



IMPACT & TRACTION REPORT · 2023-2026

THREE YEARS. ONE MISSION. EVERY NUMBER HONEST.

The complete record of what Bold Futures Academy has built, who we have served, what the students made, what the mentors observed, and where we are going next — built for the partners who help us move.

A LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER



Bold Futures Academy was built on a conviction that has not changed in three years: young people from communities historically left out of the entrepreneurship conversation have far more to offer than they are usually given the chance to explore.

This report is the most honest account I can give of what we have built, who we have served, and what the work has actually produced. I include the numbers that flatter us and the numbers that do not. The people who help us move BFA forward — board, funders, partners, mentors — deserve a clear picture, not a curated one.

Three years in: we have served forty-five to fifty young people across three program lines, built a real mentorship partnership with UConn's Werth Institute, opened a Connecticut expansion through Hartford Youth Scholars, and completed our inaugural LaunchLab cohort — which produced two full Demo Day pitches, one modified completion, real working prototypes, and four student arcs documented in full in this report.

What I see when I read the data is a small organization doing depth-over-scale work in a sector that mostly does the opposite. Our students do not just attend. They build ventures. They change how they think. They take their experience back into their schools, families, and communities. That is the case for support.

Read it slowly. Ask the hard questions. Then come build with us.

Vanessa Ruth Gay

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BOLD FUTURES ACADEMY

NINETY SECONDS, EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS

Bold Futures Academy equips young people from underserved communities with the entrepreneurial skills, mindset, and network to lead in the age of AI – through one pathway that holds students from middle school to college.

3

YEARS OF CONTINUOUS DELIVERY
SINCE 2023

45-50

STUDENTS SERVED ACROSS THREE
PROGRAM LINES

30+

COLLEGE STUDENTS MENTORED
THROUGH IGNITE AT UCONN

100%

OF SURVEYED STUDENTS SAID BFA
CAN BRIDGE THE READINESS GAP
(N=7)

6/4/3

SPRING 2026 HONEST FUNNEL:
ENROLLED, ENGAGED, COMPLETED
DEMO DAY

5/5

INDEPENDENT MENTOR SCORE ON
DELIVERY FOR TOP DEMO DAY
FOUNDERS

THREE REASONS THIS REPORT EARNS FUNDING

- **Proven, not projected.** An inaugural flagship cohort completed with documented ventures, working prototypes, and externally scored pitches – plus three years of mentorship outcomes behind it.
- **Honest by policy.** The funnel is reported without rounding, sample sizes are named, and program failures appear in this report alongside what changed because of them.
- **Ready to grow.** Fall 2026 is recruiting, the middle school pipeline opens in July, governance is in place, and every gift maps to a named unit of program delivery.

WHAT THIS REPORT HOLDS



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AT A GLANCE

Bold Futures Academy is a small organization doing depth-over-scale work: equipping young people from communities historically left out of the entrepreneurship conversation with the skills, mindset, and network to lead in the age of AI.

3

YEARS OF ACTIVE DELIVERY SINCE 2023: GUEST SPEAKING, MENTORSHIP, AND FULL-PROGRAM FACILITATION

45-50

STUDENTS SERVED ACROSS IGNITE MENTORSHIP, GUEST WORKSHOPS, THE HYS PIPELINE, AND LAUNCHLAB

3

PROGRAM LINES: LAUNCHLAB, IGNITE, AND HYS WORKSHOPS

2

ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS: UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE AND HARTFORD YOUTH SCHOLARS; FAIRY x BFA IN DESIGN

6

SPRING 2026 COHORT ENROLLED · 4 ENGAGED MEANINGFULLY · 3 COMPLETED DEMO DAY

N=7

NOV 2025 UCONN SURVEY: 100% FELT UNPREPARED BY HS · 86% WOULD HAVE JOINED LAUNCHLAB

ONE THEME ACROSS EVERYTHING

All three programs are anchored by the same thesis: Entrepreneurship in the Age of AI — The Human Advantage. Students who come through any BFA program encounter the same core argument about what entrepreneurship is for, and what makes a human founder valuable in a market increasingly shaped by AI. Program philosophy runs through three lenses: Look Back, Look Now, Look Forward.

