRENTICE GUIDE TO SURVIVING A SHITTY YEAR

WRITTEN BY APPRENTICES:  
EUGENE AND TYREE

- 1 Stay chill. Don't panic. Don't overwhelm yourself. We got enough TP. Relax.
- 2 Colorado 'recreation.'
- 3 Friends, family, coworkers. Enjoy each moment we get with them.
- 4 Live in the moment. You can always make a bad moment into a good one.
- 5 Bro, listen to your theme song- you know, the song that you vibe on. (Ty) For me, it's Dolly Parton's 9-5. (Eugene) For me, it's Find My Way, by Da Baby. And then I just make fun of Brady for calling them 'Da Babies.'
- 6 Play video games. (Ty) Whoop Eugene 24/7. Stress reliever, always.
- 7 Challenge yourself. (Ty) This looked like teaching and presenting to groups about how Prodigy has really pushed me. (Eugene) For me it's about staying in a good mood.
- 8 We are always trying to make others laugh. Because it's fun. And, so they won't feel sad and bad.
- 9 Be more creative. Draw. Paint and Sip. (Eugene) For real, I went to Paint and Sip two weeks ago with my sister.
- 10 Don't be scared to say yes more. Be a risk taker. Move forward, don't look back.
- 11 Customers. Their familiar faces were a welcome site. Especially in 2020.
- 12 (Ty) Learn how to say no. (Eugene) What? After I just said, "learn how to say yes more?"
- 13 Drip too hard, catch that wave.
- 14 I GOT YOU, always. (Ty & Eugene)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS FROM EACH OTHER

"My guy Eugene is a true leader. He is the Pirate Captain."  
"Tyree, he's my bro Vice Captain"

# THE PRODIGY ADVICE COLUMN

Life Wisdom our leadership team received from apprentices throughout the year

**SHOULD I GET A TATTOO?**  
At the shop one day, an apprentice asks, 'Hey Brady, you have any tattoos? No? Are you gonna get one? Oh, I got you. You need to get one with a coat rack with Ned Flanders' jacket and his shoes underneath. Above, you can get, "Hi Diddy Ho, Neighbor!" Fits you perfect.'

**OUT OF THE BLUE. NO QUESTIONS ASKED. UNSOLICITED ADVICE.**  
Tyree and Eugene, greeting me one morning when I arrive at the shop: "Brady, we need to talk." Uh oh. This is never good. "Sarah [my wife] told us you made her take out the garbage to the alley this morning. What's up with that? Come on, Brady, you know better. I need to up my game."

**WHAT'S THE KEY TO GREAT LATTE ART?**  
While I'm deep into training Bri about the complexities of latte art, an apprentice casually walks by the bar and says, "all you have to do is wiggle."

**I'M A NEW MOM. HOW CAN I FIND BALANCE?**  
Every time I walk into the shop I hear, "Bring your baby to work every day. We'll watch her."

**WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I'M STRESSED?**  
Whenever I begin to get overwhelmed with the things going on around me I begin to rub my temples. Some of the apprentices have begun to recognize what this means. They see me with that stressed but just breathe and you got this." A little reminder of something so simple can really change an entire mood.

**WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I CAN'T FIND SOMETHING?**  
My mom has this saying when I can not find something I am looking for that is most likely right in front of me. "Pick sh\*t up and look for it." One day an apprentice asked me for something, and that phrase just slipped out. He found the item underneath the first thing he picked up. About a week later, roles were reversed and I was the one looking for something. I was getting really mad that I couldn't find it and that same apprentice told me, "maybe you should pick sh\*t up and look for it." Sure enough that was all I had to do.

**WHAT'S THE BEST LIFE ADVICE YOU CAN GIVE ME?**  
Eugene lovingly responds, "Why would we give you

**OUT OF THE BLUE. NO QUESTIONS ASKED. UNSOLICITED ADVICE.**  
I'm walking up the basement stairs and I hear Tyree yell, "Ms. Destiny! Never wear weave! Haven't you seen Bad Hair on Netflix? It's scary."

