



---

CENTRE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

---

CARIBBEAN

---

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019 EVOLUTION

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**03 Our Mission**

**04 Corporate Information**

**05 Impact at a Glance**

**06 Chairman's Message**

**07 CEO's Message**

**08 The Evolution Continues**

**12 Our year in review timeline**

**14 Our big stories of 2019**

- a. Blue Economy: Diversifying programming with a focus on oceans
- b. Maverick Experience: Tech entrepreneurs head to Necker Island
- c. Branson Centre Summit

**20 Programmes Report**

- a. Making an impact with our Programmes
- b. Shining Bright: Get to know some of our stellar entrepreneurs
- c. Branson Centre supports DBJ IGNITE entrepreneurs
- d. Supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem through mentorship

**38 Development & Communications Report**

- a. Expanding our Reach, Positioning for Growth
- b. JMMB Group & Branson Centre join forces to provide training for SMEs
- c. NCB Operational Excellence Workshop
- d. US Embassy Fireside Discussions
- e. MSMEs Benefit from JMMB Bank & We Inspire Seminar
- f. Expanding Our Network in New York

**47 Screw it, let's do it**

- a. Our board of directors
- b. Our team

# OUR MISSION



## TO CREATE DYNAMIC CARIBBEAN ECONOMIES

We remain resolute in our mission to impact the Caribbean economy by reducing unemployment and fueling economic growth through our support of scaleup businesses.

Now in our eighth year of operations, Branson Centre continues to evolve to maximise performance in the fast-paced global, regional and local entrepreneurial ecosystems.

This year, 25 entrepreneurs graduated from our accelerator programme. We assisted them in developing critical skills that will ultimately drive pathways to expansion. We supported an additional 7 entrepreneurs in the Development Bank of Jamaica's IGNITE grant programme.

We also continued to serve the wider entrepreneurial community through our events, workshops, bootcamps and virtual platform.

We are proudly making a significant impact within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and have generated a powerful momentum that is working to foster dynamic economies.

**“ We remain resolute in our mission to impact the Caribbean economy by reducing unemployment and fueling economic growth by supporting the acceleration of scaleup businesses. ”**

# CORPORATE INFORMATION

The Branson Centre Caribbean is a non-profit accelerator helping entrepreneurs to scale their businesses. We are on a mission to create dynamic Caribbean economies through entrepreneurship.

## **The Early Days**

We first opened our doors in 2011, with 20 entrepreneurs per cohort, who attended training one day per week for 12 weeks, at the Centre's Montego Bay location. By the end of 2014, we had successfully trained 7 cohorts in Jamaica.

In 2015, we launched our virtual platform, Branson Centre Caribbean Online, which enabled us to provide training to a much wider pool of entrepreneurs.

2017 was another major milestone year, as we moved our headquarters from Montego Bay to Jamaica's capital city, Kingston. We also revamped

our suite of services, while sharpening our focus on a specially selected group of high potential, high impact, fundable entrepreneurs. This repositioning solidified the Branson Centre as a key player in the transformation and development of both the local and regional entrepreneur ecosystems.

In 2019, we supported the acceleration of 25 stellar scaleup entrepreneurs. We also launched a specialised component of our programme that aimed to accelerate the growth of blue economy entrepreneurs. Through this initiative we supported three entrepreneurs focused on scaling businesses that address ocean health.

## **Looking Ahead**

Our work continues. We believe that in order to create dynamic Caribbean economies, we have to accelerate the development of investment-ready entrepreneurs and give them access to the capital they need to expand. So far, Branson Centre has played a pivotal role in making this happen, and will continue to bridge the gap between sources of capital and high potential entrepreneurs.

We are currently funded and supported through:

### **MAJOR PARTNERS**

**Virgin Holidays**

**Virgin Unite**

**NCB Group**

**PROVEN Investment Limited**

**JMMB Group**

### **SUPPORTING PARTNERS**

**GK Investments**

**Norbrook Equity**

**PanJam Investment Limited**

# IMPACT AT A GLANCE

AVERAGE NUMBER OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

13

AVERAGE SME COHORT REVENUE  
**US\$539K**

**8%**  
AVERAGE INCREASE IN REVENUE



SET UP  
**30 ADVISORY  
BOARDS**



PREPARED  
**US\$4M**  
IN DEAL FLOW



GRADUATED  
**25 ENTREPRENEURS**



LAUNCHED  
**BLUE ECONOMY  
PROGRAMME**

# CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

As Chairman of the Branson Centre it brings me tremendous fulfillment to be a part of an organisation that is igniting growth and development within the Caribbean economy by supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

We also continue to provide world-class programming; disseminating information, tools and resources that empower our entrepreneurs to execute for growth.

Our dynamic team at Branson Centre takes an evolutionary approach to meet the ever-changing demands and subtleties of the economic environment. They continue to be passionate and effective as resourceful agents of change.

On behalf of the Centre, we thank our Board of Directors, our partners, benefactors and all who have supported us along this journey. We look forward to our continued work together, helping scaleup businesses thrive in order to drive sustainable development in the Caribbean.

**Christopher Williams**  
Chairman



“

**Our dynamic team at Branson Centre takes an evolutionary approach to meet the ever-changing demands and subtleties of the economic environment.**

”

Over the past few years, we have seen unprecedented economic growth in Jamaica. This undoubtedly is linked to efforts to strengthen entrepreneurship in Jamaica. As the region's leading accelerator, the Branson Centre has played a critical role in the process.

In 2019, our investment pipeline has remained active, with a strong group of institutional investors who represent a significant percentage of the venture capital available in Jamaica. Through this initiative, we continue to facilitate opportunities for capital investment for our high potential entrepreneurs, aiding their ability to scale and have a positive impact on the economy.

# CEO'S MESSAGE

Branson Centre is always evolving, growing and pushing boundaries in order to properly serve the dynamic entrepreneurial and economic landscapes in which we operate.

2019 was another year of steady expansion for us at the Centre. We attracted a pool of 25 stellar scaleup entrepreneurs, and supported the acceleration of their businesses that demonstrated the potential for exceptional growth and economic impact. These entrepreneurs were selected from a pool of over 400 applicants from across the Caribbean - a testimony to our increased regional reach.

Also, alongside the Caribbean Climate Smart Accelerator, we launched our blue economy programme. This programme was developed as our contribution to the region's efforts to halt the effects of climate change. Under this new initiative we worked with three, strong blue economy entrepreneurs who are building scalable businesses that focus on the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, job creation and ocean health.

Another exciting development in 2019 was our global outreach. We strategically built awareness about our work by presenting at major regional and global conferences, participating in international press opportunities, and travelling throughout the world to connect with key players.

This was also another exhilarating year of service to the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The team and I extend a special thank you to our partners and board of directors who have provided essential support along this journey of building flourishing Caribbean economies.



On a personal note, after seven amazing years at the Centre, and three as CEO, the time has come for me to pursue my own evolution. In January 2020, I will officially pass the CEO torch to our Development & Communications Director, Lauri-Ann Ainsworth.

As I step into this next phase, I want to thank the Board of Directors, our partners, the team, our stellar group of entrepreneurs, and the entire Virgin family for the honour of being part of something much greater than myself.

**Lisandra Rickards**  
Chief Entrepreneurship Officer

“ We strategically built awareness about our work by presenting at major regional and global conferences, participating in international press opportunities, and travelling throughout the world to connect with key players. ”

The background is a solid teal color. It features several sets of horizontal, slightly slanted stripes in a darker shade of teal, arranged in a pattern that suggests depth and movement. A large, thin-lined hexagon is centered on the page, serving as a frame for the text.

**THE  
EVOLUTION**  
*Continues*

## THE NEXT CHAPTER

Another passionate, bold, extraordinary leader will take the reigns at the helm of the Branson Centre starting January 2020. The CEO torch will confidently be passed from Lisandra Rickards to Lauri-Ann Ainsworth.

Lisandra, who has been with the Centre for some seven years, made the difficult decision to step away from the role after realising she is ready to explore a new vision for her life.

“We all have an internal navigation system that guides us to our happiness. We either listen to it, or we ignore it to our peril. I have decided to listen to that guidance,” she explains. Travel, running a location-independent business and building a family, she says, are her next major milestones, as she seeks to consciously pursue her new life vision.

As Lisandra reflects on her 3-year tenure as CEO, she notes that she has grown tremendously through the experience.



“

**We all have an internal navigation system that guides us to our happiness. We either listen to it, or we ignore it to our peril. I have decided to listen that guidance.**

”

Lisandra’s list of achievements are monumental. They include pioneering the organisation’s shift from working with startup to scaleup businesses, creating a pipeline of venture investment from a large pool of institutional capital within the Caribbean, and relocating the Centre’s base of operations from Montego Bay to the country’s business hub, Kingston.

The journey, Lisandra says, also spawned in her a personal evolution in self development.

“I had to learn to work in an entirely new way, developing a system to keep track of everything on my plate,” she shares. Without this system, she doesn’t believe she would have had

the mental and physical fortitude to achieve her goals for the Centre, properly manage her team and maintain balance.

She notes that building solid skills around delegating and prioritising were critical, as was learning to handle the pressures of managing every aspect of the organisation. She also realised that she could potentially have a significant positive impact on the individuals on her team, and created time for regular one-on-one coaching sessions with each member.





“

I believe it is crucial to develop the whole entrepreneur, so that they are prepared to scale in all areas of their businesses.

”

Lauri-Ann Ainsworth transitions into her new role as CEO from being the Centre’s Development & Communications Director for the past two and a half years.

As Branson Centre continues to serve its growing pool of entrepreneurs, Lauri-Ann will further optimise operations by ensuring continued world-class output.

“I’m excited about the future of Branson Centre. I will take a holistic approach to entrepreneurship development within my role, by enhancing our already stellar programme. I believe it is crucial to develop the whole entrepreneur, so that they are prepared to scale in all areas of their businesses.”

Lauri-Ann continued, “I am honoured to step into this new role as CEO, which has always been occupied by strong female leaders. I will continue to build on Branson Centre’s legacy of making an impact on Caribbean entrepreneurs and economies.”

“I leave the Branson Centre in very capable hands,” Lisandra affirms. “Lauri-Ann carries with her years of experience in developing the Caribbean’s entrepreneurial landscape. Her visionary thinking and leadership capabilities around development, partnerships, fundraising and communications, make her ideal for the role.”

Confidence in Lauri-Ann’s abilities permeates throughout the team, board of directors and partners, as Branson Centre steps into its next evolutionary phase of growth and expansion.

# YEAR IN REVIEW TIMELINE

## JANUARY

1st Cohort Welcome



Investment Readiness  
Bootcamp



## MARCH

US Embassy Women's  
Month Grant Competition



Strategic Finance Workshop



## MAY

Leadership Workshop



## FEBRUARY

CEO Meeting



## APRIL

Maverick Experience



Operational Excellence  
Workshop



## JUNE

U.S. Embassy Fireside Chat



## JULY

Journeys to Scale:  
Scaling with AI



2nd Cohort Welcome



## SEPTEMBER

Branson Centre Anniversary



## OCTOBER

Corporate Governance  
Workshop



## AUGUST

Investment Readiness Bootcamp



International Startup Conference (Costa Rica)



## DECEMBER

Branson Centre Summit



A group of five people are smiling and gesturing enthusiastically. In the background, a man in a dark polo shirt with a 'Bank' logo is visible. A whiteboard with a large handwritten number '2' is also present. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

# OUR BIG STORIES OF 2019

# BLUE ECONOMY: DIVERSIFYING PROGRAMMING WITH A FOCUS ON OCEANS

We launched a specialised component of our programme in August, which helps entrepreneurs who are building sustainable businesses that promote ocean health in the region.

Of the 14 new businesses the Centre welcomed for its 2nd cohort in 2019, 3 entrepreneurs work in the blue economy. The *blue economy* is defined as the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, job creation and ocean ecosystem health.

“We have taken our proven methods in entrepreneurship development to support inspiring innovators to scale their businesses so that they can impact the ocean in a meaningful way,” said Lauri-Ann Ainsworth, Branson Centre Development & Communications Director.

The decision to hone in on blue economy entrepreneurs came shortly after catastrophic hurricanes slammed the Caribbean in 2017 and put climate change at the top of the regional agenda. The Centre’s founder Richard Branson was directly impacted by the storms, as his Necker Island home was struck by both hurricanes Irma and Maria in a span of two weeks.

The Caribbean has 80 percent more sea than land; and up to 27 per cent of the global ocean economy comes from the Caribbean Sea. But in recent years, the region has seen a marked increase in natural disasters as a result of climate change, with disappearing shorelines, more powerful hurricanes, and longer dry seasons. This trend is expected to negatively affect the economy, and population of the region over time.



Llewelyn Meggs & Jaedon Lawe of Yardie Divers



**Jordon Freeman** of JA Bioplastics

“  
The blue economy is defined as the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, job creation and ocean ecosystem health.  
”

In its recruiting, Branson Centre targeted ventures focused on addressing ocean-related problems in sectors such as manufacturing, nutrition and agriculture, digital transformation and tourism.

Businesses from across the Caribbean submitted applications and after careful vetting the following blue economy candidates were selected to be part of the second and final round of the 2019 cohort: **Llewelyn Meggs & Jaedon Lawe of Yardie Divers; Tara Carroll of Cove Coolout Restaurant & Bar; and Jordon Freeman of JA Bioplastics**

“At the end of the six months, we would like to see our blue economy entrepreneurs have a more structured business so they can access resources and development opportunities to scale faster, while maximising their positive social and environmental impacts,” said Asia Williams, Branson Centre’s Blue economy Specialist.

“Global employment of ocean based activities is set to grow from 31 million jobs to over 40 million by 2030, and we hope they can use what they learn to provide these opportunities to others as they grow,” Williams further noted.



