



**A YEAR IN REVIEW**

# **Defy Ventures 2020 Annual Report**

**DEFY  
VENTURES**

## Dear Defy Illinois Supporters,

I'm thrilled to share the Defy Ventures 2020 Annual Report with you! Inside you'll find a letter from our CEO, data on our collective impact during the pandemic, new program launches, Defy's financial data, words from our community, and more. I'm so grateful to each and every one of you who were a part of the Defy family last year, and I look forward to continuing to work alongside you to build great things in the future. Defy's Entrepreneurs in Training (EITs) continue to defy the odds with the support of our incredible community, and their resilience continues to inspire me in my work every day.

During 2020, Defy Ventures Illinois began its operations in earnest. We supported the EITs at the Kewanee correctional facility through virtual learning and supplementary texts. We launched the first Defy Illinois Entrepreneurship Bootcamp and built new partnerships with community-based organizations to ensure a strong continuum of care for EITs as they return home. I am proud of the movement we are creating here in the Midwest and look forward to sharing our successes with all of you.



**Thank you!**

**Melissa O'Dell**

*Executive Director, Defy Illinois*

# A Letter from the CEO

August 2021

## *Dear Defy Community,*



When California first started to reopen a few months ago, returning to the Defy Ventures office in Los Angeles felt a little like opening a time capsule. Remnants of prison events from March 2020 still sat on my desk, and plans sketched out in erasable marker on my whiteboard had somehow become permanent. But despite the feeling that time has lost all meaning, Defy is not the same organization we were at the start of 2020.

Resilience and perseverance were the orders of 2020. Faced with the constraints of a public health crisis, we adapted all programming at the onset of the pandemic in March. Unable to deliver our prison program in the traditional way, we offered as much as we could through correspondence. This was one of the hardest parts of the pandemic for the Defy community, both for EITs experiencing the amplified isolation inside prison and for staff and volunteers on the outside, unable to provide support beyond whatever we could send in. Still, we kept in touch with over 300 incarcerated EITs during the year as they remained committed to the program and personal growth.

Despite the stay-at-home orders, we were still able to find ways to support the influx of EITs returning home. We expanded our Chromebook program to provide every returning EIT with a laptop and converted all of our post-release programming to a virtual setting. We have also been hard at work refining and even expanding programs to serve more EITs, better than we did before. As we moved to virtual engagement, it also quickly became apparent that we could make volunteering more accessible than ever.

## *A few other highlights from 2020 include*

- Expansion of our post-release Career/Reentry and Entrepreneurship programs.
- Launch of the Defy Entrepreneurship Bootcamp and Business Accelerator programs through a federal grant from the Minority Business Development Agency.
- Launch of a new partnership with Grow with Google to provide digital literacy training.
- Fair Chance Hiring workshops for companies and business groups interested in exploring this important justice issue.
- Completion of a gender responsive curriculum to ensure we are effectively meeting the unique needs of incarcerated women.

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- Formation of a new academic partnership with the Drucker School of Management at Claremont Graduate School, which includes a Certificate of Entrepreneurship for future graduates of the Defy Ventures programs.
- Launch of a new Defy affiliate in Wisconsin, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin, Madison Extension Campus.
- Supported by the ACLU, Defy Ventures filed suit against the Small Business Administration, which resulted in increasing access for people with criminal histories to the Paycheck Protection Program.

Additionally, following the horrific murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, the Defy team recognized our responsibility to have a critical conversation about our own internal practices and generational beliefs around systemic racism. In doing so, we uncovered opportunities to push equity in our approach and deepen our learning as individuals and as an organization. We are inspired by the potential those conversations have uncovered in us and have begun to make changes to our curriculum, programs, and internal operations with the goal of naming and dismantling racial injustice in and through our work. This is just the beginning.

Reflecting on where we were at the start of the pandemic, I'm exceptionally proud to report that, as a result of determination, creativity, and hard work by the Defy staff and tremendous support from the Defy community, we are a stronger, more effective Defy Ventures than we have ever been in our 11-year history. Defy is an organization that is ready for the future. We are on a path to grow in new places (a new Louisiana affiliate launches in fall 2021!) and with more effective service and impact than ever before.