**HOW DO WE STAY GROUNDED & GRATEFUL?**  
During a closing circle after a group PD, I ask the crew what they are grateful for today. With their camera off, the screen named "IP- Da 5 Bloods tonight. Watch Antebellum tonight. Watch all the sad movies on Netflix and Hulu tonight."



BRADY GRANT | DIRECTOR OF LEARNING

I got through all that last year threw at us by appreciating the smallest bits of humanity I got to experience daily. Seeing apprentices persevere, find community, take care of each other and us. My family connecting in deeper, unexpected ways. Taking time to laugh and connect with people, in ways I never thought I would

O V E R C O M I N G

is the process of continuing to move through as joy, stress, ease, and doubt ebb and flow. In 2020 specifically, my overcoming was focused around taking my fear with me instead of trying to just get past or around it. The fear that came with being a new mother, especially during a global pandemic when nothing went as planned. Overcoming meant taking things moments at a time and planning with the understanding that things would be changing quickly. I am currently overcoming the self doubt that talks me out of doing what I am capable of. The voice that tells me to be quiet or that my ideas are too big.

*Destiny Hardney*, **PRODIGY EDUCATOR**

I am realizing the need for deep healing within myself. I'm on a spiraling, inefficient, emerging journey of overcoming all that has blinded, limited, disconnected, disembodied me.

STEPH FRANCES  
FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JOHN McCANN

2020 was a year filled with huge disruptions, as well as periods of intense isolation and stagnation. These shifts made me aware of a sense of complacency in some areas of my life and inspired me to overcome them by making some big moves and changes (including starting on with Prodigy).

WEEKEND COFFEE



SHOP MANAGER

EMILIA CANO

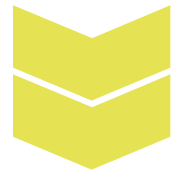
Operations Manager

I am *OVERCOMING* becoming just another statistic. So often people of color already have so much stacked against them, and it doesn't help when things like social inequity and drugs are infecting our younger communities of color.

CHANGE BEGINS WITH ME.



STAFF & BOARD



JULIE VOYLES

Senior Special Funds Officer, The Denver Foundation

As with so many people, what I've been learning to overcome is the isolation that has accompanied staying safe in a pandemic. As someone that lives alone and works remotely, staying connected to people requires a concerted effort and constant nurturing to stave off isolation but I hope is a practice that I will continue long after the pandemic finally ends.

I'm currently overcoming my lack of patience. In 2020, my husband and I overcame the chaos that COVID brought to all aspects of our life—personally and professionally—from threatening my father-in-law's life, to shutting down our business, and to threatening the health and safety of our staff. In addition to all that COVID brought us, we are overcoming the grief of losing our beloved dog, Baxter.

Tawnya Ramirez INDEPENDENT CPA

DAN REED

CEO, SEED FUNDRAISERS

Currently, I am overcoming my need for certainty and trying to rest in the small joys right in front of me. In 2020, I struggled to accept the Buechner quote "redemption means the worst thing is never the last thing."

2020 pushed us all to adapt and lean in different directions. I overcame my fear of failure when faced with big decisions. We just needed to act - relying on the best information at the time.

HEATHER LAFFERTY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & CEO  
Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver

In 2020 I grew in my understanding of how to better eat, exercise, work and rest as I face the daily challenges of loving well at home and providing value in my community.

DERRICK KELSEY | Senior Consultant, Apex IT

JOHNNIE WILLIAMS

It has been most difficult to impress upon families who live in constant crisis how serious the issues we faced in 2020 were.

#RESILIENCY

Finding funding to support a work of consciousness has proven to be a great challenge

#STAYWOKE

Executive Director, Gang Rescue and Support Project

THE HARDEST THING FOR ME HAS BEEN THE LACK OF CONTACT WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE CLOSE TO ME. I HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLY LUCKY THAT I HAVE MY FAMILY AROUND ME TO GIVE ME THE HUGS AND LOVE I NEED TO GET BY.

CHAD COOKINHAM

Director of Foundation Relations, Achievement Network