Small Businesses Needing Websites Get a Helping Hand from Former High School Dropouts
YouthBuild Charter School of California Hosts CODEchella at L.A. Trade Tech College

(Los Angeles, CA – March 30, 2017) On Saturday, April 8th from 8:00am to 8:00pm, YouthBuild Charter School of California (YCSC), with generous support from Second Spectrum, will host the 4th Annual CODEchella, an all-day website coding event at Los Angeles Trade Technical College. At the event, 55 YouthBuild students - all former high school dropouts - will split into 10 teams to build websites for community businesses that may not otherwise not have an online presence. The partnership that develops will no doubt change many lives -- particularly those of the emerging tech professionals.

In 2013, Amber Duron was 18, pregnant, and had already been kicked out of multiple schools. Although she felt disengaged with education, Amber wanted to set a better example for her daughter. So, two weeks after giving birth, she enrolled at YouthBuild Charter School of California's Boyle Heights campus. At YouthBuild, Amber found a more supportive learning environment and a renewed excitement for learning. One of her teachers noticed she had an interest in computer science and encouraged her to try taking some online classes in coding. Then, during her senior year, Amber heard that there would be sign-ups for a school-wide event called CODEchella—a week-long intensive coding boot camp, followed by a competition on Saturday to build a website for a local business. She jumped at the opportunity to hone her coding skills. "Before CODEchella, I had a small interest in coding," said Amber, "but, to be completely honest, CODEchella showed me that I wanted to make that a career."

At the event, Amber led a team of three other student coders in a competition against five other student teams from YouthBuild campuses across Los Angeles County. Her team built a fully functional and professionally designed website for client Kelly Kay Consulting in under ten hours. Although the team did not take home the night's top prize of best website, Amber was crowned "Little Steve Jobs," the top prize for a team leader.

Fast forward to 2017 and Amber is now studying computer science at East Los Angeles College, has just started a new job at software company (and CODEchella sponsor) Second Spectrum, and is excited to volunteer at this year's CODEchella event. In many of her college computer science classes, Amber is the only woman of color. According to a 2016 study by the National Science Foundation, only 4.8% of computer science degrees were awarded to minority women. However, Amber doesn't let the statistics stop her from achieving her dream. "I get faced with doubt by people who believe that I can't do this or don't have the mindset for it, but CODEchella taught me to persevere and not give up, and that's what I'm going to do."

Like Amber, the students at this year's CODEchella are all former high school dropouts between the ages 16-24, and previously had little to no experience in coding websites. The event is the culmination of a week of intensive classes in HTML, CSS, and Adobe Photoshop, designed to help these students learn skills that will translate into jobs to lift them out of poverty. A panel of industry leaders and teachers will judge the students' websites, with awards for the best website design at the end of the night.

"We encourage our young people to be leaders and social justice advocates," said YouthBuild Charter School of California Founder/CEO Phil Matero. "Teaching them how to code will not only open the door to a potential career in the tech industry, but will also provide them with a new skill set to support their communities."

The students will be designing websites for local clients to help give back to their community and promote small businesses and local non-profits. This year's clients include Simon's Burgers, Christian Food Bank, Luxury Florist by Cgee, AA Gears & Shafts, Cathy's Shoes, and five others. Students will be judged on their website's design, its ease of navigation, and how well it serves their client's needs.

CODEchella is not only advantageous for YouthBuild Charter School of California students as they learn from professionals in the field, it's also a great opportunity for local tech companies to give back to the community, work towards closing the Digital Divide in South Los Angeles, and promote diversity in the tech industry. Professionals from local graphic design and tech companies, such as Factual, Collab, and Second Spectrum, will volunteer as mentors for the teams.

"We are deeply appreciative and honored to support and participate in vital programs like CODEchella," said Second Spectrum CEO Rajiv Maheswaran. "These ongoing efforts to bring progress towards growing our STEM workforce foster greater inclusion and allow us to give back to the community."

Saturday's CODEchella event is one of several initiatives that YouthBuild Charter School of California has launched with help from sponsor and founding partner Colocation America to promote STEM education for young people of color, who are traditionally underrepresented in the field. During the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years, Colocation America sponsored a Young Tech Entrepreneurship class, which was a semester-long coding class for YouthBuild students in South L.A. This year, Colocation America is launching a new initiative, designed to create pathways for YouthBuild students to pursue STEM degrees in college.

"We are proud to have supported over 150 young people over the years in their pursuit to further their STEM education," said Colocation America VP of Corporate Strategy Samantha Walters, "But CODEchella was just the starting point. This year our support goes beyond the YouthBuild classroom as we have created the CODEchella Scholarship Fund which will provide young people with the additional assistance necessary to further their STEM education."

CODEchella is a free event, open to the entire community. People of all ages are welcome to stop by Cypress Hall, rooms D302-303 throughout the day to support the YouthBuild students as they code their websites or attend the website presentations and Awards Ceremony at LA Trade Tech's Aspen Hall starting at 6pm.

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About YouthBuild Charter School of California
YouthBuild Charter School of California (YCSC) provides a community-focused, project-based education to over 1,500 students at 19 YouthBuild sites across California. YCSC guides young people who have been pushed out of high school to re-engage and graduate high school. They use a different approach to learning, in which students participate in research, analysis and community action projects. They are successful: 85% of students who commit to the program for 1.5 years graduate high school and either enter the workforce or go to college. To learn more, visit the website: www.youthbuildcharter.org.