A TIMELINE OF BUILDING

2023

UConn Werth partnership begins

BFA enters its first institutional partnership through UConn's Werth Institute for Entrepreneurship. Guest speaking, program mentoring, and individualized coaching begin with college student entrepreneurs.

2024-26

Ignite matures into a continuous mentorship engine

One-on-one mentorship produces the first documented outcomes: increased confidence, reduced hesitation, clearer direction. Named testimonials emerge. Since the November 2025 workshop, Ruth has mentored seven additional UConn students through other Werth-connected pipelines (only one a workshop attendee), continues as a UConn summer program mentor through 2026, and has followed one mentee through her full venture journey.

NOV 2025

Primary research validates the high school–college gap

BFA delivers a workshop and fields a survey with seven UConn participants. All seven say high school did not prepare them to think like an entrepreneur. Six say they would have joined LaunchLab in high school. All seven say BFA can bridge the gap. This data anchored the LaunchLab curriculum.

SPRING 2026

LaunchLab inaugural cohort runs April 18 – May 23

Six high school students enroll. Four engage meaningfully. Three complete Demo Day. The Hartford Youth Scholars partnership is signed, the Fairy × BFA cross-collaboration enters design phase, and Brianna "Anna" Thomas joins the board as Fundraising Strategist.

SUMMER 2026

Operational capacity steps up

Nine summer interns onboard across three pods (Governance, LaunchLab, and Fairy Cohort), each with individual trackers and twelve-week task plans. Lorena begins as Community Outreach and Partnerships lead. Bookkeeping reconciliation for January–May 2026 is completed and filed.

FALL 2026

LaunchLab cohort two + HYS delivery

LaunchLab Fall 2026 runs September 12 – October 17. The HYS middle school workshop is delivered in July. The partnership pipeline continues building under Lorena's leadership.

THE ORGANIZATION

THREE PROGRAMS. ONE ECOSYSTEM.

HYS WORKSHOPS · MIDDLE SCHOOL · AGES 11-14

Single and multi-session entrepreneurship workshops delivered via Hartford Youth Scholars. Pilot delivery scheduled for July 2026, with parallel co-creation of fall high school programming. HYS has agreed to refer eligible students into BFA's Ignite program as they graduate to college.

LAUNCHLAB · HIGH SCHOOL · AGES 14-18 · FLAGSHIP

A virtual six-week entrepreneurship internship. Students earn the title of Venture Fellow and complete a working business plan and Demo Day pitch. Saturdays, 11:30 AM – 3:00 PM EST. Spring 2026 was the inaugural cohort; Fall 2026 runs September 12 – October 17 with recruitment underway on LinkedIn (students) and Handshake (volunteer mentors and facilitators).

IGNITE · COLLEGE · AGES 18-24

Mentorship and workshop partnership with UConn's Werth Institute for Entrepreneurship. Three years of continuous delivery and the source of BFA's earliest documented impact: increased confidence, reduced hesitation, and clearer direction, captured in named testimonials.

WHY PIPELINE MATTERS TO FUNDERS

The three programs are one continuous pathway. A middle schooler reached through HYS can find LaunchLab as a sophomore and Ignite as a UConn freshman. Pipeline shows BFA can hold a relationship across years, and that is the quiet competitive advantage.

THE ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

| ORGANIZATION | STATUS | WHAT IT CARRIES |
|--|-----------|--|
| UConn Werth Institute University of Connecticut · Storrs, CT | ONGOING | Three-year continuous mentorship partnership and the foundational Ignite pipeline. Since the November 2025 workshop, Ruth has actively mentored seven additional UConn students through other Werth-connected pipelines, only one of whom was also a workshop attendee. She continues as a UConn summer program mentor through 2026, and joint focus groups are planned to inform BFA's high school and college programming. |
| Hartford Youth Scholars Hartford, CT | ACTIVE | Middle school workshop scheduled for July 2026. Co-creating fall high school programming. HYS has agreed to refer eligible students into BFA's Ignite program. |
| Fairy × BFA Adult entrepreneurs in transition · joint design | IN DESIGN | A potential cross-collaboration between BFA and Fairy (Ruth's for-profit incubator platform) to support adult entrepreneurs navigating career or life transitions. Currently in design phase, pending board vote. If approved, it would extend reach into adult entrepreneurship without diluting the youth core. |

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

BFA does not run on a single partnership. UConn has carried three years. HYS is active and delivering. Small, deliberate, and durable.

