

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

Brampton Entrepreneur Abena Addo Inspires Youth to Aspire for Higher



Abena Addo - founder & executive director of Aspire for Higher

This month's client spotlight is Abena Addo, the founder and executive director of Aspire for Higher (A4H). A4H is a not-for-profit grassroots organization that has provided basketball programming for youth in the Greater Toronto Area since 2013. They offer programs that challenge and encourage athletes to improve their basketball skills in a fun and inclusive learning environment. All the A4H coaches are elite athletes themselves and thus know first-hand what it takes to do well in sports. When Abena is not creating excellent programs for youth, she is using her civil engineering training at Metrolinx as a Senior Transportation Planner.

Becoming an Entrepreneur

Abena has always had a passion for basketball. In grade 11, she moved to Brampton to play for St. Edmund Champion's quadruple A basketball team. She was recruited to play at the varsity level for McGill University and then for the University of Toronto. She encountered many challenges during her professional basketball career, such as healing from a broken rib and a broken shoulder. As she explains, ***"it was challenging, but I built a tough skin. Going through rehab was painful, but in a real way, I learned perseverance and dedication."*** These skills would come in handy when Abena decided to try her hand at entrepreneurship.

In 2013, Abena needed a summer job, so she went to the Brampton library to see what was available. As fate would have it, Jennifer Vivian was giving a presentation about the Summer Company program on behalf of the Brampton Entrepreneur Centre (BEC). This initiative,

offered in partnership with the Government of Ontario, provides youth the opportunity to learn how to launch and operate a business. Abena took part in the program and got started on building her own business.

At 7:00 am each morning, she would go door to door and ask people about their interest in a basketball camp. All her hard work led to 15 kids attending the first year of her camp. Of that time, Abena explains, ***“it was rough, but you know we made it work. I learned a lot on the go about overhead, equipment costs, and customer satisfaction. It was a really rewarding experience.”***



Growth, Growth, Growth

Since 2013, A4H has grown to provide several camp programs in the Greater Toronto Area and even in Edmonton, Alberta. The driving force in everything they do is a belief that basketball is a vehicle for developing life skills and strengthening mental as well as physical wellness. To make sure no child is left behind, Abena works hard to find funders that subsidize costs for parents who cannot afford camp costs. A4H has something for each child to do. Some of their programs include fundamental basketball training, an all-girls camp, training for kids with elite skills, and even an engaging STEAM camp.

Most recently, A4H is one of eight organizations to receive funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) under the Mental Health of Black Canadians Fund. They will be collaborating with York University and Brock University to develop a comprehensive after-school program that improves the mental wellness of Black youth in Peel.



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Hopes for the Future

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For all those looking to start their entrepreneurship journey, here's Abena's advice: ***"there are going to be a lot of downfalls and barriers, but you should never internalize that or think that that's a reflection of who you are. It's just a process, and it's part of the journey. The real test is how you overcome those barriers."***

To find out more about Aspire for Higher, you can head to their website or follow them on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter