



Rod Blong Sakses



V-LAB
BUSINESS & IDEA INCUBATOR

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INTRODUCTION

V-Lab is a charitable association that was established in 2019 in Port-Vila with the view to promote and support entrepreneurship and innovation in the country.

Working hand-in hand with Yumiwork, Vanuatu's first co-working space which was established concomitantly, V-Lab seeks to improve and strengthen the local business ecosystem to make it more conducive for entrepreneurship, social action and innovation.

As a charitable association, V-Lab is dependent on the financial support it is able to mobilize with its partners. With the support provided, V-Lab designs and implements programs that target different groups, such as returned seasonal workers, students, community leaders, young innovators or social businesses.

Our approach to business management and development has always been to offer, in any program we implement, a mix of training and coaching sessions, as we believe that training on its own is not sufficient to properly and sustainably develop capacities.

Capacity development has always been the cornerstone of our work, and we take a lot of pride in the fact that our training and coaching team is entirely composed of Ni-Vanuatu men and women whom we have trained to offer our beneficiaries the best possible services.

In order to become financially sustainable, and also to be able to reach out to more people, V-Lab started in 2021 two “pay for service facilities”, under which anyone can access learning opportunities by paying a small fee. These facilities are: The Bisnis Nakamal (looking at business management) and the Finens Nakamal (focusing on financial literacy and education). To make sure that these learning opportunities are accessible to anyone, the costs of participation to these nakamal is subsidized by our partners.

In 2022, Recognizing that not every idea can or should materialize into a business, V-Lab started expending the scope of its support to include community groups and non-profit organizations. By doing so, V-Lab moved from a purely “Business incubator” towards a “Business and Idea Incubator”. Under this approach, anyone with an innovative idea or project is now entitled to receive support from V-Lab.

The demand for V-Lab’s services and the interest of international partners is growing rapidly. With a workforce of over 15 people (incl staff and contractors) V-Lab stands ready to develop further its services so that it can support the country to fully unleash the great potential that rests in its people!

FOREWORD

In November 2022, V-Lab will celebrate its 3rd anniversary. It is time for V-Lab to reflect on the work it has been doing during these past 3 years and to document the impact that this work has had on the people that we serve.

Since V-Lab was established in November 2019, more than 150 men and women have gone through our programs and have received support for the establishment and / or development of their business or community organization. Some have been with us for a few weeks, others for a full year. During their time with us, all of them have received access to training, coaching and networking. Some have also benefited from financial support that V-Lab was able to mobilize thanks to our wonderful partners.

BUT ALL THIS FOR WHAT ? Beyond numbers, what has V-Lab achieved since it launched its first program? What has been the impact of these programs on the people that it serves? Being able to respond to these fundamental questions is critical. Yet, measuring the impact of our work is complicated. Complicated

because the 150 people who have gone through one of V-Lab's programs all have different stories and projects and all have benefitted from their time with us in different ways. Complicated also because our work does not only aim at building the business skills of our beneficiaries. It also aims at developing the personal skills (such as confidence, self-esteem, leadership, etc.) that are needed in life, whether in the context of a business, of a job, of a family or of a community. In order to answer the question "what is the impact of our work", we thought that there would be no better way than asking that question directly to the people who have benefited from V-Lab.

This is the purpose of this booklet. 20 of the people who went through our programs were interviewed and asked about their experience with V-Lab with the view to determine how V-Lab has impacted their lives. We recognize that 20 is a small sample compared to the overall number of people that we have served but we feel that, by selecting people who have participated in different programs, and who are at different stages of their personal and professional development, it is quite representative of the results that we have achieved so far.

These 20 stories are the stories of remarkable Ni-Vanuatu men and women who all have shown extraordinary commitment to V-Lab and to their respective projects. I therefore commend them all for their hard-work and dedication and wish them all the best for their journey!

As to you, the readers of this book, I hope that you will feel as inspired as I am upon reading these short stories.

Marc-Antoine Morel
V-Lab President

SUCCESS STORIES

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Junior Pedro

Program:
Social Impact Incubator

Year: 2022

Project: Vanuatu Yumi Wan

My name is Junior Pedro, and I come from the Island of Efate, Erakor Village.

I have been a participant in the Social Impact Incubator Program; a Program funded by the United Nations Development Program(UNDP) aimed at supporting social businesses and community organizations.