Thank you for your continued partnership and belief in our mission and, most importantly, your belief in the Defy EITs.

**With Gratitude,**

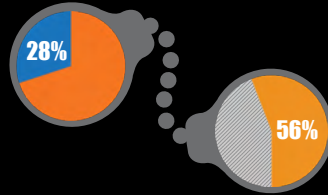


**Andrew Glazier**

*President and CEO, Defy Ventures Inc.*

## The Injustices...

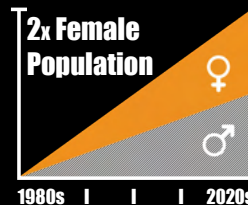
Black and Hispanic people make up 28% of the US population yet make up 56% of the US incarcerated population.<sup>1</sup>



Black Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white Americans.<sup>2</sup>



Since 1980, the number of women in prison has been increasing at twice the rate of growth for men.<sup>3</sup>



## Our Work Tackles

Defy works to address layers of racial injustice through our commitment to **changing perceptions, breaking cycles of recidivism, and helping people to create equity** in historically marginalized communities.

Defy completed a revision of our CEO of Your New Life curriculum in 2020 that specifically **addresses the challenges facing incarcerated women**. Defy currently serves in two women's prisons, and in 2021, our goal is to launch at an additional women's facility.

The unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated people is nearly five times higher than the unemployment rate for the general United States population.<sup>4</sup>



Evidence shows that having a record reduces employer callback rates by 50%.<sup>5</sup>



Because we know that employment is key in preventing recidivism, Defy engages **the business community** through **employer partnerships** and by offering **fair chance hiring workshops** to educate companies about the importance and benefits of giving formerly incarcerated individuals a fair chance at a job. Our **volunteer events** also serve to shift volunteers' hearts and minds about people with criminal histories, so that we can recruit more agents of change in our mission.

The national three-year recidivism (return-to-prison) rate is nearly 50%.<sup>6</sup>



To achieve greater economic inclusion and lower recidivism and incarceration rates, Defy aims to increase the number of fair chance employers, investors, and formerly incarcerated people who are ready for careers or to launch a small business.

The United States has become a nation of incarceration, fueled by racial and social injustice. People of color are incarcerated at disproportionate rates, and the number of incarcerated women has been rising steadily. After being released from prison, formerly incarcerated individuals often face economic exclusion, including high unemployment rates and reduced access to capital. Defy Ventures is on a mission to create the conditions for people to **defy these odds**.

## How Defy's Programs Create Impact

Defy's mission is to shift mindsets to give people with criminal histories their best shot at a second chance. Our vision is to cut the recidivism rate in half by leveraging entrepreneurship to increase economic opportunity and transform lives.

Defy's programs work toward accomplishing our mission and vision by supporting Defy Entrepreneurs in Training (EITs) along the reentry journey both before and after release from prison. The diagram illustrates Defy's programs along our two program pathways: the Career and Reentry Pathway and the Entrepreneurship Pathway. Both programs were redesigned and relaunched in 2020.

### Our Programs

#### Before Release:

**CEO of Your New Life (CEO YNL)** is a holistic, six-to-nine-month program that provides personal development, career readiness, and entrepreneurship training during incarceration or within transitional facilities.

#### After Release:

Defy provides ongoing post-release programs along two main pathways: the **Career and Reentry Pathway**, and the **Entrepreneurship Pathway**.

The **Career and Reentry Pathway** supports EITs who have completed CEO YNL and helps them transition home through a supportive community, workshops for skill development, referrals to service providers, and connections to employers. *Revised for 2020.*

#### Defy's Entrepreneurship Pathway:

The **Entrepreneurship Bootcamp** is a 14-week program for formerly incarcerated people with stable housing and employment, who are interested in exploring entrepreneurship. *Launched in 2020.*

The **Business Accelerator** supports EITs through the process of incorporating, launching, and growing new businesses, and includes advanced coursework in entrepreneurship and business management. *Revised and relaunched in 2020.*

The **Defy Entrepreneur Network (DEN)** keeps EITs who have completed the Entrepreneurship Pathway and launched their businesses connected to a community of support through workshops and events.

