



youBelong and Purple Provide Opportunities For People with Differing Abilities *BizWorld's YES! Program Integral to Purple's Launch*

John Ciocca, 21-yr old founder and CEO of [youBelong](#), had a vision to make the internet more inclusive for everyone, including people like his brother, Christian, with differing abilities. In 2017, John started youBelong to provide a community and social network for people living with disabilities. After seeing youBelong's success online, Mr. Ciocca and his brother wanted to start Purple, a debit card that would empower people with differing abilities to achieve financial independence. John found BizWorld's [YES! Program](#) provided him with the connections, confidence and financial means to pursue this brand new opportunity. [Purple](#) launched in June 2020.

The Story of youBelong and Purple

John and his brother, Christian Ciocca, started youBelong in 2017. Christian was born with down syndrome and, from a young age, John felt that there wasn't a safe place for people with disabilities to connect online. He also thought that people with disabilities were more likely to be cyberbullied when using social media. To provide a solution to the problem, John started



youBelong, the first, safe social app for people with differing abilities to connect with their friends. His brother is the Head of Community for the Social App. "I love working with my brother to help make the world a better place for people with disabilities", says Christian Ciocca.

youBelong was created for people with disabilities, their family members, and friends to build an inclusive, connected community. The users are located in 20+ different countries with a wide range of ages and backgrounds. John was happy with the traction him and Christian had made with the company, but he felt the deep desire to do more. He wanted to encourage people with disabilities to participate fully in life and in the financial world. He and Christian set out to build a

suite of services for his market. He started working on an innovative idea called Purple, a

service that would provide mobile banking for everyone, designed for people with disabilities in the form of a debit card.

John wondered how he could launch his new idea of Purple, source out guidance and support, and raise funds to make his dream a reality? He started on his journey to find entrepreneurial youth programs that would help him to achieve his goals and came across BizWorld's YES! Program in 2019. This creative, life-changing program provides the necessary tools and resources to accelerate high potential young entrepreneurs (like John) as they create and develop thriving businesses. Through a 4-phase program, students have the opportunity to prepare their pitches in order to participate in a business accelerator, receive mentorship, and attend interactive virtual workshops. Top businesses have the opportunity to "pitch live" for a chance to receive start-up investment of up to \$30,000. At the YES! Demo Day in Fall 2019, John Ciocca's pitch won him \$10,000 that he put towards his vision of making Purple a true reality.

"Being a part of the YES! program gave me the confidence to pursue my business", said John Ciocca. "Not only did I have access to some incredible mentors throughout the program, but I also had the continued support of the entire Bizworld community. After Demo Day, the seed funding allowed us to launch Purple, and I was beyond thrilled."

Since 2019, John Ciocca reports that his team has nearly doubled the number of youBelong users and has a 51% retention rate of members on his platform. After completing BizWorld's YES! program, he said,

"We expanded to work on Purple so that we could successfully build financial products that enable people with disabilities to spend, save and invest for a better life."

John gives the following advice to budding, young entrepreneurs around the world:

"Focus on solving a problem that you're passionate about and would be willing to dedicate a lot of time to. Start small and build for yourself at first. Get feedback, iterate on it and do it all over again."

Do you know any high potential young entrepreneurs ages 16-22 who want to make their business ideas a reality? If so, please visit us at bizworld.org or call toll-free 1-888-4-BizKid for more information.