I originally came to V-Lab to learn how to restructure an existing association that caters the needs of our community's post-COVID. Before this program, I spent most of my time in the agricultural sector, around North Efate. Apart from handling livestock, I have also engaged in social work with the charitable organization Yumi Wan, distributing relieve supplies during the pandemic. As the pandemic gradually declined, the association needed ideas to improve the wellbeing of the community while meeting the same vision.

I am passionate about helping youths, women and men in communities and work with them in order to develop their skills and capacities. The Social Impact program I participated in helped me to improve my strategies for approaching and understanding the needs of the communities I am working with. One important lesson that I took from the program was the need to avoid procrastination. Before joining the program, procrastinating was taking a lot of my time as making decisions was something difficult for me. By joining the program, I realized the importance of time management and planning, which in return helped me a lot for prioritizing tasks and being on track with my work.

Thanks to the program, the association Yumi Wan was able to mobilize additional resources and develop further community projects and I am now collaborating with V-Lab as a business coach !

“When there is failure, there is room for success”.





Velenie Jacob

Program:
Scaling Frontier Innovation
(SFI)

Year: 2020

Business:
Narara Consulting

I am Velenie Jacob, from the Island of Ambrym. I have participated in the DFAT supported Scaling Frontier Innovation (SFI) aimed at fostering innovation in Vanuatu. The business that I wanted support with was a Money lending business.

Before entering V-Lab's program, I was an employee at Credit-Corp. I always had the mentality like everyone else that being employed with a steady salary is the only way out. However, V-Lab opened new doors through the SFI program by supporting each individuals with self-development: on the formalities of a business, taking things seriously with my business, and encouragements to share more of the things that I learnt with other people.

As a result of the program, I have more confidence with the business decisions I make, and I have an, 'Outside the box' mentality which helps me to develop new ideas. Among the brilliant ideas, I took a major step leaving my full-time job to start a consultancy business which aligns to my passion.

A clear example of V-Lab's success in me is through my Facebook page; as of 2022 I have reached 10,000 followers as I continually educates my viewers on financial literacy.

"V-Lab acted as a stepping stone that broke a lot of barriers for me. I encourage Nivans to step out of their comfort zones if they want to grow.

Build on your personality.

Doesn't matter if you walk, crawl or run, as long as you keep going."



James Rory

Program:
Scaling Frontier Innovation
(SFI)

Year: 2020

Business: Lokol Vibes

My Name is James Rory. I come from Malekula.

I've been engaged in the DFAT supported program Scaling Frontier Innovation, aimed at Fostering innovation. The business I brought to the program was an idea to develop an app to help local artists sell their songs.

Before the program, as a high school dropout, I spent most of my time at home, helping out in doing house chores or babysitting. I had little hope of achieving anything constructive with my life... Fortunately, I was selected to participate and this program which played a huge role in supporting me to identify what I wanted to do and how to get there.

This program has been eye-opening to me personally as it reshaped my mentality. The program helped me in particular to

address one of my key weaknesses: time and task management. Thanks to all the training and coaching sessions that I attended during the program, I am now better equipped to set priorities in order to achieve the visions and goals that I was able to identify. The self-confidence I have managed to develop during the program has helped me to be able to discuss ideas openly and receive feedback from others to further improve my business.

On the business side, the program and V-Lab in general have been particularly helpful in developing my marketing and resources mobilization TRAILFON networking skills. 2 Years after the end of the program, I still have strong ties with V-Lab and very much enjoy all the connecting events that they are organizing.

I now have a business that is licensed as, Lokol Vibes and I am in the process of having the business up and running, with the workflow of the app and business plan already developed.

“Every Problem is an Opportunity”.



Esslyn Aru

Program:
Social Impact Incubator

Year: 2022

Business:
Tropical Coconuts

Hi there, I am Esslyn Aru, I come from the beautiful island of Ambae.

I participated under the Social Impact Incubator Program; a Program funded by United Nations Development Program focused on Social Impact in communities and the society. I have a business in creating local handicraft with coconut resources. So, I brought my business into the program to improve it and to seek new ideas to further grow it.

Before the program, my business was created but was not well recognized to everyone since most of my marketing was centralized (Efate/town). Also, I had little, to almost no networking skills which made advertising my products sometimes quite challenging.

By joining the program, I managed to tackle some of my weaknesses which helped me to become who I am today. Learning the importance of punctuality for instance was one thing that helped me to improve my time management. After understanding how

punctuality is important in a business, it changed my mentality. As a result of this program and of my interaction with V-Lab's coaches. I made the decision to move my business to Tanna Island.