In 2020, Defy launched the **Venture Fund**, which provides pre-seed grant funding for EITs who are launching a scalable business in Defy's Business Accelerator.

### Program Pathways

- Reentry and Career Pathway
- Entrepreneurship Pathway

#### Before Release:

CEO of Your New Life  
(CEO YNL)

#### After Release:

Career and  
Reentry Pathway

Entrepreneurship  
Bootcamp

Employment  
\*Goal after  
program completion

Business  
Accelerator

Business Launch  
\*Goal after  
program completion

Defy Entrepreneur  
Network (DEN)



## Defy Ventures' 2020 Impact

Defy Served **587** Entrepreneurs in Training (EITs) in 2020

**363**

EITs were enrolled in Defy's in-prison program, CEO of Your New Life.

After the pandemic hit, Defy supported incarcerated EITs with:

**2,077**  
letters + correspondence pieces

**1,350**  
textbooks

**998**  
supplemental books

**627**  
assignments completed

**224**

Formerly incarcerated EITs engaged with Defy after release, including participating in workshops, classes, and case management.

Once EITs released from prison, Defy provided:

**170**  
Chromebooks for connection to career and reentry resources

**118**  
workshops + networking events

**80%**  
of Defy EITs successfully found employment\*

This work would not have been possible without the support of **656 Volunteers**

## Defy's All-Time Impact

• **6,000+** People served in Defy's programs

• **<10%** 1-year recidivism rate\*\*

• **<15%** 3-year recidivism rate\*\*

• **6,300+** All-time volunteers

• **140+** Businesses launched

*\*Employment rate for EITs who were surveyed and have been home for three years or less (surveyed in January 2020, June 2020, and January 2021).*

*\*\*National 1-year rate is 30.4% and 3-year rate is 49.7%*





## Recap of 2020

### Defy's 2020 Was a Year of...

#### ...Prioritizing Career Readiness and Fair Chance Hiring, featuring:

- ✦ Grow with Google partnership to deliver digital literacy training to Entrepreneurs in Training (EITs)
- ✦ Providing every EIT coming home with a Chromebook
- ✦ Fair Chance Hiring workshops for companies and business groups interested in exploring this important justice issue

#### ...Doubling Down on Entrepreneurship, featuring:

- ✦ Launch of Defy's Entrepreneurship Bootcamp and Business Accelerator programs, funded through a first-ever federal grant for Defy through the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency
- ✦ Increasing access to the Paycheck Protection Program for entrepreneurs with criminal histories, through a suit brought by Defy and the ACLU against the Small Business Administration

#### ...Going Virtual & Remote During the Pandemic, featuring:

- ✦ Over 100 post-release events over Zoom for EITs, with over 500 volunteers joining us
- ✦ More EITs served after release than ever before in our organization's history
- ✦ Sending in materials to prisons to support EITs' learning after the pandemic hit

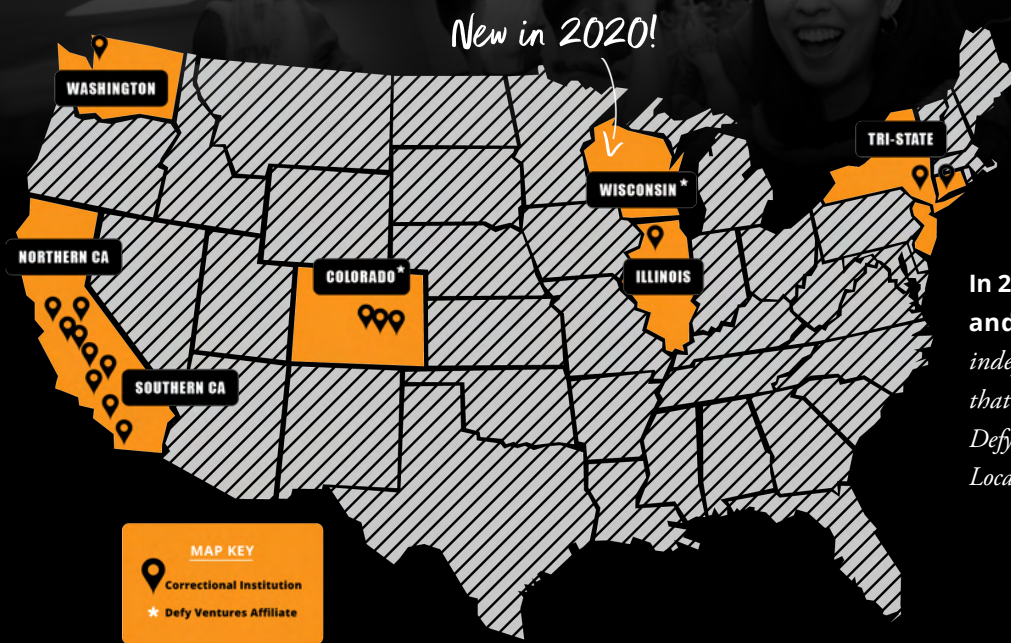
#### ...Growing to New Regions, featuring:

- ✦ Launch of a new Defy affiliate in Wisconsin, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin, Madison Extension Campus

#### ...Improving Programs for Women and Overall, featuring:

- ✦ Completion of a gender responsive in-prison curriculum to ensure we are effectively meeting the unique needs of incarcerated women
- ✦ An academic partnership with the Drucker School of Management, which includes collaboration on curriculum development and a Certificate of Entrepreneurship for graduates of Defy's programs





## Where We Serve

In 2020, Defy had programming in 8 states and 16 prisons. Defy Ventures Affiliates are independently governed non-profit organizations that operate in a collaborative relationship with Defy Ventures and deliver our program under license. Locations with an \*asterisk symbol are Defy affiliates.

## 2020 Program Highlights from Defy Staff



"I witnessed the strength and resilience of the Defy community in 2020. We started a peer mentoring program and saw Defy EITs help each other get jobs and support one another during the pandemic. We also brought some great partner organizations on board to provide EITs with beneficial services, like pro bono coaching."

—**Qa'id Aqeel**, Program Manager,  
Career & Reentry Programs, Defy NorCal



"The pivot to virtual events really upped our engagement with both EITs and volunteers. These events helped us all stay connected, and gave volunteers and EITs a supportive community to be a part of during the pandemic."

—**Terrell Hall**, Senior Program Manager,  
Career & Reentry Programs, Defy Tri-State



"Seeing the EITs pour their hearts and energy into Defy's assignments while in lockdown made me so proud of them. The pandemic was particularly awful in prisons, and I saw incredible proof of the EITs' resilience and commitment to bettering their lives, even during the darkest of times."

—**Sandy Y. Rodriguez**, Senior Program Manager,  
Prison Programs, Defy SoCal



"It was exciting to help lead the launch of the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp. A program like this wasn't available when I first came home, so getting to provide a pathway to entrepreneurship for formerly incarcerated people is very fulfilling. I am able to use my experience as an entrepreneur to help others in their journey."