THE BOARD BEHIND THE WORK

BFA is governed by a working board with expertise spanning education, finance, community engagement, marketing, and entrepreneurship, organized into four standing committees.

| MEMBER | ROLE |
|------------------------------|--|
| Don Dea | Board Chair |
| Vanessa Ruth Gay | Board President · Founder & Executive Director |
| Arlene Powers | Board Secretary |
| Jessica Haberer | Board Treasurer |
| Mohammad Sarhan | Educational Specialist |
| Raj Shankaran | Corporate Partner Liaison |
| Christopher Hendricks | Community Advocate |
| Kevin Lederer | Entrepreneurial Advisor |
| Sade Reese | Marketing Leader |
| Mercy Yalartai | Advisory Board |
| Brianna "Anna" Thomas | Fundraising Strategist · joining the board in 2026 |

Standing committees: Executive, Development, Marketing, and Program. The board is supported by volunteer grant writers, a marketing and design volunteer, and a nine-person summer operations team. Bookkeeping is reconciled monthly, with the January–May 2026 reconciliation completed and filed.

EVIDENCE BASE

WHAT THE NOVEMBER 2025 UCONN WORKSHOP TOLD US

BFA student feedback survey · n=7 · UConn Werth Institute · Mixed sophomore and junior cohort · Self-reported, post-workshop responses.

100%

FELT UNPREPARED BY HIGH SCHOOL. FOUR SAID "NOT REALLY," THREE SAID "NOT AT ALL."

86%

WOULD HAVE JOINED LAUNCHLAB IN HS. SIX SAID YES OUTRIGHT, ONE SAID MAYBE, NONE SAID NO.

4.1/5

POST-WORKSHOP CONFIDENCE IN BRINGING THEIR IDEA FORWARD. SIX RATED 4, ONE RATED 5.

100%

SAID BFA CAN BRIDGE THE HIGH SCHOOL-COLLEGE READINESS GAP. ALL SEVEN SAID YES.

TOP SKILL GAPS STUDENTS NAMED



Five of the seven students opted in for ongoing mentorship; Ruth plans to reengage them this summer.

WHAT THEY ACTUALLY SAID

ON THE GAP THEY FELT IN HIGH SCHOOL

- "How to come up with ideas, how to be successful in entrepreneurship."
- "Design thinking. Having a bright idea isn't always the same as having an execution plan."
- "How to network and how to connect with other people."
- "More about mindset and purpose."

ON THE SUPPORT THEY WISHED THEY HAD EARLIER

- "I wish I had encouragement. Most adults look at me like I'm crazy and it would have been nice to have more support."
- "People in similar fields, alumni from my program."
- "Mentorship. Most important thing."

ON WHAT BFA CAN DO FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

- "Let them know that their big ideas are realistic."
- "Give them the confidence to pursue their ideas."
- "Understanding that their potential is limitless, and seeing what they are capable of."

IN ONE WORD, THE WORKSHOP WAS...

Insightful. Amazing. Insightful. Perspective. Fun. Insightful. Great. — Three of seven students independently used "insightful."

IGNITE TESTIMONIALS

Documented testimonials from students mentored through Ignite at the UConn Werth Institute. Each is shared with permission. Across three years, the patterns are consistent: increased confidence, reduced hesitation, and clearer direction.

"Ruth's entrepreneurial spirit was inspiring. Learning about her startup journey encouraged me to embrace my own entrepreneurial ideas, sparking newfound confidence. Her encouragement and practical advice empowered me to overcome my hesitations and pursue new ventures."

— KETSIA · IGNITE PROGRAM MENTEE · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

"Working with Ruth honestly felt so natural. I loved how our values aligned and how easy it was to brainstorm with her. I always left our chats feeling inspired and encouraged and I'm so grateful for everything she shared with me."

— MAL · IGNITE PROGRAM MENTEE · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

"From our very first meeting, she was intentional, kind, and genuinely cared about helping me grow. She has supported me through every stage of my project, starting with ideation, and taught me so much about the entrepreneurial process."

— ANONYMOUS MENTEE · IGNITE PROGRAM · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

"Throughout my time as one of Ruth's mentees, I have been fortunate to take away many meaningful life lessons from her. Her guidance set me on the right path for my final two years of undergraduate studies and played a key role in helping me secure internships during that time and build meaningful relationships."

— KY · IGNITE PROGRAM MENTEE · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

THE HONEST FUNNEL

A six-week virtual high school entrepreneurship internship. April 18 – May 23, 2026. Saturdays, 11:30 AM – 3:00 PM EST. Theme: Entrepreneurship in the Age of AI – The Human Advantage.

6

ENROLLED · CONFIRMED AFTER APPLICATION AND ORIENTATION

4

ENGAGED MEANINGFULLY · BUILT VENTURES, DOCUMENTED PROFILES

3

COMPLETED DEMO DAY · TWO FULL PITCHES, ONE MODIFIED COMPLETION

1

DISQUALIFIED BY ATTENDANCE · MISSED THREE SESSIONS INCLUDING DEMO DAY

2

DROPPED OFF EARLY · DID NOT ENGAGE PAST THE OPENING WEEKS; BOTH RECEIVED OUTREACH

2

FULL FORM COMPLIANCE · SUBMITTED ALL FIVE WEEKLY LIVE SESSION FORMS

WHY WE REPORT THIS WAY

BFA does not round these numbers up. The four students who engaged meaningfully built real ventures, made measurable mindset shifts, and produced documented work. Reporting honestly is how we earn the right to claim depth – and how we identify what Fall 2026 needs to improve.

THE SIGNAL NOBODY NOTICED IN REAL TIME

Weekly form submission tracks completion almost perfectly. Lined up against outcomes, the pattern is striking.

| FOUNDER | WEEKLY FORMS | OUTCOME |
|--|--------------------|---|
| Anonymous Founder · <i>NeuroGuard</i> | Weeks 1–5 complete | Full Demo Day pitch |
| Anonymous Founder · <i>Bridge AI</i> | Weeks 1–5 complete | Full Demo Day pitch · only student present every week |
| Anonymous Founder · <i>Asian Student Awareness</i> | None submitted | Modified completion · pitched Demo Day, departed early for legitimate reasons |
| Anonymous Founder · Food insecurity venture | Week 2 only | Did not complete · three absences · disqualified by attendance |
| Two other enrolled students | None submitted | Did not engage past opening weeks |

THE INSIGHT

Form submission isn't only learning data. It's the earliest reliable engagement signal the program has. By the end of Week 2, the founders who would complete had submitted; the founders who would not complete had not. A Week 2 missed-form pattern is the first window to intervene – well before attendance becomes the issue.

WHAT THIS IMPLIES FOR FALL 2026

Track form submission as an engagement metric with a weekly dashboard flagging non-submission. Reach out at Week 2 missed-form, not Week 3 missed-attendance. And decouple the form's two jobs: engagement signal and learning reflection.

WHAT THE COHORT PRODUCED

TWO FULL DEMO DAY PITCHES

An anonymous founder pitched *NeuroGuard*, an AI safety net for stroke triage. An anonymous founder pitched *Bridge AI*, a tax documentation tool for surplus farm donations. Each delivered a seven-minute slot: three minutes of pitch, two of peer feedback, two of mentor panelist feedback. Both pitches were grounded in working prototypes, complete business plan notes, and tested customer hypotheses.

ONE MODIFIED COMPLETION

An anonymous founder built *Asian Student Awareness* across the prior weeks and pitched at Demo Day before departing the program early for legitimate reasons. Her venture exists, her arc is documented, and the modified completion path is one Fall 2026 will explicitly design for through asynchronous pitch recording and makeup options.

WHAT EVERY STUDENT WHO COMPLETED PRODUCED

- A real venture, named and positioned to address a real problem.
- A working prototype tested with peers and mentors.
- A six-week business plan with weekly Looking Back / Looking Forward analysis.
- A documented mindset shift, captured in their own words across weekly forms.
- A Demo Day pitch delivered to mentor panelists with live feedback.
- A keepsake LaunchLab letter and completion certificate.

"Before LaunchLab, I thought entrepreneurship was strictly building a business. Now I think entrepreneurship is building an idea with purpose to help other people."

— ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · LAUNCHLAB SPRING 2026 · FOUNDER, ASIAN STUDENT AWARENESS

INDEPENDENT VALIDATION

WHAT THE MENTOR PANEL SCORED

Independent volunteer mentors observed sessions across Weeks 2, 4, and 6, then scored Demo Day pitches. Their data is the validation funders trust most, because it does not come from us.

5/5

100% OF DEMO DAY MENTORS SCORED TOP FOUNDERS 5/5 ON DELIVERY & PRESENCE

5/5

100% OF MENTORS SCORED THE BRIDGE AI FOUNDER 5/5 ON EVIDENCE & PROTOTYPE

3

SESSIONS ACROSS WHICH THE SAME MENTORS TRACKED EACH FOUNDER'S GROWTH IN WRITING

"From a lack-of-scope, data-less, un-researched idea with an ambiguous solution, to a professional-grade deck and pitch presentable to board members."

— VOLUNTEER MENTOR · WEEK 6 DEMO DAY OBSERVATION · SAME STUDENTS TRACKED ACROSS THREE SESSIONS

WHY EXTERNAL OBSERVATION MATTERS

Self-reported outcomes are easy to inflate. BFA's program design embeds independent observers at three points in every cohort, so the record of student growth is written by people with no stake in the result looking good. That structure carries into Fall 2026 unchanged.

ANONYMOUS FOUNDER

NEUROGUARD — AI SAFETY NET FOR STROKE TRIAGE

ANCHOR: DISCERNMENT

FORMS: WEEKS 1–5 COMPLETE

TEAM SIM: CEO · WEEK 4

OUTCOME: FULL DEMO DAY PITCH

NeuroGuard is an AI-assisted tool that flags when emergency stroke triage AI may be underweighting a patient's symptoms due to biased or unrepresentative training data, so a clinician can review the case before time-sensitive decisions are made. By Week 5, the founder had repositioned the venture as a second layer of safety rather than a replacement for clinical judgment — a framing she arrived at through user feedback during the MVP panel.

WK 1 · MINDSET

Discernment is not pure logic. Empathy, emotion, and integrity belong to it.

WK 2 · PROBLEM

Moved from vague AI-bias observation to a grounded problem statement.

WK 3 · IDEATION

NeuroGuard sharpened into a focused stroke-triage use case.

WK 4 · TEAM SIM

Served as CEO. Demonstrated leadership and group coordination.

WK 5 · MVP

HTML prototype. Repositioned as a safety net, not a diagnostic tool.

WHAT SHE DEMONSTRATED

- **Personal experience as method.** Drew on her own observations throughout — never treating her venture as an academic exercise.
- **Mentor feedback as input.** Took panel feedback seriously and visibly narrowed from broad AI bias to a specific clinical use case.
- **Mindset shift documented.** Began with a Silicon-Valley-style profit-first framing. By Week 5, was articulating human-centered design as the moat, not the constraint.
- **Leadership under pressure.** Stepped into the CEO role during the team simulation and held the group's coordination.

"LaunchLab gave me the chance to turn an idea into something real."

— ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · WEEK 6 EXIT REFLECTION · LAUNCHLAB SPRING 2026

ANONYMOUS FOUNDER

BRIDGE AI — TAX DOCUMENTATION FOR SURPLUS FARM DONATIONS

ANCHOR: PIVOT

FORMS: WEEKS 1–5 COMPLETE

TEAM SIM: CTO · WEEK 4

OUTCOME: FULL DEMO DAY PITCH

Bridge AI evolved across three distinct stages: a hardware environmental concept in Week 1, an ML platform for food-waste reduction in Week 3, and finally a B2B IRS tax-documentation tool that helps farms convert surplus produce into tax-deductible charitable donations. By Demo Day, the venture had a working prototype and a real B2B customer hypothesis. This founder was the only student present every single week.

WK 1 · HARDWARE

Particulate-filtering environmental concept. Profit-first frame.

WK 2 · ASSUMPTION

Caught their own assumptions. Reframed mission language.

WK 3 · PIVOT 1

ML food-waste platform. Recognized AI could not generate their SMS-for-farmers idea.

WK 4 · CTO

Served as CTO in the team simulation. Built infrastructure thinking.

WK 5 · PIVOT 2

Real-time B2C-to-B2B pivot during the MVP panel. Landed on the IRS tax tool.

WHAT THIS FOUNDER DEMONSTRATED

- **Iteration as identity.** Three venture pivots in five weeks, each grounded in a new piece of feedback or evidence, not in indecision.
- **Mindset shift early.** Their Week 1 reflection captured a shift from a profit-first frame to a learning-first one, crediting guest speaker Conor Twomey.
- **Founder thinking, not user thinking.** Their closing reflection positioned themselves clearly as the agent using AI, not the other way around — a distinction many adult founders never make.
- **Consistent attendance.** The only student in the cohort present every single week.

NOTE ON ATTRIBUTION

At this founder's request, their words are kept private. The profile is drawn from facilitator observations and program records, with no direct quotation.

ANONYMOUS FOUNDER

ASIAN STUDENT AWARENESS — REDUCING BULLYING THROUGH CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING

ANCHOR: PURPOSE

FORMS: FACILITATOR OBSERVATION

DEMO DAY: PITCHED · MODIFIED PATH

OUTCOME: MODIFIED COMPLETION

Asian Student Awareness was built directly from the founder's own childhood experience being bullied for being Asian. The venture focused on reducing bullying through structured cross-cultural awareness: interventions designed to be deployed in school settings where students from minority backgrounds are routinely targeted. By Demo Day, the founder had built the venture from a personal memory into a real pitched concept, demonstrating the full arc of a founder.

WHY HER PROFILE IS BUILT FROM OBSERVATION

The founder did not submit weekly live session forms. Her profile is therefore drawn from facilitator observation across the weeks she was present and from the work she submitted directly. The signal she gave was strong enough that an entire profile could be built from observation alone — a tribute to how clearly she carried her venture across the cohort.

WHAT SHE DEMONSTRATED

- **Personal pain as starting point.** Built her venture out of the most honest source she had: her own childhood experience.
- **Mission-first framing.** By program's end, was articulating entrepreneurship as building an idea with purpose to help other people — a near-perfect verbalization of LaunchLab's core thesis.
- **Demo Day pitched.** Despite an early departure for legitimate reasons, returned to deliver her pitch on Demo Day.
- **The modified-completion case.** Her path is the reason Fall 2026 will explicitly design asynchronous pitch recording and makeup options into the program structure.

"Before LaunchLab, I thought entrepreneurship was strictly building a business. Now I think entrepreneurship is building an idea with purpose to help other people."

— ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · CLOSING REFLECTION · LAUNCHLAB SPRING 2026

ANONYMOUS STUDENT

FOOD INSECURITY VENTURE — REDUCING SHAME AS A BARRIER TO ACCESS

ANCHOR: DEPTH

FORMS: WEEK 2 ONLY

ATTENDANCE: 3 ABSENCES · DISQUALIFIED

OUTCOME: DID NOT COMPLETE

This student's venture centered on food insecurity, focused on lower-income households and students who could not reliably afford high-quality food. The distinguishing insight of their work was identifying shame — not cost, not logistics — as the deeper barrier keeping people from accessing food resources. Their solution framing aimed at reducing that shame while still securing food access. It was the most sophisticated root-cause framing in the cohort.

NOTE ON DATA SOURCES

This student submitted only one live session form, from Week 2. The profile is built from that single form combined with facilitator observation across the weeks they were present. The depth of that one form was unusually high, and the patterns it surfaced are real. The student missed three sessions including Demo Day, which closed their engagement with the cohort and disqualified them from completion.

WHAT THIS STUDENT DEMONSTRATED

- **Empathy as a working tool.** Approached the entrepreneurial process through the lens of the people they wanted to serve, not the product itself.
- **Root-cause thinking.** Identified shame as the barrier — not the surface symptom of cost or logistics.
- **Direct, thoughtful contribution.** Their in-session commentary was unusually grounded for a student at their stage.
- **The non-completion case.** Their arc is documented because the depth they showed when present was real.

WHY THIS PROFILE IS INCLUDED

BFA does not erase students from the record because they did not complete. Including the profile honors what they contributed and gives Fall 2026 a clearer signal on how to support students whose engagement is uneven.

WHAT STUDENTS SAID

LAUNCHLAB VOICES

Direct quotes appear only with student permission, attributed anonymously per each founder's documented choice.

"LaunchLab gave me the chance to turn an idea into something real."

— ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · WEEK 6 EXIT REFLECTION

"Before LaunchLab, I thought entrepreneurship was strictly building a business. Now I think entrepreneurship is building an idea with purpose to help other people."

— ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · CLOSING REFLECTION

"It gives students real hands-on experience building a venture, not just learning about entrepreneurship in a classroom. You meet amazing people, gain confidence, and leave with skills you can use in any future career."

— ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · ON RECOMMENDING LAUNCHLAB

"I wished these Live Session Forms were shorter just because I was too busy filling it out sometimes that I missed half of what was being said."

— ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · END-OF-PROGRAM SURVEY

"From a lack-of-scope, data-less, un-researched idea with an ambiguous solution, to a professional-grade deck and pitch presentable to board members."

— VOLUNTEER MENTOR · WEEK 6 DEMO DAY OBSERVATION

THE ASKS WORTH HONORING

Three specific asks surfaced in the end-of-program survey. Each represents an unmet need with a direct response planned.

01 Shorter live session forms

The cohort's highest-engagement student reported that filling out the in-session form cost her the listening. Direct response: split the form into a three-question in-session check-in and a ten-minute post-session reflection due before the next session.

02 Real-world internships after the program

Paraphrased from the survey: a wish for opportunities from other business owners to offer internships after LaunchLab ends. Completing founders leave with working ventures, real prototypes, and Demo Day pitches; they could meaningfully contribute to an early-stage company. Direction: a designed exit pathway — alumni intake form, an intro-list of BFA-friendly companies open to short engagements, and at minimum a LinkedIn introduction service.

03 Continued community after the program ends

Implicit in multiple founders naming community and bonding as their most memorable moments. The community currently ends abruptly at Demo Day. Direction: a ninety-day post-Demo-Day cohort touchpoint — one structured group call, an asynchronous channel, or a 30/60/90 mentor check-in cadence. Low marginal cost, high retention value.

ONE FOUNDER'S MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT

"Being able to bond and talk with everyone that was part of the program." For a six-week virtual program with four engaged students, the cohort still produced relational outcomes. That deserves more design intentionality, not less.

WHAT THE COHORT TAUGHT US

WHAT WORKED — AND STAYS

Three program elements did most of the heavy lifting, confirmed independently by students and mentors. The Week 5 MVP panel was the single highest-impact session: both full-pitch ventures made material pivots through live audience feedback, with *NeuroGuard* repositioned as a clinical safety net and *Bridge AI* executing its B2C-to-B2B pivot during the panel itself. Well-matched guest speakers produced citable mindset shifts — one founder named the Week 1 speaker as the trigger for moving from a profit-first to a learning-first frame. And real venture building, rather than classroom simulation, was the differentiator every student response named. The team simulation, structured peer feedback at Demo Day, and the cohort's community formation round out the elements Fall 2026 preserves.

WHAT MENTORS AND JUDGES KEPT SAYING

Five themes recurred across mentor and judge feedback to multiple founders: ventures anchored in lived experience pitched stronger than those arrived at through ideation alone; in regulated fields, trust and integration with existing systems matter more than features; proof points persuade more than prototypes; the right story beats product complexity; and young founders should borrow credibility from established community organizations rather than building it from scratch. Each theme is being threaded into the Fall 2026 curriculum.

THE PATTERN UNDERNEATH

The program's strongest design choices create conditions for students to discover insight in front of real audiences — they do not deliver information. Every redesign decision protects that mechanism first.

WHAT WE'RE IMPROVING

FALL 2026, REDESIGNED FROM EVIDENCE

The cohort surfaced real friction, and each point maps to a committed change for the September 12 – October 17 cohort.

| WHAT BROKE IN SPRING | WHAT CHANGES IN FALL |
|--|--|
| In-session reflection forms competed with listening – a direct student ask for shorter forms | A three-question in-session check-in, with substantive reflection moved to a short post-session form |
| Mid-program disengagement went undetected until students were already gone | A Week 2 individual mentor touchpoint and an early-warning dashboard built on form-submission patterns – the leading indicator the data revealed |
| Legitimate-absence students had no designed path to finish | A formal, named Modified Completion option with asynchronous pitch recording, communicated at orientation |
| The program ended abruptly at Demo Day with no landing | An alumni intake at exit and a post-program touchpoint cadence, opening pathways to internships and continued mentorship |

WHY WE PUBLISH THIS PAGE

An organization that hides what broke will eventually hide what matters. Publishing the friction alongside the fix is how a small organization proves its evaluation loop is real – and it is the reason a funder can trust the next report as much as this one.

THE NEXT TWELVE MONTHS

FALL 2026 · LAUNCHLAB COHORT 02 · SEPTEMBER 12 – OCTOBER 17

Recruitment underway on LinkedIn (high school cohort) and Handshake (volunteer mentor and facilitator roles). Theme: Entrepreneurship in the Age of AI – The Human Advantage. Modifications from Spring: asynchronous pitch recording, an explicit attendance policy reviewed at orientation, and a strengthened mid-program mentor touchpoint.

JULY 2026 · HARTFORD YOUTH SCHOLARS WORKSHOP

BFA's first formal middle school delivery. Co-creation continues on a parallel fall high school program, and HYS has agreed to refer eligible students into the Ignite pipeline.

IN DESIGN · FAIRY × BFA CROSS-COLLABORATION

A potential pathway for adult entrepreneurs navigating career or life transitions, in design phase pending board vote. If approved, it would extend BFA's reach beyond youth without diluting the LaunchLab focus.

ONGOING · FUNDRAISING INFRASTRUCTURE

Brianna "Anna" Thomas joins the board as Fundraising Strategist; she co-facilitated portions of LaunchLab Spring 2026. Lorena begins her summer internship as Community Outreach and Partnerships lead. Together they own the build-out of BFA's first formal donor pipeline and partnership database, anchored by the BFA Master Fundraising Playbook. A complete bookkeeping reconciliation for January–May 2026 is filed.

HOW FUNDING WORKS HERE

WHAT IT TAKES TO RUN THE PROGRAM

Every gift to BFA maps to a named unit of program delivery. Donors fund students and cohorts – never an undefined "support."

| UNIT | WHAT IT COVERS |
|----------|---|
| \$250 | One full program session: facilitation, materials, and platform costs for a live Saturday session. |
| \$2,500 | One LaunchLab student through the complete six-week venture-build: curriculum, mentor time, materials, and Demo Day. This is the unit ask. |
| \$10,000 | Names a cohort as Lead Cohort Underwriter, with headline recognition across cohort materials and Demo Day. |
| \$25,000 | Funds a full LaunchLab cohort end to end – students, mentors, materials, evaluation, and the operations underneath them. The Fall 2026 campaign goal. |
| \$65,000 | The Year-2 operating plan: two cohorts per year plus salaried program staff, moving delivery off an all-volunteer footing. |

WHERE EVERY DOLLAR GOES

BFA runs lean by design: a volunteer-driven mentor model, virtual delivery, and a working board keep overhead minimal, so gifts flow to facilitation, student materials, mentor coordination, partner programming, and the evaluation infrastructure that turns each cohort into evidence for the next. Books are reconciled monthly, and financial statements are available to funders on request.

IN-KIND COUNTS TOO

Volunteer mentor hours and donated services are tracked at fair market value and reported alongside cash – because for a program built on mentorship, time is the other currency.

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COME BUILD WITH US

FOUR WAYS TO PARTNER

GIVE

\$250 FUNDS ONE PROGRAM SESSION. \$2,500 SPONSORS FIVE STUDENTS FOR A FULL SIX-WEEK LAUNCHLAB. \$10,000 SUPPORTS AN ENTIRE COHORT WITH CORE PARTNER RECOGNITION.

PARTNER

SCHOOLS, YOUTH-SERVING NONPROFITS, AND FAITH COMMUNITIES: BFA DELIVERS ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMMING DIRECTLY INTO YOUR EXISTING CONTEXT. CO-CREATION WELCOME.

MENTOR

VOLUNTEER MENTORS AND DEMO DAY PANELISTS. A FEW HOURS OVER SIX WEEKS. APPLICATION VIA HANDSHAKE.

REFER

SEND A STUDENT, A BOARD CANDIDATE, OR A FUNDER WHO WOULD CARE. BFA'S GROWTH DEPENDS ON WARM REFERRALS FROM PEOPLE WHO ALREADY UNDERSTAND THE WORK.

The vision is clear. The need is real. The next move is yours.

Bold Futures Academy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. All gifts are tax deductible. Every dollar moves a specific piece of the program forward.

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BOLD FUTURES ACADEMY



Equipping the next generation to lead in the age of AI.