I believe that building my self-confidence was one of my main achievements of the program, and I can say that, it works!

I have also come to find out one of my passions during the program, which is to help people; the confidence I built enabled me to have a voice in the business sector, and also in my personal matters.

“Think Big, Start Small. Take Steps one day at a time and you will get to where you want to go... And never let your self-esteem down”.





Sandrine Aurelie Philemon

Program:
BISNIS NAKAMAL

Year: 2021

Business:
Aelan Construction

My name is Sandrine Aurelie Philemon, I come from the island of Malekula.

I have participated in the Business Nakamal training during 2021. Business Nakamal aims at providing its participants with basic training on business operations and management, which I never had, despite running several businesses !

Before attending the trainings, I had already setup three business: One in construction work, one in Second Hand shop, and one in fishing. The idea is to setup businesses that would cater for the basic needs of my life: clothing, shelter and food. However, I needed assistance to help my business continue in the midst of the Covid crisis.

After discovering V-Labs posts on social media, I joined V-lab's program to help me with knowledge on how to further run my 3 ongoing businesses. It can be very challenging operating 3 different

business industries simultaneously, but it was a risk I chose boldly. It was so inspiring to have V-Lab's coaches and trainers share their experiences which I can relate and learn from, and to have them listen eagerly to my challenges and provide supportive feedback.

One of the key skill that I feel I have improved through this training is to be able to firmly and confidently make decisions in my business. I was bombarded with negativity all the time with the decisions I took concerning my businesses, but with the support received from coaching and training, it helped me to take on more educated risks that eventually paid off.

I have just opened a second hand branch and on the hunt to pursuing other potential business ideas.

Philipians 4:13

“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength”.





Dalida Borlasa

Program:
Pawarem Manples
Cohort 2

Year: 2021 - 2022

Business: YumiUp

My name is Dalida Borlasa, I come from Malekula, I am married and I have two sons.

I joined the "Pawarem Manples" program in 2021.

Before joining V-Lab, I was part of a group of women who were sewing products for 300 Coconut Bag. From there I developed an idea to start a business for myself by recycling waste materials, and that was the idea that brought me to V-Lab.

My life before the program was very unorganized and all-over-the-place. I had a full-time job and had already established my small business, but I was facing difficulties managing my time. I had the passion to be an entrepreneur but I had no sense of direction or a plan to follow through.

I am a very talkative person. I like thinking outside of the box and being creative. With everything I create, I always just let my imagination to lead me and it is what keeps the innovation inside of me alive. I had a very different mentality and behaviour before joining the program which made me appreciate the journey with V-Lab all the more. For me, I am always 'right' when it comes to my business matters. I was ignorant to new ideas and never saw the importance of having solid and consistent relations, even with my customers.

My time with V-Lab has made a huge difference, not only for my business but also in my personal life. The main take out for me in the program would be the way in which we were taught to be resilient entrepreneurs; that being an entrepreneur is all about taking risks and making compromises to ensure the longevity of one's business.

The most memorable part of my time with V-lab is spending time with the V-Lab staffs. Ideas are always flowing when we sit together to discuss and when I have a question to ask, they are ready to give me answers. The environment you get at V-Lab is different from what you get elsewhere, everyone is always ready to serve you and it contributed to my accomplishments.

“Create a good relationship with people, to have a good reputation so that you can move forward in all aspects of your life”.



Roy Tinning

Program:
Yumi Growem Vanuatu
Cohort-1

Year: 2021 - 2022

Business: Dog Point Vanilla

My name is Roy Tinning, I am 60 years old and originally from the Island of Ambrym. My passion is dealing with Vanilla and I own a small business called 'Dogpoint Vanilla' where I make mostly vanilla based products.

Before joining the YGV program in 2021, I was a taxi driver. When my taxi broke down, I had to find another way to earn money. At that time, I was growing vanilla but not with the intention to make profit. I joined the Yumi Growem Vanuatu program with no business idea and the program has taught me how to develop ideas and changed my mentality about the way I perceive everything. When I now look at something, I can never just look at it for what it is, but rather what can be made from it and how adding another component can make it even better.

Business management was one of the greatest weaknesses for me as I had no background in business. I was interested to start a business but needed more knowledge on how to manage myself, my business idea, finances etc., and the YGV program provided exactly that for me.