—**Quan Huynh**, Senior Program Manager,  
Entrepreneurship Programs, Defy SoCal

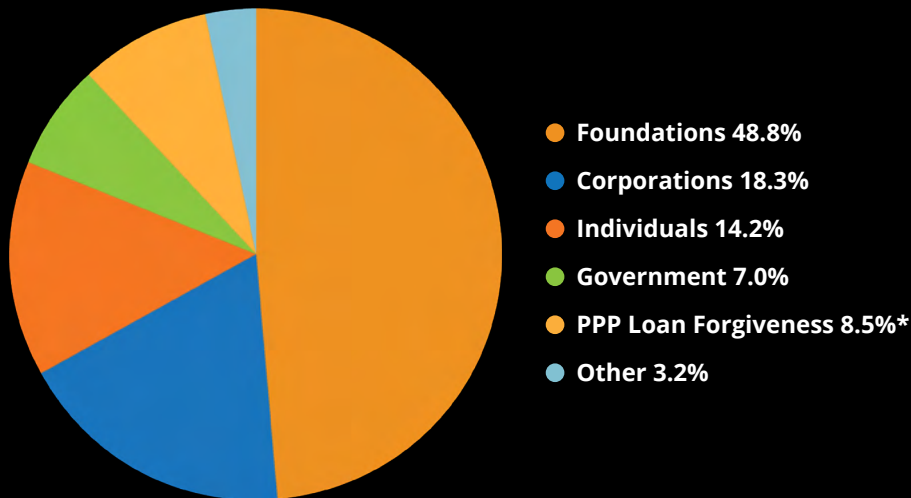


## 2020 Financial Position

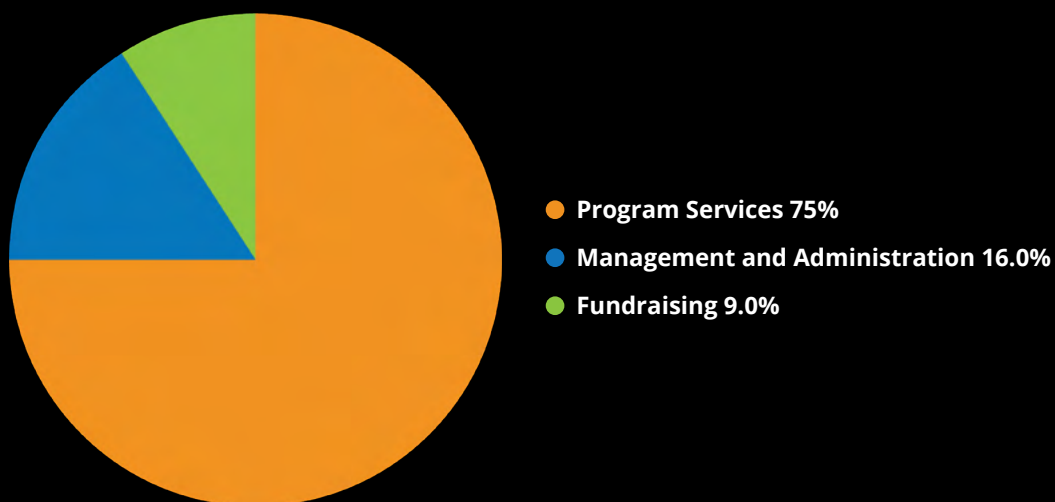
Defy Ventures' 2020 budget was \$2,680,097

For more information, please see our [audited financials](#)

### Revenue



### Expenses



*\*Defy received stimulus funding through the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program, to maintain staff levels during the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn in FY20-21. These funds are recognized as revenue in FY20, as they were fully forgiven by the lender and SBA.*





## Community of Supporters

Defy's work is only possible through partnership across sectors including funders, program partners, employment partners, and business community volunteers and allies. We are grateful for our many partners in 2020. Together, we can create a world of true second chances and legitimate first chances.



● Funding Partner      ● Program Partner      ● Employment Partner

*Program Partners provided workshops for EITs, helped develop programs and curriculum with Defy, or provided event space or other non-monetary resources to run Defy programs. Employment Partners hired or employed Defy EITs.*



## Voices of Defy



“My experience so far with Defy has been challenging and rewarding. [...] I have been challenged to get out of my comfort zone and learn new ways of thinking and I’m doing things that are guaranteed to help meet my goals. I’m glad that I took this leap of faith and I am going to refer as many people as I can to this program [the Defy Bootcamp].”

—**Josephine**, *Illinois EIT*



“Defy’s work is important to me because they provide a platform for people to use their skills, network, and knowledge to elevate the EITs. This is a wonderful contribution to a hidden, often sidelined community who deserves better from society. Defy helps close that gap and provides new opportunity to well-deserved talent.”

—**Marsye**, *Defy Tri-State Advisory Board member*



“Defy is important to me because they’ve not only given me opportunities but also made me feel like part of the family. Defy helps position me to be the best person I can be and helps me identify skills that I never thought I had. I’ve gotten a few job offers through people in the Defy community, and that’s a testament to Defy.”