**Tara Carroll** of Cove Coolout Restaurant & Bar



## MAVERICK EXPERIENCE: TECH ENTREPRENEURS HEAD TO NECKER ISLAND

In April, Branson Centre tech entrepreneurs Larren Peart and Conrad Mathison headed to Sir Richard Branson's Necker Island to participate in Maverick1000 - an inspiring getaway of activities created to intentionally give specially selected entrepreneurs the push and support they need to accomplish impactful, world-changing work.

The transformational retreat, joined by Sir Branson himself, allowed entrepreneurs to recover from burnout while accessing inspiration and information exchange with other like-minded, successful leaders.

“ I am so happy I got a chance to meet Vishen from Mindvalley, because he has played a critical role in how Pixel Perfect operates as a business today. ”

According to Larren, Bluedot Insights CEO, “We were gifted an amazing opportunity to travel to Sir Richard Branson's private island to pitch to, meet and interact with several super-successful entrepreneurs.”

Larren is a top-notch data guru and member of Branson Centre's 2018 cohort. He brings Silicon Valley standards to Jamaica by charting new frontiers in data-driven tracking. His business enables clients to make calculated, data driven decisions through the provision of insights on products, services, customers, competitors and markets.

Conrad, who is the managing director of It's Pixel Perfect, said of the experience: “I am so happy I got a chance to meet Vishen from Mindvalley, because he has played a critical role in how Pixel Perfect operates as a business today. I watched two of his videos in 2013, one on happiness and the other on dream boarding... It changed my life forever...”

Conrad is a digital marketing dynamo and also a member of Branson Centre's 2018 cohort. His company is a full-service digital agency that creates products and services to grow businesses in this digital age.

# BRANSON CENTRE SUMMIT



We ended the year with our signature event - the high energy, positivity-filled, Branson Centre Summit.

As the second edition of this annual event, this year's summit was held in December at the Spanish Court Hotel, under the theme *Scaling for Impact*. The keynote speaker was Leilani Mürter - who is both a celebrated environmental activist and professional race car driver.

Leilani explained the dire effects climate change will have on Caribbean businesses and the economy at large if serious action isn't taken soon. "The region is facing extended droughts and extensive, unseasonal amounts of torrential rain, which we all know can be devastating to farmland. All of this will impact the economy and the lives of the people," she told the audience.

The second of two panel discussions also dove into current environmental threats facing the region, and how business can be a force for change. Dubbed *Scaling the Impact of the Blue Economy*, the panel included Jaedon Lawe and Llewelyn Meggs of Yardie Divers, Justin Wolff of iLoveCoral, Racquel Moses of Caribbean Climate Smart Accelerator, and our expert Blue Economy Specialist, Asia Williams.

With the Centre having launched a blue economy programme in 2019, the session explored the importance of blue economy businesses, which focuses on the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, job creation and ocean health.

During the discussion, Yardie Divers founders Jaedon and Llewelyn credited the programme for instilling critical new knowledge that led them to reconfigure their operations, improve training and shift the trajectory of their business. The testimonial was met with rousing applause.

The summit also included a thought-provoking *Scaling the Impact of Women* panel, with panelists Kerry-Ann Stimpson of the JMMB Group, Sandra Glasgow of BizTactics & First Angels JA, Cortia Bingham of We Inspire Women, and the Branson Centre's Programme Development Manager Tashaine Morrison.

The packed room included a cadre of entrepreneurs and global business leaders, as well as the Centre's 2019 cohort, whose graduation was held as a segment of the proceedings. During the short ceremony,

members of the cohort were lauded as amongst the most stellar of scaleup entrepreneurs in the region, with each carefully selected for the programme from a pool of over 400 applicants.

During the event, emotions were high with the screening of Lisandra Rickards' farewell video, *The Next Chapter*, and the announcement of her 2020 departure. Development & Communications Director and incoming CEO, Lauri-Ann Ainsworth thanked Lisandra for her leadership as a strong female CEO.

The event was made possible by our amazing sponsors and partners, including PROVEN, the US Embassy, Virgin Holidays and Virgin Unite.





# PROGRAMMES *Report*



# MAKING AN IMPACT WITH OUR PROGRAMMES



This year we continued to advance our focus of targeting scaleup entrepreneurs. We also doubled down on our push to grow access to capital, and dove into the new territory of offering our entrepreneurs powerful advisory boards.

Here are some of our highlights for the year:

- **Graduated 25 entrepreneurs**
- **Set up 30 advisory boards**
- **Delivered 2 investment readiness bootcamps**
- **Completed 6 workshops**
- **Completed 10 CEO meeting sessions**

## **2 Scaleup Cohorts**

We welcomed 25 entrepreneurs between two cohorts, which began in the first and second halves of the year. As scaleups, these

entrepreneurs earn between J\$25 and J\$125M in annual revenue.

In July 2020 we welcomed our first ever blue economy cohort. This pilot programme was designed to provide greater impact by ensuring blue economy businesses can maximise opportunities while scaling with a positive environmental impact. 3 businesses graduated.

The blue economy cohort included scaleup entrepreneurs only, while the second cohort also included early stage blue economy entrepreneurs. Engagement with blue economy entrepreneurs is slated to increase in 2020.

### **Generating deal flow**

We prepared over 20 entrepreneurs to pitch for equity investment. Preparation included participation in our 6-day investment readiness bootcamp, completing a pre-pitch due diligence checklist and heavy 1:1 coaching sessions. 7 entrepreneurs (1 in Cohort 1, and 6 in Cohort 2) have pitched deals totalling US\$4M to our group of venture capital investors.

### **Advisory Boards**

Our cohort members were each provided a 5-member advisory board to introduce principles of governance and guide their medium-term growth. Each company was paired with board members to improve decision making, provide critical guidance and improve strategy. We decided to switch from 3 to 5 board members this year to mirror a true board of directors, allowing for a quorum of 3.

### **Investor Relations**

We have been working very closely with our entrepreneurs and pool of investors to find more ways to increase the success rates of equity investments. Our investors remain committed to working with our entrepreneurs and increasing the rate of equity financing for the SME sector.

### **Partnerships & Collaborations**

We signed an MOU with First Angels Jamaica to give our entrepreneurs greater access to investment funding opportunities.

In order to improve the business development ecosystem, we also forged important collaborations with Jamaica Manufacturers & Exporters Association (JMEA), Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ) and JAMPRO. Additionally, we collaborated with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for assistance with our blue economy programme.

### **Signed on for 2nd round of DBJ's IGNITE Grant Programme**

7 entrepreneurs were approved for DBJ's IGNITE Grant Programme: 1 was from the creative industry and is a filmmaker; 3 are tech companies; 2 are manufacturers; and 1 is in the construction industry. The 7 entrepreneurs received a total of J\$4 million each in grants. We provided them with advisory boards, and will be working with them to facilitate grant disbursement into 2020.

### **Looking forward**

For 2020, we will continue to refine our programming, and improve our content and delivery. With 30% women within our 2019 cohort, we aim to address our gender parity by recruiting more women and mixed gender founding teams. This will promote greater diversity within our programme and the business community at large. Meanwhile, macroeconomic factors are creating many opportunities for entrepreneurs across the region and we're committed to scaling our entrepreneurs to create dynamic Caribbean economies.



**Dmitri Dawkins**

Entrepreneur Programmes Director



**SHINING BRIGHT:  
GET TO KNOW SOME  
OF OUR STELLAR 2019**  
*Entrepreneurs*

# ADRIAN LOPEZ

## LIQUID LIGHT DIGITAL

### Tell us about your company.

In 2000, I was five years out of university and working in marketing at Red Stripe. Coming from a family of entrepreneurs, I desperately wanted to strike out on my own. I had always had a passion for film and animation, but I saw a niche for advanced 3D animation and visual effects that simply weren't being done in Jamaica at the time.

In 2002, I started Liquid Light Digital and quickly gained a reputation for solid work and a strong clientele. Within a few years, we were servicing big brands like Sony and Nokia, and doing work for clients as far flung as Scotland and Brunei. We expanded into live action production and created some of the most memorable TV commercials on Jamaican television.

### Why did you decide to work with the Branson Centre, and how has the Centre helped you along your journey?

I met Tashaine Morrison from Branson Centre when we were pitching on of our latest animated TV IP's Julie Jamrock at Kingston in 2019. When I spoke to her about the challenges I was facing as an entrepreneur, she suggested I come and meet with them. After meeting with Dmitri and Tashaine, I was convinced that Branson Centre's programme could help. The workshops have been intensive - lots of coffee - but a treasure trove of information, guidance and resources shared by successful CEOs and experts in a variety of fields. From preparing the business for investment, to organisational structure and corporate governance, Branson Centre has helped me step back and look at the business differently. Their business pitch deck guidance and pitch preparation have been invaluable.

It has been an exciting journey, and joining Branson as an entrepreneur is probably one of the best business decisions I've made - aside from resigning my day job back in 2002.



### How is your business benefiting the community?

Historically, we've always been involved with government projects to educate the public about issues ranging from safe sex and renewable energy to climate change awareness and early pregnancy. In the future, with the guidance we're getting from the Branson Centre, we hope to shift things to a whole new level, by training disadvantaged and inner-city Jamaican youth in the emerging technologies of film, virtual, augmented and mixed reality, and of course, animation.

### What does the future hold for your company?

Without giving too much away, we have significant plans for expansion. Jamaica offers several advantages to global business - a creatively talented population and our geographic location, to name a few. As Jamaica's most experienced and accomplished film and animation company, we're ideally positioned to grow in this sector. Part and parcel of that expansion will be to develop a world class workforce in an industry that's relatively new to Jamaica, and developing strong partnerships both locally and overseas will be key. The film and animation business is massive, and it's growing every year. Jamaica needs to shift from just being a pretty location waiting to be exploited, to being an exporter of our creative skills and rich stories - taking a more active role in steering our creative destiny.

# LLEWELYN MEGGS & JAEDON LAW

## YARDIE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATIONISTS LTD.

### Tell us about your business.

Yardie Environmental Conservationists Ltd. (YEC) is an environmental company that was formed and registered in June 2013 to conduct conservation tours, environmental education activities in schools, SCUBA training, dive excursions and environmental consultancies, particularly in the marine domain.

We are both marine biologists and conservationists with over a combined 14 years experience in protected area management, coordinating and administering environmental tours, seabird conservation, fisheries management, and education and awareness in high schools and communities. YEC Ltd. projects all have strong components for education, community building, alternative income generation, or conservation, hence our motto "Discover, Educate, Conserve".

### Why did you decide to join the Branson Centre's accelerator programme?

For a couple of years now we have been looking for an investor with the right fit for us, but have not been able to find one that accepts the value of our business and that we feel has our best interest at heart. We heard about Branson Centre through a friend and liked the idea of an actual programme that would assist us in overcoming our shortfalls, advise us how to grow, and teach us about business.

Branson Centre is reputable and also, through the blue economy programme, is aligned with what we are trying to accomplish - business + environmental conservation + education and awareness.



“ YEC Ltd. projects all have strong components for education, community building, alternative income generation, or conservation, hence our motto “Discover, Educate, Conserve”. ”

## **Tell us a little about your background and where your passion for business began?**

As marine biologists, we have very limited business backgrounds. We were employed to an international NGO and our project was terminated without warning. Within days we were without a job. From time to time we dabbled in providing field trips to school children and decided to provide this service as well as other services on a more long term basis. The intention was to have a business that would allow us to not be dependent on others for our livelihoods.

## **What is the most important thing that running a business has taught you?**

It is all on you. Your business is your baby and nothing happens unless you have the energy and the drive to see it through to completion. Having your business is liberating in the sense that the sky's the limit and you need not worry about red tape and people holding you back because they don't see your vision or the possibilities that exist.

## **How does your business benefit the wider community and the environment?**

The business is centred around recreational activities taking place in the marine environment with a significant focus on environmental awareness and education. We teach SCUBA diving and take people on tours and excursions while highlighting man's impact on the marine ecosystems. As marine biologists, we also do marine-based consultancies that range from Ecological Surveys, Conservation Education and Awareness and Marine Protected Area Management.

Our recreational arm is based in Port Royal, which is off the beaten path, so to speak, and has not benefited from growth and development as other communities in Kingston and St. Andrew have. As it is, our activities provide employment to persons in the area, and can provide more with the growth of the business that is expected.

## **What does the future hold for your business?**

I would love for our services to be in demand every day - to be the number one recreational hotspot in the corporate area, and that place that locals and foreigners think of when they want to dive, fish, kayak or just take a tour on the sea.

“

Having your business is liberating in the sense that the sky's the limit and you need not worry about red tape and people holding you back because they don't see your vision or the possibilities that exist.

”

# MICHELLE SMITH

## CHOCOLATE DREAMS

### Tell us about your company.

I founded Chocolate Dreams Ltd. when I recognised that Jamaica was home to some of the best cocoa in the world.

Supported by family and friends, I started the company from humble beginnings in 2004 out of a tiny 2-bedroom apartment in Kingston.

Since 2004, Chocolate Dreams has moved to its own factory/retail space which began with only 800 square feet of space, and increased to 1700 square feet in 2015 with 2 additional retail locations. Over the past 12 years, the company has specialised in making delightful, specialty handcrafted pralines and truffles, as well as baked chocolate desserts.

“ Branson Centre has opened my eyes to the intense work required for scaling up the business. ”

Chocolate Dreams produces over 88 handmade creations of Jamaican flavours with many different types of chocolate, satisfying our customers' 'sweet tooth' with rich, chocolaty products. Chocoholics come from far and wide to taste our chocolates. My vision is to create smiles by reaching out to millions of people so that they may experience the flavours of Jamaica blended with chocolate.

### Why did you decide to work with the Branson Centre, and how has the Centre helped you along your journey?

We have been trying to scale up the company since 2015, and it has been a herculean task. There have been many programmes, but Branson Centre came after chatting with some friends from cohort 1 who encouraged me to



apply. Branson Centre has opened my eyes to the intense work required for scaling up the business. The Centre is very well connected within the Jamaican landscape.

### What does the future hold for your company?

I am looking for a space to have a retail/factory location to increase my revenue enough to take the company into an IPO.

# JOELLE SMITH

## IF WALLS COULD TALK



### **How did you hear about the Branson Centre and why did you decide to join its accelerator programme?**

I heard about the Branson Centre through a past cohort member, Darren Peart. I then met Lisandra and we immediately became a member of the Branson family. I was contracted to manage the Branson Centre relocation project to Kingston, and collaborated with the Virgin Holidays design team remotely on the design.

Having worked with Branson on other business development initiatives, the accelerator program was a clear choice when I decided to scale my business.

### **What is the most important thing that running a business has taught you?**

The value of running a customer centric operation, and also the value of managing your cash flow well. Running a business is challenging, but I believe that mastery of these two areas can determine the success of your business. I also believe that the people you choose to have on your team are critical to the ease with which you achieve this success.

### **How does your business benefit the wider community and the environment?**

IWCT employs tradesmen across various geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. We also ensure that we repurpose items/materials wherever possible in our projects.

### **What does the future hold for your business?**

As the way people interact with their environment and how they access information and services changes, we want to ensure that we are one step ahead. By incorporating a digital method of designing spaces into our portfolio, we are able to meet the needs of our modern customers, and scale our business.

### **Tell us about your company.**

If Walls Could Talk is in the business of transformation. We have completed over 100 projects encompassing residential and commercial design, renovations, as well as event design and execution. Great design is an art that infuses creativity, aesthetics and functionality.

I am not only the managing director, I am the lead designer. I have over seven years of experience working in the interior design and event decor industry, and always had a passion for creating spaces that are both beautiful and functional. As a result, I have been honoured with recognition for my work in local publications including Jamaica Observer, Places & Spaces Magazine as well as Start Social Magazine. I have also been awarded The Best of Houzz Service Award.

If Walls Could Talk aims to offer great design in every project we undertake. The joy we experience is in the transformation of not only the space, but the lives we touch with every project.

# ANN MARIE WALTER-ALLEN, DAVID ALLEN & UNDEL WILLIAMS INFO EXCHANGE



“  
The outlook is bright. We have two new service offerings coming down the pipeline that should significantly contribute to the exponential growth that we are looking for.”

## Tell us about your company.

Info Exchange is one of Jamaica’s first, and leading, Cloud Services Providers. Today we specialise in Software-as-a-Service and Infrastructure-as-a-Service. Our client base of approximately 100 corporate companies represents all industries within Jamaica’s productive sector.

Our focus is on utilising internet technologies to create and deliver integrated business solutions that achieve the desired business outcomes for our clients. The ability to perform in-depth business analysis and develop database-intensive, web-based applications is commonplace within the organisation.

Our holistic approach to formulating solutions, pulling on our extensive experience in software development, information systems and cloud application services, have earned us the reputation as one of the most experienced and trusted IT consultants in Jamaica. We are driven to find the right solution for our clients, helping them along their digital transformation journey, showing them how to make their business more agile and responsive as the market changes.

## Why did you decide to work with the Branson Centre?

A senior member of staff saw that Branson Centre was helping more established companies and suggested that we look into it. We decided to go into it, primarily for the advising component of the programme.

The programme forced us to look more closely at our company, so we left with intimate knowledge of the value of our company, as well as the gaps in our organisation and how to fill them.

## What does the future hold for your company?

The outlook is bright. We have two new service offerings coming down the pipeline that should significantly contribute to the exponential growth that we are looking for. We are filling some key positions to bridge some gaps that were identified. We continue to actively look for funding to enable us to transition more quickly through the growth phase that we are presently experiencing.

# JANELLE PANTRY SPACES LTD.



## **Tell us about your company.**

Spaces is a lifestyle furniture and home decor store helping clients create the home of their dreams and the house they want to come home to.

Since opening its doors in November 2007, the company has made significant strides in impacting the Jamaican home decor and furniture market by creating a complete home furnishings solutions center.

From selling a small array of accessories in 2007, the business has fast expanded to hundreds of products from around the world. In 2012, expanding on the style and quality that Spaces had become synonymous for, the store entered the home furniture market offering home furnishings of elegance and exceptional craftsmanship. From custom upholstered sofas and chairs to occasional tables, dining room and bedroom sets, Spaces brings classic design to the comforts of home. In 2015, the success of our home furniture business led us to create our own locally made and designed line of furniture, The Gallery Line by Spaces.

As we enter our 12th year of business, we continue to innovate and introduce new products and services. The company now not only sells an array of home furnishing products through its brick and mortar location, but also via its ecommerce site, and also offers interior decorating services.

## **Why did you decide to work with the Branson Centre, and how has the Centre helped you along your journey?**

Although I had several years of business experience when I joined the Branson Centre, I found it critical to see my business break the MSMEs ceiling. I wanted to improve operational efficiencies and potentially explore the option of private investment in order to scale Spaces exponentially, as opposed to the organic growth we had experienced over the years.

## **What does the future hold for your company?**

Since enrolling at the Branson Centre, I've had a whole new outlook on how I approach business. Armed with new skill sets to effectively run Spaces and lead my team, the outlook for 2020 is looking great. I'm currently working on refining my investor pitch, while simultaneously updating my business plan to reflect the new revenue streams that we will be aggressively targeting for 2020 and beyond.

# DILCIA BENT-BULLI

## ALLTECHBIZ CONCEPTS & VISION LTD.

### Tell us about your company.

ALLTECHBUZZ Concepts & Vision (AllTechBiZ) helps our business clients make better use of technology by putting the human touch into every solution. We are the tiny secret sauce helping many corporate giants to grow and flourish!

AllTechBiZ is a cutting edge, full service information technology consulting firm, which was created to help enterprises of various sizes and at various stages of technology immersion, efficiently fuse information technology into other business areas in order to profitably transform and optimise their strategic business objectives. We specialise in providing interconnected solutions such as enterprise resource planning software, accounting and finance, project management, business intelligence and customer relationship management (CRM) as well as a few bespoke solutions. We back our products with superb consulting and advisory services delivered by a highly skilled and professional team.

Our approach is unusual and we strive to bridge the gaps usually left when employing technology, thereby enabling smooth and more fulsome adaptation of technological solutions among business stakeholders. We are proud and dynamic “techies” who are passionate about helping our clients succeed in their businesses!

### Why did you decide to work with the Branson Centre, and how has the Centre helped you along your journey?

AllTechBiZ was established in June 2013 and we performed well each subsequent year, showing modest organic growth. However, I was itching to have significant growth and be able to scale up to properly manage this. Branson Centre has an excellent reputation for helping entrepreneurs who are looking to “springboard” their growth and development, so I felt it would be a lucrative partnership. Furthermore, I knew a few people who had worked with the Centre, and they provided confirming feedback.

Branson Centre has aided me on my journey by helping me understand what investors are looking for, how to be properly prepared for seeking



investment and how to stand a better chance of getting funding. The programme has also helped me to ensure I have the necessary framework in place to make the most effective use of the growth when it comes.