The program allowed for improvements to take place in my life, and one of the greatest improvements would be the shift from a 'working' mentality to generating income for myself. I have come to learn that there are other ways to make money, and that you can make something out of nothing. All you need is an idea and a good utilization of your skills and talents.

My journey with V-Lab has been a very enjoyable one, in a sense that there is accessibility to services within Yumiwork; the free internet for me to research, advice from trainers and coaches and the atmosphere within V-Lab staff provided for me a safe space where I know I can always go to them to get support and help.

Since joining V-Lab, I was given many opportunities to seek support for my small business. From getting exposed through free promotions to being recommended by the V-Lab president to get access to small business grants. So many benefits have also come from my connection with V-Lab and it inspires me to keep moving forward and to keep allowing new ideas to flow ing.

"Thank you V-Lab for the trainings provided that has given me the opportunity to make something for myself. My advice to anyone reading this is to keep digging until you find the gold. Don't stop until you get to the gold".



Losena Bani

Program:
Bisnis Nakamal
Learning Cycle: Seed Haos

Year: 2021

Business:
Online Beauty Shop

I am Losena Bani and I come from the Island of Ambae. I joined V-Lab in 2021 under the Bisnis Nakamal program, Seed Haos learning cycle. I had a full-time job at that time but wanted to start a business on the side to earn some extra money. I had the passion and drive to be an entrepreneur, but I needed a good idea to work with.

The Seed Haos cycle taught me to think outside the box and to look at things from different perspective and not just one in order to find solutions. It pushed me to get out of my comfort zone and take small steps towards the things I want to achieve in life. There was a lot of capacity building activities, and I know that each participants have their own experience of the program, but for me it has shifted my mentality into one that can adapt to changes.

Throughout my short journey with V-Lab, there were a lot of things that have inspired me in the environment that we were in. One of which is seeing other entrepreneurs who have made progress in their journey, such as Velenie Jacobs – her story is a testimony that we can all do something for ourselves. It is a wonderful thing for me to see how V-Lab is supporting locals, and young people especially who are interested to start a business.

When I entered the seed haos learning cycle, my idea was to start an online beauty shop selling beauty products. Since leaving the program, I was able to stay determined with my business idea no matter the challenges I encountered, I remained positive and kept on believing in myself and in my dreams.

My encouragement to the readers is, if you're interested to start something, there is no right or wrong idea. Each of us has a different journey and you just have to keep believing that you can achieve your dreams.

“Challenges will arise but you must never give up. No matter your age, it is never too late to start dreaming, and never too late to achieve your dreams”.



Jack and Mary Kalsrap

Program:	Cohort- 1	Business:
Pawarem Manples	Year: 2020	Mamma's Laef Vanuatu

When my wife and I joined V-Lab, we had already established our business and had initially joined to get more knowledge on Digital Marketing, Business Management, Accounting and Finance and to learn the basic uses of a computer.

Mamma's Laef Vanuatu is a social enterprise that started in 2015. Its objective was to meet the needs of young girls and mothers in rural areas by creating reusable hygienic products to support the health and wellbeing of Ni-Vanuatu women. When we started mamma's laef, we had no idea how to use technology or how to market our idea. Most of the digital skills that we now possess we came to learn during our incubation period and have spent time developing after leaving the program.

I have seen many improvements in my personal life and inside my business. I am a year 6 leaver who has accomplished much with my business idea, thanks to V-Lab.

A memorable event for me would be during a pitching event where they had asked us to prepare PowerPoint presentations and I had to teach myself to use Microsoft power point. That activity has given me confidence and skills that I am still using to this day.

Since leaving the program, my business partner and I have learnt many things that are of great help to us. A few that we can remember are; the importance of keeping records, bookkeeping and digital marketing. When we came to learn of digital marketing, I grew an interest in that area and started building my own knowledge after leaving the program. I have invested time and resources in getting digital equipment's that I am currently using to promote Mamma's Laef.

In 2021, Mamma's Laef Vanuatu was given an award by the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu for Women in Small Medium Enterprises (SME's). That was a big achievement for us in the six years that we have been operating. The path to achieve such an accomplishment is hard and it required a lot of sacrifices. A piece of advice that I had picked up from a training session with Rob McCallister is "Do not regard the business as yours but treat it as a different person to sustain the life of the business and also the community that depends on that business idea".

I have to always keep that in mind when I make decisions for my business, that I have employees working for me who have families depending on them. If I make a decision that can harm the business, then it will affect every one of us.

"Do not regard the business as yours but treat it as a different person to sustain the life of the business and also the community that depends on that business idea"



Max Albert

Program:
Pawarem Manples
Cohort 2

Year: 2021 - 2022

Project:
Ikkana Cancer Society

I am the founder of Ikkana Cancer Society, a charitable organization that promotes cancer awareness and prevention in Vanuatu. What motivates me to do the things that I do is helping others. Seeing mothers get the help and the treatment that they need, it pleases my heart. My mother is my inspiration, she had suffered from breast cancer and her suffering is why I am helping other women today.

I first joined V-Lab in 2021 when I was selected for the second cohort of the Pawarem Manples program. This program, like all the other programs initiated by V-Lab, involved business management training, coaching, mentoring, and networking events.

During my experience with Pawarem Manples, the support I received focused mostly on business and financial management which, at that time, seemed pretty unrelated to what I was doing as head of a charitable association. I did not understand at that time the importance of the things I learnt then. But then, in March of 2022, I was fortunate to get selected for another program with V-Lab called the 'Social Impact

TRIAL FONT

Incubator' which focused this time on social change actors. This program has helped me greatly to incorporate skills and knowledge gained from the first program into my work and also measure the impact of what I am doing.

Before I came to join V-Lab, I had already established Ikkana, but I was making little progress, as I had no knowledge of how to properly run and manage my organization. The programs have made a positive impact in my soft skills and also gave me confidence to move forward with my idea. The influence from the trainings have helped me to work with partners, making reports, meeting their expectations and also securing funds for the organization.

The biggest accomplishment for me would be the exposure that Ikkana now has thanks to V-Lab. I have received support from many individuals, companies and also a lot of growing interest from people everywhere in the work that Ikkana is doing.

My advice for anyone that is interested to start an organization like me is that:

“You have to learn to make decisions on your own, and to enjoy the environment, the people, and the work that you do, and to always believe in yourself”.



Jack Pata

Program:
Social Impact Incubator

Year: 2022

Project:
Youth Empowerment

I first learnt of V-lab from a friend who was part of one of their programs. I had been sharing with him ideas of what I wanted to do and he recommended V-Lab as the only place in town capable of helping me to turn this idea into reality. When the Social Impact Incubator program was launched, V-Lab reached out to me encouraging me to apply.

Before I came to V-lab, I was running small activities with young people in my community at Manples area – who, for the majority of them, had dropped out of school and like me, were unemployed. I was interested to start a community group but I had no clear idea where to start. The initial idea that I came to V-Lab with was to build a youth centre, and ever since, V-Lab has been helping me to move this idea forward, step by step.

Joining the social impact program has made a huge difference in my life. Being part of V-lab's program and eco-system, I can see that my idea is slowly transitioning from paper to reality and it gives me the confidence and the dedication to keep pushing forward. The knowledge shared in the training, the activities, the ideation weekend, even the mentoring and networking events has given me a clear vision of my goals and has given me a sense of direction.

Currently I am working on a project to build a library in my village school on Tanna. I am also fortunate to be part of a second program with V-Lab for the returned seasonal workers. I am a single father, and much of what I do is in hopes that I can create a legacy for my son to carry on. I enjoy what I do and I hope that I can make an impact in the lives of young people that will later bring change to our nation.



“Give without expecting anything in return. That is the quality of a true leader. If we want to change the nation, we have to start with the younger generations”.



Alex George

Program:
Yumi Growem Vanuatu
Cohort - 1

Year: 2021 - 2022

Business: Piggery Farm

My name is Alex George, I am a returned seasonal worker and I own a piggery farm in Mele Village, Efate. I joined the seasonal workers scheme in 2006, and I had been travelling for work until 2020. When I returned, I saw that V-Lab had put out a call of application for the first cohort of the Yumi Growem Vanuatu program and my daughter Robin helped me to apply and I was selected along with 30 other people.

When I came into the program, I had already started building a small pig pen in my backyard and had 3 pigs that I was looking after. My goal in the program was to equip myself with knowledge that will enable me to manage my small business, and to find a different approach to farm my pigs, one that is simple and can generate profit.

From my observation I would say that program has a very unique format, designed to fit the local's needs and I have seen how much progress I have made with my business since leaving the program. Imagine, I have started with from 3 sows, and now the number has

increased to 12, excluding the several dozens of piglets and male pigs that I now own! My coach, has been so helpful in providing me with tips and advice on the practices that I now have in place in my small farm.

