

Rêve Academy: dreaming with direction

Written by Julie Desmond
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This summer, twelve kids from North Minneapolis will get together for ten weeks to create websites for local companies who need them AND these kids will launch a new retail concept. Yes, kids. These teens will bridge achievement gaps, demographic challenges and digital divides to get there, but they will get there. Rêve Academy, founded by Brad von Bank and Kristin Pardue, will provide the time, tools and training required to ensure these young people succeed. They know what it takes. Along with an expert team of teachers and mentors, these two have been using their corporate smarts to help Northside kids for a long time. And they plan to keep it going.

Rêve Academy started out two years ago and was inspired by corporate roles with Target, GE, Carlson and General Mills where they recognized the growing need for digital talent, and the scarcity of it in the workforce. They also knew that there were kids in the city who were smart and extremely capable of learning technology, but who had limited access to it. The idea to provide pathways to digital careers was galvanized by the founders' corporate experience regarding where talent would be needed in the future.

Rêve Academy did not happen overnight. Brad and Kristin have been invested in the North Minneapolis community for over 13 years. Along the way, they helped create other programs focused on bridging the digital divide. Ultimately, their efforts evolved into a permanent commitment when they started Rêve Academy. Brad says, "It begins with belief in kids. Setting

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high standards, providing support and ultimately believing they are capable of leading the Twin Cities into the digital economy. The kids step up ... and it's exciting to watch the transformation."

The first group of Academy kids – there were six of them – invested two weeks learning to build a website. Then, forty more kids participated in after school enrichment classes to learn e-commerce and web design in their free time. This year, more than 700 kids will benefit from the program that helps develop real, marketable skills in both technology and marketing. As Brad explains, "Given the chance, these kids will be able to compete with anyone."

The impact Rêve Academy has on its participants is clear. But the tide of positive change reaches so much further. Rêve collaborates with Minneapolis public schools and locally owned businesses as well as colleges in the Twin Cities. Rêve Consulting, the for-profit company Brad and Kristin also co-founded, has brought ten private sector jobs to West Broadway. And Rêve keeps moving forward. Plans for the future include creating an academy that is self-sustaining through student run businesses.

Brad and Kristin say the journey so far, while not always easy, has often seemed magical. "I'm living my values," says Kristin. "I want to challenge kids to be true to who they are; to be clear." If there is one way to ensure success in any endeavor, that just might be it.

Learn more about Reve at <http://www.reveacademy.org/about/> .

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