



# Samaschool and Women's Foundation of Arkansas: Empowering women with digital skills to achieve their full potential

## **What we do**

Samaschool aims to bring opportunity to areas with high poverty and unemployment by training low-income Americans how to find and succeed in online work. The program teaches high-demand, market-aligned skills and provides the soft skills and digital literacy training required for success in today's job market. Through the Samaschool model, low-income women can access a new economy and gain critical skills that will generate new sources of income and pathways out of poverty.

## **Online work**

The internet and the rapid growth of the digital economy are creating unprecedented avenues for economic opportunity. But in order for the unemployed to take advantage of online work opportunities, they need 21st century skills.

Samaschool addresses critical gaps in the workforce development space by connecting skills development to immediate income gains and long-term employability.

We leverage online work to provide students with market-aligned skills, practical experience, and access to the fast-growing online job market.

## **Samaschool Arkansas**

Samaschool launched in Dumas, Arkansas in August 2014 to address economic disparities in the region, which suffers from high unemployment and lack of access to technology and 21st century skills.

Women are disproportionately affected by these issues. Today in the United States, women make up two-thirds of the nearly 20 million workers in the low-wage workforce—though they make up less than half

of all workers. In Arkansas, 18% of women live in poverty and Black and Hispanic women face alarmingly high rates of poverty at 31% and 33% respectively. The poverty rate for female-headed families in Arkansas is 49%.<sup>1</sup>

Samaschool launched in Dumas, Arkansas in August 2014 and the first cohort of 21 students completed the course in November 2014, with a graduation rate of 75%. Samaschool trained an additional 14 people in basic computer skills. Five students are now employed in online work as a result of the program.

The results of the pilot have informed our curriculum and strategy for the second cohort, which launched in March 2015, and make a case both for the need and the potential to expand the program to reach a greater number of Arkansans.

### **Impact and program costs**

Our program has led to positive employment outcomes for students with minimal experience navigating job markets, in Arkansas and nationwide.

While 75% of Samaschool students are unemployed before entering the program, graduates increase their income by an average of 28% within six months of completing the program.

Additionally, 95% of graduates report experiencing significant improvement or improvement in their writing, professional communication, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship skills.

While other programs that target digital skills and work-readiness for low-income populations cost as much as \$20,000 per student, Samaschool's program leads to equal, and in some cases greater results at a cost of approximately \$3,000 per student (varies by geography).

### **Samaschool and Women's Foundation of Arkansas**

We aim to expand the impact of the Samaschool program in Arkansas through a partnership with Women's Foundation of Arkansas that enables us to continue our work in Dumas, and expand to an additional site as part of a broader strategy to scale across the state.

Samaschool will pilot a scaling strategy that builds on our success and a strong base of support from local partners, community resources, and expertise in online work and nation-wide success of the model. This partnership will pave the way for our impact at scale in Arkansas and holds the potential to increase the prosperity of thousands of women across the state.

### **Our strategy in Arkansas**

Samaschool's strategy encompasses an ecosystem approach that includes in-person, instructor-led training both by Samaschool instructors and partner instructors, as well as an online version of the curriculum.

In Arkansas, we will achieve scale by implementing a train-the-trainer model that will draw on lessons-learned from our first train-the-trainer model, launched earlier this year in East Palo Alto, CA and the expertise of our Arkansas instructor, who will lead training of additional instructors, with support from our team in San Francisco.

Partnerships with community organizations are a key component of our work, enabling us to leverage existing resources and add value to the work of others in the economic development and workforce readiness space.

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<sup>1</sup> National Women's Law Center, "Women and Poverty, State by State". Accessed 6/3/2015. <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/women-and-poverty-state-state>

Our initial strategy will include the continuation of the Dumas program and expansion to additional sites in Arkansas. This will enable us to maximize the impact of our program and scale the reach of existing resources, including community organizations, Samaschool's local instructor, and curriculum.

### **Support from Women's Foundation of Arkansas**

The partnership envisioned with the Women's Foundation of Arkansas will pave the way for broad and lasting change in Arkansas by empowering low-income women and men with the tools to succeed in today's economy. Funding of \$180,000 will enable us to deepen the impact we have in Dumas and roll-out the program to one additional community in 2016. Prospective locations include Francis, Phillips, Lee, and Chico counties. Phillips County Community College has been identified as a potential implementing partner.

Through a collaborative approach with Women's Foundation of Arkansas and partners to support the implementation of the program locally, we aim to involve community stakeholders in addressing the economic disparities that prevent women in Arkansas from achieving their full potential.

### **Our Program**

Samaschool's flagship program is a 10-week, 90 hour course that provides students with digital and soft skills and entrepreneurship training. In addition to Samaschool's instructor-led program, the organization has piloted, and plans to roll-out a train-the-trainer model that will deploy the Samaschool curriculum to a greater number of partner organizations by equipping local instructors with the tools to deliver Samaschool's curriculum.

#### *Program development process*

- Connect with local community partners to get to know community resources and conduct due diligence on potential partners
- Select community partner and training location
- Identify/hire local instructor
- Train instructor on Samaschool model and best practices
- Begin student marketing and recruitment process
- Interview and select first pilot cohort of students and begin class
- Review results and feedback and iterate on curriculum and model

### **Partners and Supporters**

Partnerships are a core element of Samaschool's program and growth strategy. We work in collaboration with leading digital marketplaces, philanthropic organizations, and community partners including Tipping Point Community, JPMorgan Chase and Co., Elance, Odesk, and others. Wherever possible, we leverage partnerships to provide classroom space and train existing instructors to deliver the Samaschool curriculum and provide in-kind support in the form of student laptops.