The financial support provided in the program is also something that I have greatly benefitted from. Most farmers in our rural areas did not receive a tertiary education and therefore face difficulties accessing loans from banks, or subsidies from the government departments etc. As these processes require complicated forms to be filled out and lots of paper works, this often pushes them away from these opportunities. The YGV program had a great approach, one that combined formal (yet accessible) training and technical assistance in the form of coaching.

This approach has been so helpful and I am so thankful for all the support I had received!



*“If you fail to plan,
you are planning to
fail. If you want to
achieve something
you must have
a plan to work”
towards it”.*



Jochebeth Williams

Program:
Yumi Growem Vanuatu
Cohort- 1

Year: 2021 - 2022

Business:
Fanaugna's Creation

My Name is Jochebeth Nauni and I am from the island of Futuna and Ambae. I operate my small business with my mother who is also my business partner, Albertine Nauni.

We participated in 2021 in the Yumi Growem Vanuatu (YGV) Program 1; a program funded by New Zealand and Australia aimed at supporting the economic reintegration of seasonal worker through entrepreneurship.

Our business focuses on Upcycling through using waste products and transforming them into handicrafts.

Before the program, we handmade these crafts at home very much as a hobby. We had no business focus or plan, no marketing strategy, and no direction or idea of how to turn this hobby into a business. Joining the YGV program opened our eyes on the possibility and path towards establishing a small business that would help to sustain our lives.

The confidence that we built and the decision making and business management skills that we learnt during the training sessions that we attended have helped us to conceptualize our business and look at our passion through a different angle. The coaching sessions that we attended were also a key main drive in the success of our business. Thanks to V-Lab and the YGV program, we have built a large network amongst our friends and the business community which has, in turn, opened the door for increased demand from our customers.

The focused that the program had on stimulating creativity has enabled us to think outside the box. As a result of this, we now offer a large variety of products and services, unlike at the beginning of our journey, when we only offered a few up-cycling products and gifts. We are now involved in event decorations, production of face-masks, and other handy and other crafts made from recycled products.



“Continue with the Passion you have and do your best no matter what people say about what you are doing just aim and achieve what you set out there”.



Glenda Balkonan & Joana Naty

Program:
Social Impact Incubator

Year: 2022

Business:
Yumi Smat

My Name is Glenda Balkonan and I am from the island of Pentecost. My business partner is Joana Naty who is from the Island of Aneityum.

We have been part of V-lab's Social Impact Incubator Program; a Program funded by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) aimed at supporting social change actors in the country. The main idea behind joining the program was to operate and develop a Business of Recycling Products, under the name, 300 Coconut Bag.

Before attending the Program, we spent most of our time at Pikinini Playtime as teachers. We have created love and passion of helping People but allowed room for doubt resulting in a lack of confidence in ourselves. We do not have the necessary intellectual abilities to confidently stand and talk in front of many people. We were running the business but with limited knowledge and with an indecisive mindset in the business operation decisions.

As a result of the program, V-Lab has improved our skills and capabilities. Through the trainings and coaching, there has been major progression positively impacting the business. Our confidence level rose as we had opportunities to interact with other entrepreneurs, and their businesses.

The program has helped a lot in expanding our network to a large pool of businesses and individuals, which has had a very positive impact on the business growth and success.

The program and support received has taught us in particular how important team work is which has in turn enable our business to experience great Progress. We now have a business Facebook Page and we launched recently a new name for our business: Yumi Smat.

Think Outside the Box and always be innovative

&

Think Big and make it Happen.





Stephanie Gislapno & Jester Titus

Program: Cohort - 2 Business: Fresh Food Vanuatu
Pawarem Manples Year: 2021 - 2022

I am Jester Titus, I am from the Island of Malekula. I have a business partner, Stephanie Gislapno who is also from Malekula and who happens to be my wife.

I have participated in the Pawarem Manples Incubation program in 2021. The initial idea for joining this program was to further build our business, Fresh Food Vanuatu which is frozen root crop packaging business.

Before joining V-Lab's program, the business was already established and in the path for growth. However, Stephanie and I were missing critical skills (such as branding and marketing for instance) that were necessary to accompany and support the development of our business.

Thanks to the training received, we now have these missing skills and we are thus better positioned to manage successfully our business.

Looking back at the support we received, I realize that at the time, one key weakness I had was limited knowledge ad skills for financial management & business decision-making. Going through the program I now feel that I have more confidence with the decisions I make regarding our business operations and that I am now fully knowledgeable for financially managing and sustaining my business.

Finally, being able to access V-Lab's networks has been another great benefit for our business. Thanks to the exposure we received (in the Daily Post and through social media for instance), we have grown our network exponentially, allowing us for instance to develop closer ties with the Government and, as a consequence, benefit from extended support that will allow us hopefully to start exporting our products in the near future.

“It is better to be prepared for an opportunity and not have one than to have an opportunity and not be prepared”.

– Whitney M. Young Jr



Merly Charley

Program:
Yumi Growem Vanuatu
Cohort- 1

Year: 2021 - 2022

Business:
Merly's Handicraft Collection

My name is Merly Charley and I am from the island of Nguna. I own a small handicraft business and I have a shop at the Port Vila Haos blong handicraft in town.

My participation to the Yumi Growem Vanuatu YGV incubation program with V-lab in 2021 came at ideal time for me as I was looking for opportunities to increase my knowledge and skills to manage my handicraft business.

When I started my business, my goal was to provide enough means to support my family by paying for basic household necessities. I had no intention to go beyond this and to grow my business further. My inspiration has always been my daughter, and being able to provide for her and giving her a good education was all I wanted to achieve.

The YGV program entirely changed my perspective, reshaping my mentality, and enabling me to see the bigger picture and to become more ambitious. However, for that to happen, I needed to build first my self-

confidence, which has been for me the first achievement of the YGV program.

This year marks ten years since I started this business, and in during all those years, I always considered that my strength lied mainly on my sales, customer service and marketing skills. However, this was not enough as I also needed financial management skills. The YGV training provided exactly that for me and I am very proud of my new bookkeeping skills.

Likewise, the exposure I have received through all the events and communication organized by V-Lab during the YGV and beyond have helped me to reach new levels! Since leaving the program I have created a Facebook and Instagram page and I have been receiving many orders online, even from people overseas. I am so grateful to V-Lab for teaching me digital marketing, which I believe is a skill that is very beneficial for anyone wanting to grow his/her business.

I now have a flourishing business with levels of revenue generated that have increased drastically thanks to V-Lab and its YGV program!

“Dream big and start small. You will never know until you try so don’t be afraid to take risks when venturing into new opportunities”.





Kenny Robinson

Program:
Pawarem Manples
Cohort-1

Year: 2021 - 2022

Business: Channel Village

My name is Kenny and I come from the Island of Ambrym. My passion is in filming and photography and I operate an online live streaming business called Channel Village. How I came to know V-Lab is through the returned seasonal workers program, I had applied with my business idea in 2021 and got selected to be part of the first cohort.

When I first travelled to New Zealand, I went searching for a business idea and I found interest in live streaming. I started collecting equipment but at that time I only had a smart phone to work with but it didn't stop me from pursuing that idea. I saw an opportunity in the YGV program and with the financial support I received I was able to purchase brand new equipment that came as an upgrade for my small business.

This program has helped me to step out of my comfort zone. I used to be a shy person who didn't talk much, and the YGV program has helped me to address that challenge. As a consequence, I have seen many improvements in my life and I am thankful for that.

The program played a big role in teaching me financial literacy, digital marketing, planning, communications, and even self-confidence. One thing that really stood out for me in V-Lab is their training style - Vanuatu needs more incubators that incorporate business training with coaching. Having a business coach/ mentor is very helpful for start-ups as they support from the sides and push us to move forward.

An accomplishment that I am proud to share is the fact that I have left my full-time to pursue a successful path in entrepreneurship.

“Take the risk and see the opportunity in a crisis”.





Aurelien Leye & Ernest Malesu

Program:
Social Impact Incubator

Year: 2022

Business:
Van Graduate Recruitment
Agency

My Name is Aurelien Leye and I come from Aneityum. I also have a business partner, Ernest Malesu which is from Nguni Island.

We have been part of V-lab's Social Impact Incubator Program; a Program funded by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) aimed at supporting social change actors in the country. The main objective for joining this program was to receive support to establish an agency (Vanuatu Graduate Recruitment Agency - VGRA) where newly graduates facing difficulty finding jobs can be connected with potential employers.

Interestingly, before joining the Social Incubator program, we had been part of another one of V-Labs program, the Ideation session at the University of Vanuatu. Through the ideation session, the idea was brought to life and further implemented through the 2nd program.

