

Meghan McCormick '03

CEO & Cofounder, Dare to Innovate



Meghan McCormick '03 receives the Holy Child Spirit Award from Madeline Sherry '66 P'01'03.

Holy Child School at

Rosemont alum Meghan McCormick '03 did not waste any time turning Cornelia Connelly's "Actions Not Words" into a way of life. After attending The Episcopal Academy, then Georgetown University, Meghan served with the Peace Corps in Guinea. She now is the CEO and Co-Founder of Dare to Innovate, a non-profit aimed at ending youth unemployment in West Africa through investments in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, and of OZÉ a for-profit

FinTech company equipping youth with the tools to initiate and sustain entrepreneurship.

While working at her Peace Corps assignment teaching entrepreneurship courses and creating an e-reader library and business coaching films, Meghan recognized that West African youth needed particular tools not only to innovate, but also to maintain the companies they were establishing. One day while running, she envisioned Dare to Innovate and immediately went home and sketched out a plan. The non-profit, however, would never have dawned on Meghan without her experiences working with youth in an entrepreneurial capacity.

The outcomes of Dare to Innovate speak for themselves. Over 8,000 youth have been trained in entrepreneurship and almost \$500,000 in seed capital has been invested in businesses started by youth. Meghan now lives in Ghana full-time and manages OZÉ, one of the organization's for-profit subsidiaries. OZÉ is a technology platform that assists over 10,000 small business owners with digital record keeping and enables them to receive personal feedback on recommendations and areas for growth within their businesses.

One of the many success stories of Dare to Innovate is that of youth entrepreneurial fellow Darius whose tutoring center grew from a small room in his uncle's house to a private school that boasts over 1,000 students and a large wait list. Darius is now the largest employer in his town.

Meghan credits the uniqueness of Holy Child for providing her with perspective and for supporting some of her very first social change initiatives. "Holy Child's impact on me was twofold. The service orientation of Holy Child meant that we were constantly being exposed to people who had different backgrounds than we had. We were always looking at the commonalities and not the differences and seeing them as our peers. That kind of upbringing

and education make it easier to work in places where my experiences are very, very different from the experiences of the people I work with and for," said Meghan. "The other part is that my teachers and peers all really believed in me and went along with my crazy ideas. I ran a non-profit carnival for years while I was at Holy Child called the 'AIDS Alive Carnival,' and every single classmate volunteered at it, which you wouldn't get at a 'normal' school."

Dare to Innovate continues to grow under Meghan's leadership. Her team is now experimenting with their new social franchising model in order to make entrepreneurship feasible for more people. "Our social franchising model allows individuals to have the autonomy to own their own business and benefit from Dare to Innovate's purchasing power and know-how so they can actually plug into the supply chain of a group of businesses that Dare to Innovate manages. We're also doing urban agriculture where we provide the training and access to that market, but the youth can own individual aquaponics systems. Additionally, we're making paving stones out of recycled plastic." Added Meghan, "It's really exciting because it's something that's really not happening anywhere in the world and so designing a system that makes entrepreneurship accessible in countries like Guinea is something we're really interested in doing." Dare to Innovate is the first and the largest business accelerator in Francophone Africa that Meghan is aware of.

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Meghan recently completed an MPA program at the Harvard Kennedy School and an MBA at MIT's Sloan School of Management, both of which will assist her in her endeavours with Dare to Innovate and OZÉ. In March, Meghan was honored with the 2019 Holy Child Spirit Award by the Society of the Holy Child Jesus for the ways she embodies a Holy Child education. "[Holy Child is] where I first discovered how to turn an idea into a reality. It's where teachers first set a high bar for me while also helping to catapult me over it. It's where every day I walked by a banner that proclaimed, 'Actions Not Words,'" said Meghan at the awards gala. "This motto seeped into me over the decade I spent at Holy Child School at Rosemont and imbued me with a lifelong propensity for action. ✦"