### How is your business benefiting the community?

AllTechBiz is benefitting the traditionally dormitory community of Portmore primarily by providing awesome jobs in the area. We are saving team members from the laborious chore of travelling back and forth to the nearby Kingston city every day; wasting valuable energy, time, petrol and toll. Helping them to realise their full potential and exposing them to the best international standards. Portmore is said to have the largest number of tertiary educated persons per capita in the entire English-speaking Caribbean, so why not respond to their growing needs by providing much needed high-skilled employment? We have been so successful at growing and developing people that our employees are sought-after all over the world.

We also support local schools and charities especially when it provides an opportunity to ignite the technological passion and highlight the global possibilities the industry offers to our youngest and most vulnerable in society. We are currently building a new programme which will see us starting to help our fellow community residents earlier in the educational cycle by benefiting schools at the basic and infant levels, starting next quarter with a pilot slated for a basic school in Greater Portmore.

# BRANSON CENTRE SUPPORTS DBJ IGNITE ENTREPRENEURS



This year, seven companies prepared by Branson Centre were awarded grants from the Development Bank of Jamaica's (DBJ) IGNITE programme - which represents the largest grant pool for the second installment of the project.

The IGNITE grant programme is set up to aid the accelerated growth of a group of innovative ventures by micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). IGNITE is specifically geared towards funding projects with high levels of innovation that may otherwise not be funded. The programme will last for a period of 18 months, between January 2019 and July 2020 - with an additional year of monitoring. Selected businesses will be introducing new products and services within the Jamaican and overseas markets.

DBJ awards top performing businesses in the programme and grants are channeled through business service intermediaries such as Branson

Centre. "This is our second time partnering with DBJ for the IGNITE grant programme and we are happy to support its expansion," said Branson Centre Entrepreneur Programme Director, Dmitri Dawkins. Programme requirements ensure that entrepreneurs integrate better business practices through governance, business training and compliance.

Branson Centre's high-touch preparation and vetting process involves reviewing initial applications, providing feedback for improvements, and preparing entrepreneurs with the best alignment to the programme. Branson Centre negotiates with funding partners like DBJ to get capital for projects.

# SUPPORTING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM THROUGH MENTORSHIP



## MENTORS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Mentors play a vital role in supporting entrepreneurs, and also provide incredible depth and breadth to our programme. By sharing experiences and lessons-learned, they help guide our entrepreneurs on their entrepreneurial journey.

While our stellar scaleup entrepreneurs are talented and brimming with potential, through interaction with their mentors, they are exposed to international perspectives and years of industry experience. On the flip side, mentors also benefit from these relationships too. They gain insight into new market trends and the trailblazing innovation of their mentees. The connection is always a win-win.



**MEET A FEW OF OUR  
EXTRAORDINARY**  
*Mentors*

# CHRISTINE GISCOMBE



**Christine Giscombe - Motivational Speaker, Mentor for teenage girls, Coach for women in business, and the founder of Born to Excel Ltd.**

**Tell us about yourself. How did you start your entrepreneurial journey?**

I am a mentor, coach and public speaker. I mentor young ladies and I coach women in business. I have worked in the legal profession of over 25 years. I have always possessed a passion for empowering women of all ages to recognise their skills and talents, and use them to add value to themselves and others.

My entrepreneurial journey began approximately five years ago after I engaged mentors and professional coaches to help me to understand how best to utilise my knowledge, experience and skills and to see the bigger picture of business development. I was able to package my knowledge and experience and brand and market my skills to achieve things I never dreamed possible.

I now use those skills to inspire others, equip them with the right tools, and empower them to go on and lead with confidence. I have always said, sometimes it takes another person to see the greatness inside of you before you see it yourself.

**What is your most memorable moment as a mentor with Branson Centre?**

As a mentor that resides in the UK, my greatest memorable moment was being a guest at the Branson Centre's first ever Fireside Chat held at the US Embassy in Jamaica earlier this year.

**A good mentor will get the mentee to do the things they do not want to do, to get to the place they want to be!**

**What is your biggest takeaway that you've had as a mentor?**

I have learnt as a mentor that it is not always the behaviour on the outside that reveals the mentee on the inside. Core beliefs play a huge part in making a vision a reality!

It is a journey of trust where both mentor and mentee have to learn to trust each other, and trust the journey. With perseverance, commitment and focus this will always deliver positive results.

**What advice would you give other mentors to maximise their experience?**

It is a rewarding journey of learning for both mentor and mentee. It will reveal the character of both. No experience that the mentor has gone through is ever wasted in the journey of mentoring. Always remain the encourager and be solution-focused, which enables the mentee to see that 90% of the time, the solution lies within them.

A good mentor will get the mentee to do the things they do not want to do, to get to the place they want to be!

# DERRICK PRYCE

**Derrick Pryce - Owner of custom software development company, Ventra**

**Tell us about yourself. How did you start your entrepreneurial journey?**

I was born and raised in Canada. My parents are Jamaican, so working with the Branson Centre gave me the opportunity to give back and work with an organisation based in the Caribbean. My entrepreneurial journey started with my very first passion - music. I had always been into music as a young child, initially playing the piano. I eventually gained interest in producing music myself. That led me to start my own music production



company about 15 years ago called Kebomusic. I still run the company today, writing and collaborating with artists, as well as releasing my own music. At the same time, I had always been interested in computers and technology. Given my technological skills, working in technology and the demand for software solutions, exploring software-based technology ventures seemed like the next logical step.

**What is your most memorable moment as a mentor with Branson Centre?**

My most memorable moment was not a moment, but an experience throughout the programme. What is most memorable was connecting with other like-minded professionals who were also mentors in the programme. Everybody was eager to share their knowledge and experience that they had gained within their industries with the entrepreneur that we were working with. These are connections that I hope to carry on into the future.

**What is your biggest takeaway that you've had as a mentor?**

My biggest takeaway is that no matter what stage of business that somebody is in, there is always an opportunity to learn and improve. Others have made mistakes already, so hopefully entrepreneurs in the programme don't have to make them again. Starting and running a business is hard work. It takes tenacity and perseverance to work through challenges that will ultimately make your business succeed.

**What advice would you give other mentors to maximise their experience?**

I would suggest that mentors take the lead and set the pace of the mentor-mentee engagement. This involves setting the frequency of meetings, asking for information, etc. Establishing this at the beginning will help things run more smoothly throughout the term.

# KATRINA JAGIC

**Katarina Jagic - Business Consultant, Certified EU Project Manager, and Mentor Volunteer**

## **What is your most memorable moment as a mentor with Branson Centre?**

Expecting a match was always an exciting time for me, but an email where I get information on my mentee is a great and joyful moment. It brings questions, but it also brings happiness to be able to share, to advise, and to see my mentee's success.

I am so proud to be a mentor at Branson Centre Caribbean. My mentee is Adrian Lopez - an extraordinary person who achieved amazing results seeking for new developments. I believe that together with other members of the team we will achieve what Adrian dreams about!

## **What is the most important aspect of mentorship?**

My biggest takeaway that I've had as a mentor is each step forward towards the success of my mentee. It brings me back in my moments with my mentors. They were always around whenever I needed information or support. I knew I could count on them. If they were not able to help, they would connect me to the right person.

So, being available when one needs you is the most important moment for a mentee.