I (Aurelien) am currently going through my last year studying for my Masters degree at the University of Vanuatu while Ernest has already graduated last year, 2021.

We both are young parents fresh off university and trying to cope with the workforce environment.

Our journey with V-lab has had a hugely positive impact on our life as it enabled us to truly launch our business.

One key element we personally developed was confidence. Our agency requires interactions with higher authorities to seek jobs on behalf of our students and the program helped us to confidently network with companies that could support our agency further.

V-Lab has given us hands-on experience to understand the business processes. Despite our limited experienced in the field, our efforts paid off and the feedback only motivated us to become better.

With our educational level, we understood theoretical knowledge but V-Lab has opened us doors to applying the theories learnt to the real world.

VGRA is now growing rapidly and the agency has already enabled over 20 students to find a job or an internship! In order to grow, we are now busy diversifying our offer and, as more graduates participate the program, we will continue to look for creative ideas to explore as we were taught in V-Lab.

It is in your hands to create a better world for all who live in it.

– Nelson Mandela



Virginia & Teivita Taravaki

Program:
Social Impact Incubator

Year: 2022

Project:
Marama Youth
Foundation

My name is Virginia Taravaki, I am from Ifira and part Mele as I am happily married to my husband, Teivita Taravaki which is from Mele Village.

I took part in V-lab's Social Impact Incubator Program; a Program funded by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) aimed at supporting social change actors. The initial thought for joining the program was to get further training or support when setting up a project in our community; my husband and I find passion in engaging the youths into social activities and capacity development, especially in sports. It was my husband's idea to establish this association which steered the direction of our projects.

Before the program, my husband and I were full-time employees with a family to take care of, but we had a passion for these activities that we sacrificed most our time and efforts to support the youths with sports programs. Most of the support provided came from our own personal funds. We received criticism and negative from all sides, on how incapable we were given our inexperienced status. This only ignited our commitment and motivation levels to reach higher.

One of the many great outcomes of this program was being awarded the first prize of a pitching competition amongst all participants that enabled us to get access to funding from the New Zealand High Commission for a major project aimed at establishing a Youth Information Centre at Mele, in the village. This centre will enable youths to easily access information on opportunities government sectors, private parties or NGO's can provide to our youths.

Without a doubt, we'd say that joining V-lab has been an awesome and unforgettable experience which I believe has changed our perspective of things, project-wise and personally.

“If you’re always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be”.

— Mia Angelo



Torika Kalman

Program:
Scaling Frontier Innovation
(SFI)

Year: 2020

My name is Torika and I come from the beautiful Island of Nguni. I first came to know of V-Lab through Dr.Basil Leodoro who was championing telehealth in Vanuatu.

Dr.Basil had asked me to partner with him in working on the telehealth project that will provide healthcare services to remote islands, villages and communities using telecommunication technologies. It took me some time to confirm if I wanted to shift from my full-time job to work on a project and venture into the world of social entrepreneurship. We have set up the Tasinga Vanuatu; a non-profit organization working towards connecting our communities and providing healthcare services.

As my mentor, Dr. Basil always encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and take up new challenges, so I took a chance on the SFI program. In my personal view, the content of the program was more focused on the business aspect, which had little to no relation to the initiative that we had. Nonetheless, the program had given me an opportunity to build a new set of skills that will later be beneficial in my journey as a program co-ordinator and also working on the telehealth initiative.

It was through the SFI program that V-Lab saw the potential in me to run and coordinate projects and offered me an opportunity to lead in a small project funded by the French Embassy. I am thankful for the program as it has equipped me with the capacity and the confidence that I needed to successfully carry out the implementation of that program and those that came after it.

A memorable experience for me was getting to meet nine other extraordinary people who came to the program with their own ideas and seeing how excited and driven they were about their businesses, it encouraged and motivated me to take on new challenges and continue to push myself out of my comfort zone.

Currently I am a program co-ordinator in V-Lab, coordinating one of its biggest program – the Yumi Growem Vanuatu (2). This year would be my second year working for V-Lab and what inspires me in my job is knowing that I have been a part of somebody else's journey to success. Being able to contribute in any small way, whether it be making sure that they attend the training, giving advice, and helping them to write proposals and business plans. That is what makes this job worth doing. For me, my work is not about the profit that I get, but it's about giving back to the communities and helping people achieve their dreams.

If you want to grow and achieve something, you have to put yourself out there.