—**Erik**, *SoCal EIT*



“I volunteer with Defy because it’s enabled me to meet EITs who are some of the most inspirational and motivational individuals. Defy does an amazing job of working with the EITs, who are more similar to me than I’d initially expected, and giving them the opportunities that they deserve to be successful post-incarceration. I’m so proud to play a part in the incredible work that Defy is doing!”

—**Sepora**, *Defy Illinois Associate Board member*



“My experience with Defy has been life-changing. I have really learned a lot about myself and how I can change for the better. Defy not only teaches us about starting our own business but also about becoming a respected person and part of society. This program has been incredible for my personal growth and confidence.”

—**Rubi**, *EIT graduate at California Institution for Women*



“Defy is my favorite organization to volunteer with because Jeanette and Terrell make each volunteer event enjoyable, inclusive, and real (no fluff); and the EITs are THE finest and most humble entrepreneurs I’ve ever encountered.”

—**Peter**, *Tri-State volunteer*

## Voices of Defy



“Defy is important to me because of the love and support everyone has shown me both inside and out of prison. Defy has been a HUGE part of my life in making a successful transition back into society.”

—**Adam**, *NorCal EIT and Advisory Board member*



“My business all started with Defy. I wouldn’t be where I am without them. Defy connected me to an incredible community and mentor, and that community helped me complete, step by step, the Payment Protection Program loan this summer to keep my business going. When I think about Defy, their support system, the mentors, and how they’re there when you think everything is lost—it amazes me. Defy means everything to me.”

—**Sharon**, *Defy graduate in Tri-State*



“Why Defy? Because none of us are perfect. Because when we talk about the things that matter—our hopes, our dreams, our families, our regrets—we find we are more alike than we are different. Because being a society is about being there for each other, to lift each other up. Because I am sure I get more out of volunteering with Defy than I put in.”

—**Tatiana**, *Defy volunteer*



“Defy’s work is important to me because it’s so much more than charity, it’s empowerment. There are very few things that are more invigorating in life than getting to witness such hope, purpose, and passion in what could be one of the most hopeless places in the world. And yet as a volunteer, I get to experience that deeply each time I walk into prison with Defy. What a gift.”

—**April**, *Defy Governing Board member*



“I took Defy’s program while incarcerated, and I was blown away by the program’s content. But what was even more important was the confidence I was able to build within myself. The volunteers who came into prison—who saw us as humans and were willing to give time to us—were the catalyst for building my confidence. After I released, I got a job through the Defy network where I worked while building my tech skills. Defy allowed me to build a community that believes in me and then in return, I started to believe in myself.”

—**Victor**, *EIT and Defy Washington board member*





## How to Get Involved and Support Defy's Work

### Volunteer

Defy can only achieve our mission with the help of the broader community. By volunteering with Defy, you're helping to shift mindsets and create a more inclusive economy and society. You can find our available volunteer opportunities on our [volunteer website](#).

#### Volunteer opportunities include:

- Attend an in-prison event (when in-person events resume).
- Join a virtual post-release event, including book clubs, resume coaching, business coaching, and more.
- Become a mentor for an EIT with a business.

### Fair Chance Hiring Workshops

Companies looking for ways to contribute to our mission can engage in a number of corporate partnership opportunities. One of these is learning more about becoming a fair chance employer.

Fair chance hiring is a practice built on the premise that everyone, regardless of their background, should be fairly assessed for a position they are qualified for. Defy's **Fair Chance Hiring Workshop** is an interactive workshop designed to help companies and professional groups learn about fair chance hiring while exploring attitudes and perceptions about individuals who have been incarcerated. This 60- to 90-minute workshop can be delivered virtually or in-person.

### Donation Information

We are so grateful for the support of our community!

You can support Defy's work with a donation [online](#) or by sending a check to:

**Defy Ventures, Inc.**

**P.O. Box 102117**

**Pasadena, CA 91189**

**Defy's tax ID number is 27-3611908.**

You can find other ways to donate (like contributing stock) [on our website](#).

To connect with us, please contact [info@defyventures.org](mailto:info@defyventures.org).





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For more information, email us at [info@defyventures.org](mailto:info@defyventures.org) or visit us at [defyventures.org](http://defyventures.org).