## **What words of advice can you give to other mentors based on all your years of experience?**

Mentors can maximise an experience only by learning all the time from various other mentors and entrepreneurs.

A mentor is a key person in the life of a would-be-entrepreneur, a startup, or a scaleup. We all always need mentors. Just look at your everyday life, and how many times we ask our parents and children for advice! Entrepreneurs are fragile people - scared of failure, unsure what to do and how to do it, and who to tell all their dreams...

A mentor is someone who believes that success is possible; that failure is a healthy part of growing - and that it's an experiment that will finally succeed. And, that entrepreneurship is the most creative and fun place to be where you see your dreams come true and make other people's lives better.



“

**A mentor is someone who believes that success is possible; that failure is a healthy part of growing - and that it's an experiment that will finally succeed.**

”



**DEVELOPMENT &  
COMMUNICATIONS**  
*Report*

# EXPANDING OUR REACH, POSITIONING FOR GROWTH

## PARTNERSHIPS

No man is an island. We are clear that in order to continue our mission, we need to put a spotlight on the work that we are doing. As such, we collaborated with some amazing partners to support our reach.

### US Embassy

Alongside the US Embassy we executed *Journeys to Scale*, which was a series of fireside chats. This series of three events examined critically important areas of entrepreneurship in the Caribbean, including mentorship, artificial intelligence, and strategic expansion into US markets.



### JMMB

We continued to work with our partners strategically in order to tap into our target market of high potential scaleup entrepreneurs. When JMMB Bank joined forces with We Inspire Women to host 40 high potential women entrepreneurs for a micro, small and medium-sized business seminar, we introduced our virtual training platform to this growing segment of our target market.

### NCB

At key junctures our partners also played important roles in programming. Tracey-Ann Spence of NCB presented at one of our training sessions, giving our entrepreneurs important insight in investment readiness and how to pitch for investment deals.

### Virgin

We continued to leverage our relationship with our parent company's media and PR capabilities. As a part of our repositioning strategy, we highlighted the depth of expertise in our arsenal to support small and medium sized companies.

## COMMUNICATIONS

As we continue to position Jamaica and the Caribbean as leaders in the entrepreneurial space, we have embarked on a global PR strategy. This resulted in our brand being represented on high-profile podcasts, panels and international conferences.

This year our CEO, Lisandra Rickards participated in several key conferences across the globe.

### International Startup Conference, Costa Rica

In August, Lisandra was the keynote presenter at the International Startup Conference in Costa Rica, where she made connections for greater collaboration with the region, and shared about the Centre's successful model for business acceleration.

### UNWTO Conferences

In May, Lisandra presented at the UNWTO Gastronomy Conference in Spain, and supported design of the pitch event at the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association Conference in Miami in June. UNWTO is the World Tourism Organization, which is a United Nations Specialized Agency.

# DEVELOPMENT

Our incredible partners include Virgin Holidays, Virgin Unite, NCB Group, PROVEN Investment Limited, JMMB Group, Grace Kennedy, Norbrook Equity, PanJam and Greystone Capital. With these organisations on board, we are able to eliminate obstacles within the ecosystem and help our entrepreneurs overcome barriers in accessing the funding and resources they need to scale.

## **New York Activations**

Lisandra and I visited New York City for strategic networking with key players in the entrepreneurial space, as well as potential partners.

## **Virgin Unite 15th Anniversary**

While in NYC, one of the major events we attended was Virgin Unite's 15th anniversary celebration, hosted by Branson Centre's founder Richard Branson and Virgin Unite President Jean Oelwang.

## **Branson Centre Toast Event**

We also hosted our own Branson Centre event - a private cocktail party that brought together founders, investors, philanthropists and business leaders from the New York community.

## **London Connections**

In late 2019, Lisanda and I also visited London to make connections with influencers and decision-makers, creating wider, global exposure for the Centre's work.

2019 has been another great year at the Branson Centre, and I look forward to assuming my new role as CEO in 2020!



**Lauri-Ann Ainsworth**  
Development & Communications Director

“

**2019 has been another great year at the Branson Centre, and I look forward to assuming my new role as CEO in 2020!**

”

# JMMB GROUP & BRANSON CENTRE JOIN FORCES TO PROVIDE TRAINING FOR SMES



JMMB Group and Branson Centre inked a year-long agreement in January 2019, that gave select JMMB Group small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) clients access to training resources and other virtual learning opportunities provided by Branson Centre.

Through this agreement, JMMB Group sought to bridge the gap between financial institutions and entrepreneurship, helping to generate growth and development in the region.

Over the year, JMMB Group identified some 150 SME clients that they determined could benefit from learning opportunities offered by Branson Centre. The entrepreneurs participated in the Centre's workshops at a discounted price, and received online training in a broad cross-section of areas, including pitch coaching, business

plan development, and vision development. Additionally, mentorship and investment readiness were also umbrella activities provided to help the entrepreneurs bolster their success.

As a preferred partner, JMMB Group also participated alongside other investors in our deal room to get a firsthand understanding of the companies' business models. This gave them the opportunity to determine if there are any businesses that JMMB Group could partner with, and explore investment opportunities – whether through debt or equity.



## OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE WORKSHOP HOSTED WITH NCB

In April, we partnered with the National Commercial Bank (NCB) to host the *Operational Excellence* workshop at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel facilitated by Jorge C. Gonzalez Rico, Supply Chain Senior Director of J. Wray & Nephew Limited.

This was the first of two specialised workshops for the year open to the public from Branson Centre’s scaleup accelerator programme. The half-day workshop covered topics which showed small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) how to achieve superior performance through continuous process improvement, in order to comprehensively satisfy the needs of both internal and external customers.

“We are always looking for opportunities to help our customers grow and solve problems, and there is no doubt that our partnership with Branson Centre has done that. The Jamaican economy is sustained by entrepreneurs and our investment in programmes like these are important in helping businesses reach their full earning potential,” said Gregory Peart, Sales Manager at NCB.

“Small interactive workshops like these are value-filled but costly to set up, which is why we’re happy that NCB is invested in the development of SMEs through our partnership, making this all possible.” said Dmitri Dawkins, Branson Centre’s Entrepreneur Programme Director.





## U.S. EMBASSY KINGSTON & BRANSON CENTRE CHART A JOURNEY TO SCALE

This year, the U.S. Embassy Kingston’s Public Affairs Section and Branson Centre inked an agreement to host specialised fireside chats throughout the year under the theme *Journeys to Scale*.

The memorandum of understanding was signed in June at the Robeson American Center between Branson Centre’s CEO Lisandra Rickards and U.S. Embassy Kingston’s Counselor for Public Affairs, Jeremiah Knight. The fireside chats were designed to bring together business leaders, entrepreneurs, investors and other specialists to discuss important issues affecting entrepreneurship in the region. It also supports the continuous effort to expand the growth pipeline for entrepreneurs across the island through knowledge sharing.

“Promoting a robust Jamaican economy is a common area of interest for both organisations,” said Knight. “Our goal is to assist local entrepreneurs in scaling up their businesses by

promoting the exchange of ideas and information with key business leaders in Jamaica and the U.S. The building of knowledge capital will allow local entrepreneurs to position themselves to maximise bilateral trade relations with the U.S.”

