TWO ORGANIZATIONS SELECTED FOR COLUMBIA’S NEW SOCIAL IMPACT INCUBATOR

COLUMBIA, SC, - Big impact for Columbia is on the horizon as two organizations are gearing up to begin their year-long incubator process with i3 Innovative Intervention Incubator. Starting in January 2017, The Autism Academy of South Carolina and Juvenile Reentry Program at the Richland County Public Defender’s Office will begin developing their social innovations, which stand to have a major impact on Columbia’s youth and their families.

i3 | Innovative Intervention Incubator will provide hands on support, project planning, and innovation training to assist these two organizations in taking their ideas and making them a reality. “We created i3 to be a source of inspiration and a kind of R&D lab for Columbia’s social sector,” says Dr. Robert Hock, assistant professor at the College of Social Work and director of i3. “We help local organizations test and launch high-impact social innovations in our community. This year, we have two dynamic teams who are deeply committed to creating opportunities for youth in our city.”

The Autism Academy of South Carolina’s will launch their No Couch Campaign, a year long process that will assist them in launching their Couch to Career program, which offers hands-on, work-based, extended job training and placement into employment for transition-aged youth with autism spectrum disorder, aged 14-24. “Each year, approximately 50,000 people with autism finish school, many with no meaningful plans for adulthood,” said Lorri Shealy Unumb, Esq., President of the Autism Academy of South Carolina. “We are thrilled to address this issue in partnership with i3 via our ‘No Couch Campaign’ – our effort to stop the epidemic of young adults with autism spending years, or even a lifetime, sitting on their parents’ couches because of a lack of employment training and work opportunities. Because we work hands-on with teens with autism every day at the Academy, we know they have skills that should lead to employment, but we need the expertise and resources of the Innovative Intervention Incubator to tackle the problem in a sustainable and replicable way”
The Richland County Public Defender’s Office’s Juvenile Reentry Program seeks to build a coalition of key stakeholders to examine, develop, and implement strategies to combat the challenge of juvenile reentry. The Reentry Coalition will create opportunities for stakeholders to support youth reentering the community and mobilize stakeholder’s involvement in these youth’s success. “Building the Reentry Coalition requires implementation of social and behavioral research and innovative techniques to encourage civic engagement from crucial partners in the community. i3 team members will provide the Juvenile Reentry Program with necessary and invaluable expertise and skills to assure a development of a sustainable evidence-based model of the Reentry Coalition.”

i3 is an initiative at the University of South Carolina College of Social Work that brings community members and researchers together to explore and test innovative ideas for solving social problems. i3 will provide staffing, resources, technical assistance, and mentoring to grow new ideas into high-impact, sustainable interventions here in South Carolina. The incubator will serve as a catalyst and an opportunity for engagement between the social, private, and public sectors across the city.

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