

Hustles transform into small businesses with help of nonprofit

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Tulane alumna Haley Burns is the executive director of Fund 17, a nonprofit dedicated to helping local entrepreneurs develop small businesses. The organization's moniker is dedicated to the 17 wards of New Orleans. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

As the executive director of nonprofit [Fund 17](#), Tulane University alumna Haley Burns works to empower New Orleans' underserved communities by helping residents create their own economic opportunities.

"The community members we work with are often running informal businesses out of their homes, which they call 'hustles,' " said Burns.

Fund 17 provides one-on-one business-development assistance to these local micro-entrepreneurs, equipping them with the tools to turn their hustles— which can range from landscaping work to hairstyling ventures—into viable small businesses.

A native of Huntsville, Alabama, Burns received a bachelor's degree from the School of Liberal Arts in history and international development in 2015.

Burns was initially interested in studying global poverty issues but eventually decided to concentrate on fighting local inequality after taking part in community health surveying efforts in the Hollygrove neighborhood.

During a fellowship with nonprofit Lend for America, Burns gained experience in offering affordable financial services to low-income individuals. She then began laying the groundwork for building her own service-oriented organization.

Fund 17 now focuses on providing assistance through programs led by staff members, university students and fellow local entrepreneurs.

“This summer, we’re focusing on creating a cohort of entrepreneurs in the 7th and 8th wards,” said Burns, noting that the nonprofit hired two new staff members for more intensive case management.

Fund 17 also hosts a fellowship for university students, who provide weekly support to local entrepreneurs each semester by covering topics like determining prices and establishing a social media presence.

“The fellowship program has been running for two years. We have led 20 students and 20 entrepreneurs through that program and will continue this fall,” said Burns.

Burns says that Fund 17 is building a new program where fellow business owners can advise participants.

“We’re building a database of people who have started their own successful small businesses that are willing to lend some time to our entrepreneurs to overcome particular challenges,” she said.

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“That’s really what our mission is all about — helping people turn those businesses into livelihoods.”

— Haley Burns, executive director of Fund 17