

LOWELL



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Stephen Wahome of Newton, right, who went to the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell when he was growing up in Lowell, is creating a program, Startup Boot Camp, to teach kids of color about how to start a business. Pathways manager Na Lam of Lowell, left, and sports & fitness department manager Devonna Williams of Methuen, will be involved.

ENTREPRENEUR LOOKS TO EMPOWER KIDS OF COLOR

UML grad working with Boys & Girls Club for business boot camp

By Stefan Geller

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LOWELL » While thousands of protesters in Massachusetts have taken to the streets to con-

demn inequality and fight racial injustice over the past six months, local entrepreneur Stephen Wahome is taking a more innovative approach: teaching young students of col-

or how to build their own businesses.

Come January, Wahome will partner with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell to launch a virtual Startup Boot-

camp for kids of color between the ages of 12 and 18, which over the course of four weeks will teach them everything from basic terminology to cre-

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ating business plan walk-throughs and elevator pitches.

"More Black-owned businesses are a must, and this starts with teaching young people of color in communities like Lowell the fundamentals of starting a business," said Wahome, a Kenyan immigrant who grew up in Lowell. "It will not only bring money into their hands, but it will circulate in their families and their communities."

Wahome said he came up with the idea for Startup Bootcamp during the summer, following the police killing of George Floyd and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests across the nation and the globe. After witnessing so many people take a stand for racial equality, he said he felt compelled to contribute in whatever way he could, which he de-

termined was through his knowledge of business.

"I just feel like people can give back in so many different ways, and for me to give back something that I love and enjoy doing every single day, it's just phenomenal," he said.

Wahome, who lives in Newton, got his start in entrepreneurship while he was still studying at the University of Massachusetts Lowell for his MBA, when he partnered with Lowell native Nicholas Bedard to create JamFuze, an online music marketplace that connected local unsigned music artists with producers.

Several years later, he teamed up with Lowell natives Anthony Gentles and brothers Ayoub and Ibraheem Khadar to create KWG Softworks, a Boston-based remote company that creates software applications for companies in the U.S. by utilizing African talent. The company officially launched in February.

Wahome said that as word got around about his two business ventures last year, a lot of people interested in creating their own startups began reaching out to him for advice.

As more and more people continued to reach out, Wahome said he started to receive a lot of the same questions, so he created a series of 26 short videos answering all of them in order to save himself some hassle.

Fast forward to the start of 2020, and Wahome said the videos grew so much in popularity that they led to people asking him if he taught courses, including parents asking for their children.

After the Black Lives Matter protests erupted months later, he presented the idea to officials at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, a place Wahome said he went to so often as a kid that it helped mold him into the person he is today.

"I think it's amazing, and one

of the things that I appreciate is that he as a club alum is willing to give back to our kids, because he knows how much the club influenced him," said Alisha Harrison, program director at the Boys & Girls Club.

Wahome said he is currently testing the program with kids outside of the club in preparation for the January launch.

It follows a four-week schedule consisting of 26 pre-recorded learning modules. Students can self-enroll at any time and Wahome will host two weekly office hours, where students can ask him questions and pitch their ideas.

Harrison said she's hoping to make Wahome's program part of the club's Pathways Program, which helps prepare club members for their lives after high school.

"This could be another stepping stone that our club members can use to end generational poverty and really have a path-



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Says Stephen Wahome, 'More Black-owned businesses are a must, and this starts with teaching young people of color in communities like Lowell the fundamentals of starting a business.'

way for themselves after high school that is sustainable," Harrison said.

To register for the program, visit <https://startupbootcamp.thinkific.com/courses/SB>.