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Emile Studham (a former Australian gym teacher and semi-professional Aussie Rules Football player) and Kaela Bree (a former Australian actress), run Aussie X, a school and camp sport program that teaches Canadian youth the life-changing power of sport and community through Australian rules football (“footy”), cricket and netball. Aussie X runs programs in over 150 Toronto schools, with a focus on schools in at-risk areas. To date, 110,000 Canadian kids have participated in Aussie X’s programs, which warrants this month’s entrepreneur spotlight.

WHAT IS AUSSIE X?

EMILE STUDHAM: Aussie X is a sports program for schools, camps, birthday parties and corporate events that teaches the life-changing power of sport and community through Australian rules football (“footy”), netball and cricket. Utilizing the unique Australian sports culture to level the playing field, Aussie X promotes healthy lifestyles, laughter and confidence. The programs have participants active and engaged from start to finish and are designed to motivate participants to enjoy the benefits of physical activity at varying degrees of intensity. The power of sport to change lives is the driving force behind Aussie X and the team are committed to providing safe, unique fun.



WHAT WAS YOUR MOTIVATION TO START AUSSIE X?

ES: I have always loved teaching and I love Aussie rules football, and I was lucky enough to merge these two passions and build a business teaching footy [ed note: that’s Australian Rules Football, for us Canadians]. It started quite small, with me, a TTC pass and a hockey bag full of footies going



AUSSIE X PITCH ON CBC'S DRAGONS' DEN

from school to school teaching the sport. But then I met my Australian business partner Kaela Bree and, with our skills combined, we quickly turned a few footy clinics into hundreds of clinics that incorporated netball and cricket as well.

We realized that if we could sell multiple programs over multiple weeks in many cities

throughout the world, we could have a fully functioning business. Aussie X was officially formed on June 5, 2008 and since then we have taught more than 112,000 students across Ontario and British Columbia.

Aussie X brings to the table a sports program that focuses on Australian sports in the Canadian

schooling system—a unique way to get kids active and foster a sense of community using sports they had never been introduced to prior.

With cricket, we identified a market here in Canada with a focus on the diverse ‘New Canadian’ population, who are very connected to the sport of Cricket with many coming from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and also the West Indies. Footy is an awesome sport that is little known around the world and that people take to very quickly, particularly children. It levels the playing field for all ages and abilities whether the participants are school aged or attending a corporate team building program. In addition to our growing schools sector, after Dragons’ Den we will be focusing on launching our effective corporate team building programs into the corporate world of Canada.

WHAT CHALLENGE DID YOU STRUGGLE TO OVERCOME?

ES: Very little is known about Australian rules football here in Canada. When I first started making phone calls to schools and I mentioned ‘footy’ the response was either “What? We already play Rugby” or “Is that Soccer?” This was rather challenging when trying to sell a program that teaches children how to play a sport they know nothing about.

In relation to business, I started with expertise in physical education, but with very minimal





experience in business, which was certainly a challenge to overcome. I learned a lot very quickly simply by knowing when and where to ask for help and by surrounding myself with successful entrepreneurs and business people. I am lucky to have two very switched on business partners in Kaela Bree and Mark Sheard. Together we are a united team with different strengths that really work to complement one another.

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE EXPERIENCE OF GOING ON *DRAGONS' DEN*. WHAT WERE YOUR EXPECTATIONS? WHAT WAS THE RESULT?

ES: When we first connected with the *Dragons' Den* producers, we found out that the program was full for the 2011/12 season. Nonetheless, we pulled together a package for the *Dragons' Den* team to learn more about what we do and in preparation for next year's season. In an interesting turn of events, another pitch pulled out last minute from filming and we got a call on a Sunday night in June to be ready to film that following Wednesday.

We truly believe in what we do and the programs we provide to kids, parents, teachers and professionals and we saw *Dragons' Den* as a fantastic forum to demonstrate our passion. We were incredibly prepared despite having only a couple of days to plan the pitch. We sought feedback from the network of successful business



people and entrepreneurs we have built over the years, which proved invaluable when building our strategic plan for the pitch. Believe it or not—we had a plan and a strategy around every possible scenario you could imagine.

The final result was that we shook hands with Jim Treleving for a \$150,000 deal for 50 per cent of the company. Some questioned our decision in giving away 50 per cent of the company, but we did thorough due diligence in researching the



AUSSIE X PITCH ON CBC'S DRAGONS' DEN

dragons and found that Jim's connections in the sporting world amongst more would invaluable for rapid growth of Aussie X throughout North America. We had a clear goal going into the *Dragons' Den* and that was to partner with Jim Treveling

and we successfully reached that outcome. Overall, we loved every minute of the experience and seeing the Dragons participating in Aussie X was a fantastic highlight.

WHAT ARE THE FUTURE GOALS FOR AUSSIE X?

ES: Moving into the corporate team building world is high on our agenda. With our schools and camps program humming, myself and the Aussie X management team will focus on the launch of the corporate program post *Dragons' Den*. Our pilot corporate programs have exceeded all expectations. Feedback has been extremely positive and has proved that we have a unique product and service that will reinvent the team building market.

International expansion is a long term goal of the Aussie X, as well as becoming an internationally recognized brand. We have a goal of having 1 million people participate in Aussie X programs.

Our international outreach program has already started with a small project in Jamaica, and a larger outreach program in the poorest regions of Nairobi, Kenya where we taught 3,200 children in need the life-changing power of sports and community. Aussie X's overriding goal is that we have an extraordinary impact on the world. **CBJ**

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