“Branson Centre and the U.S. Embassy Kingston want to highlight the impact and importance of entrepreneurship, exponential thinking, and partnerships on building a dynamic Caribbean economy,” Rickards added. “These fireside chats will bring a fresh perspective to the entrepreneurial and investment community through a meeting of the minds with experts in scaling small and growing businesses.”

“ Branson Centre and the U.S. Embassy Kingston want to highlight the impact and importance of entrepreneurship, exponential thinking, and partnerships on building a dynamic Caribbean economy. ”

# BRANSON VIRTUAL PLATFORM SHARED WITH MSMEs AT JMMB BANK & WE INSPIRE SEMINAR

When JMMB Bank joined forces with We Inspire Women to host 40 entrepreneurs for a micro, small and medium-sized business seminar, Branson Centre was enlisted to share our virtual training platform with the handpicked, high potential group.

The entrepreneurs were drawn from a range of industries, and were mostly female. Held at the EXIM Bank, the participants walked away with insight about opportunities in partnering for growth, as well as an introduction to the Centre's virtual training platform, and practical advice about scaling one's business to maximise efficiencies and reap the synergies that this provides.

The invitation-only event was open to women business owners and their partners who were registered for the We Inspire series of events.

During the event, Branson Centre's former Programme Development Manager, Clare Bailey, shared the benefits afforded by the partnership established with JMMB Bank and the Branson Centre, through its online education.

The virtual training platform, she explained, is currently only available through such partnership agreements. However, as a result of the collaboration between the two organisations, selected participants would have the opportunity to access the online training curriculum, free of cost, in addition to benefiting from other courses offered by the Branson Centre. Those entrepreneurs enrolled in the programme are able to access training on a broad cross-section of areas that can potentially benefit their businesses and capacity building, including: pitch coaching; business plan development, and vision development.

Bailey painted a clear picture of the value that the Branson online platform affords these budding entrepreneurs, noting that by participating in the online training platform as business owners, they would have a step-by-step guide to assist in validating their business ideas, identifying and addressing any business gaps, and developing key tools for accelerating their companies namely: a business plan and pitch deck.





## EXPANDING OUR NETWORK IN NEW YORK

CEO, Lisandra Rickards, and Development & Communications Director, Lauri-Ann Ainsworth, made a trip to New York City in September where they connected with the business and philanthropic communities, and took part in a series of events to expand the Centre's network and promote the work it does in the region.

One of the major events the duo attended was Virgin Unite's 15th anniversary celebration, hosted by Branson Centre's founder Richard Branson and Virgin Unite President Jean Oelwang. Branson Centre Board members Lisa Lake, Paula Kerr-Jarrett Wegman, Chris Williams, and Mark McIntosh were also present for the festivities.

Branson Centre also hosted its own event - a private cocktail party that brought together founders, investors, philanthropists and business leaders from the New York community.

Paula Kerr-Jarrett Wegman and Andrea Barron, a longtime supporter of the Centre, both delivered opening remarks, warmly welcoming Lisandra and Lauri-Ann to New York.

The highlight of the evening was a presentation Lisandra gave on her journey with the organisation and the impact its entrepreneurs have had on the economy.

The duo participated in several other meetings in the city before returning to Jamaica.



**SCREW IT,**  
*Let's do it*

# OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Christopher Williams**  
Chairman



**Derek Gannon**  
Director



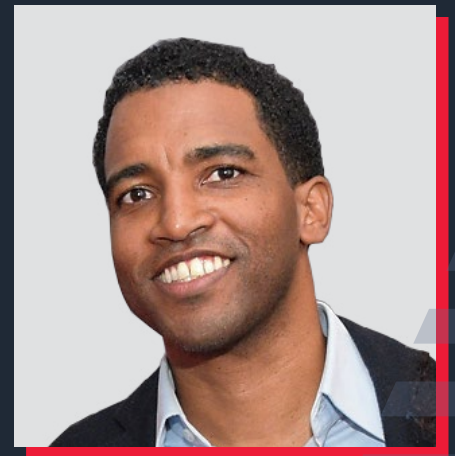
**Pauline Wilson**  
Director



**Lisa Lake**  
Director



**Paula Kerr-Jarrett**  
Director



**Mark McIntosh**  
Director

# OUR TEAM



**Lisandra Rickards**  
**Chief Entrepreneurship Officer**

Lisandra spearheaded the Centre's strategy to support growth stage entrepreneurs towards investment, raised funding for the expansion of the Centre's mission, and relocated its headquarters from Montego Bay to the business hub of Kingston. She holds an MBA with Honors from Harvard Business School.



**Lauri-Ann Ainsworth**  
**Development & Communications Director**

Lauri-Ann carries with her years of experience in developing the Caribbean's entrepreneurial landscape. Having coached and mentored startups, she has developed a strong passion for supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem through visionary leadership skills around development, partnerships, fundraising and communications. She is a certified project manager and a graduate of the University of Toronto.



**Dmitri Dawkins**  
**Entrepreneur Programme Director**

Dmitri has co-led entrepreneurship initiatives, and has significant experience in business process reengineering and product development. He is highly innovative with a talent for pairing technology with processes to quickly identify and analyse problems and create holistic solutions in order to deliver value to our entrepreneurs.



**Keisha Hudson**  
**Operations Manager**

Keisha brings to the Branson Centre 15 years of experience in the fields of information technology, accounting and operations management. She has worked in the technology, insurance and manufacturing industries, giving her a well-rounded perspective on the challenges faced in business today. She holds a BSc in Computing from the University of Technology & an MBA in General Management from The Mona School of Business.



**Gizelle Riley**  
**Development & Communications Manager**

Gizelle is a media and marketing communications professional with a history of launching successful campaigns across diverse industries. She graduated at the top of her class with a Bachelor of Arts in media and communications from the International University of the Caribbean. She holds several certifications in digital marketing and is passionate about helping entrepreneurs build memorable brands.



**Tashaine Morrison**  
**Programme Development Manager**

Tashaine is a project management specialist with more than 5 years of experience under her belt managing regional and international projects for public and private sector firms. Her main focus is incorporating innovative practices in strategic management to join the “work smarter” bandwagon. She is currently enrolled in a Global MBA programme with the University of London, specialising in Entrepreneurship and Innovation.



**Coronia Taylor**  
**Operations Coordinator**

Coronia worked in the shipping industry as an accounting clerk, and within two years she was promoted to logistics supervisor. She is a graduate of the University of Technology, with a Bachelor’s Degree in accounting. Her philosophy is: “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” She also believes that the road to success is hard work and determination.



**Asia Williams**  
**Blue Economy Specialist**

Asia is passionate about climate and the impact it is having on the environment. She has experience as an environmental consultant and recently moved to Jamaica from the U.K. where she supported the Climate Change Division’s communication activities. Asia spends her weekends ocean diving and volunteering with the marine parks.

*Rawson*

---

CENTRE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

---

CARIBBEAN

---