

Introduction:

This is life invented. Invent the life you want to lead. Invent the life you want to lead. Be creative, be challenged, be the solution. Go Broncos.

Narrator:

Welcome to the life invented podcast presented by Santa Clara University. From campus life to what it means to learn in the Silicon Valley, we explore how to be a Global Citizen in an era of change. This is: Life Invented.

j:

Some of us old enough to recall can remember a time when cherry fields across the valley ruled the land before the Silicon Valley became one of the most popular places on this Earth. And in addition to the self-made millionaires, tech IPO billionaires, and news of expensive living, there is a growing community of entrepreneurs that are looking beyond the profit margin, and are constructing business models on a mission. It's a beautiful day in Santa Clara, and on this episode of life invented, we're chatting with the director of the [Global Social Benefit program](#) along with one of its fellows who is a senior and economics major at Santa Clara University. Ever wonder what it's like to participate in a competitive program that allows you to work on global challenges in a country you may not have been to before, and get to hone your craft as a social entrepreneur? Yeah, us too. Let's go!

Alright gentlemen, thanks for joining us. We'd love to have you introduce yourself and share a little bit about your background, or as we like to request: please dish yo deets. Keith, let's start with you.

Keith Warner:

My name is [Keith Warner](#), I'm the senior director for communication and action research at Miller Center Social Entrepreneurship here at Santa Clara. I get to work with students everyday to help them think about the intersection of social entrepreneurship and making change in the world. I am a California native, and so my passion is creating learning opportunities for students where they can understand social entrepreneurship and a visceral, personal level through direct contact with the poor and working on innovative change-making strategies.

Aidan O'Neill:

My name is Aidan O'Neill, I'm Class of 2017. I am a fellow for the Global Social Benefit Fellowship from this last summer, so I love writing. I'm also an ambassador at this [Admissions Office](#), so I love giving tours, talking to prospective students about what they're looking for in colleges.

j:

In the last few decades here in the Bay Area and the Silicon Valley, for the most part, entrepreneurship and its culture has been thought of mostly in like, you know "self-made

millionaires”, “tech billionaires”, and “expensive living”. In the midst of all of this, what is social entrepreneurship and why has it gained so much attention as of late?

Keith Warner:

Social entrepreneurship is using business strategies to create positive change in the world, and Santa Clara and the Silicon Valley is a great place for that because we’re able to draw from on the dynamism, the innovation, the creativity, the vision of Silicon Valley, but apply that to the world’s greatest needs where there are situations of very serious and sustained poverty and environmental degradation.

Aidan O’Neill:

Well I think it’s interesting because here at Santa Clara, we’re obviously here to get an education and succeed and we chose this place for a reason you know; we are in the heart of the Silicon Valley here. It’s also a Jesuit School that imparts on us a lot of the values of being a man or woman for others, you know having a heart of service and educating the whole person. So it’s really a great blend of both those principles and just the practicality and the ambition and desire to succeed that is here in the Valley, and I think it also plays into the average age of the people that are here, you know all the research on millennials is showing that they don’t just care about how much money a business makes, what the return on investment is going to be, they also want to see social return on investment, so that’s really opening the door for a lot of social enterprises to get that funding early on because people here in the Valley that are concerned about entrepreneurship in the traditional sense, also see a huge avenue for social entrepreneurship as well in a place of the same interest.

News Coverage:

It covers over 70% of the Earth, but over 700 million access lack safe access to it: water. According to water.org, 3.4 million people die each year as a result of unclean water, poor sanitation, and bad hygiene. In Latin America, one country is especially troubled by this water crisis. Nicaragua is among the poorest countries in Central America. While efforts since 2010 put many in urban areas closer to better water sources, much of the rural population still lives without it.

j:

So there’s another two word phrase that has gained prominence, and that is “climate justice”. How does social entrepreneurship and climate justice work together, especially in the case of the [Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship](#) in which you guys focus so much on.

Keith Warner:

One of our primary focal areas is on fostering climate resilience, so using innovative business strategies to help organizations and communities respond to the stress of climate change, which is affecting the world’s poor much more than us here in the United States, and especially rural communities and farmers. And so a simple example of where that stress results is in water

shortages and water extremes. So we're seeing more intense rainfall here, as well as alternating with droughts, that's even more serious in places like Central America and Africa that don't have the same kind of infrastructure that we do. A social entrepreneurship is able to put tools in the hands of local communities to allow them to be able to withstand those stresses and provide those kinds of resources to their members of these communities.

Aidan O'Neill:

So that's a perfect example of what I was doing this last summer, me and two other students, an [environmental sciences](#) major and a [public health](#) major, the three of us went to Nicaragua, which is part of the Central American dry corridor, part of the 5 countries in Central America that's been really affected by water shortages and water contamination as well. So the traditional water supplies there have been contaminated by rising temperatures, by drought, which is also affecting their livelihoods because it's a largely agricultural area. So what we were there to do was to try to find a social entrepreneurial solution to the problem that they faced with having contaminated water, contaminated drinking water, the three of us went there and basically tried to determine what it was that they were doing to decontaminate their water currently, which had a high variance. A lot of times people just drank straight from the contaminated water and just hoped that their stomachs would keep up with it. Some communities had kind of filtration systems that did a little bit, not nearly enough to meet the [World Health Organization](#) standards, but that at least made it a little bit better. Some people in more urban areas were able to have-- kind of an underground chemical filtration system, but what we did was interview people to try and figure out what it was that they wanted to see and the results of our research was that what they wanted and what we would be able to bring them was in home water filters that would help them filter their water in the house.

Keith Warner:

So I really like Aidan's project because what it did was it looked for pathways to accessing clean water and that's really what social entrepreneurship does for communities that are cut out of the basic good and services that an economy should provide, social entrepreneurship opens the doors of opportunity and allows people to create their own futures.

j:

How do you connect that assessment of what's going on in a community and couple that with a business proposition, and what kind of business comes out of that?

Aidan O'Neill:

Yeah so that's a great question, because that's what essentially we're trying to figure out the whole time. The biggest part of our research project was what's called a "community needs assessment", and so that's what's kind of the main focus of the interview is determining what problems actually exist right now, because a lot of times we kind of like a bird's eye view and we can kind of assume what issues people are facing in rural communities. So when you're there with them talking to them you can really kind of strip all of that away, but we spent a lot of time

there talking to both the employees of the nonprofit, employees of other nonprofit organizations that dealt with water that are in the country, and then with members of the community; what issues is water causing for you in your family, and then what would you like to see? We already have an idea for water filtration of some kind, but we didn't know what form that would take so we were basically just trying to figure out how would this fit into people's lives, also what would they be able to afford, what would they be willing to pay, things like that.

j:

So you did a ton of market research, analysis, thought about a value proposition, and so where do you land at this point, you know what's the pitch?

Aidan O'Neill:

Yeah, so our final deliverable to [ASDENIC](#), the nonprofit we worked with, was basically a recommendation that their nonprofit launch a subsidiary organization that was technically for-profit, so a social enterprise that focused on bringing clean water at an affordable price. So what we recommended was that the subsidiary organization becomes a distributor of in-home water filters. There are suppliers in the country keeping this business in the country was important to members of ASDENIC, specifically Raul who was basically the CEO of the nonprofit. They have great working relationships with these communities already; they work to bring the water to a lower contamination water already through chlorination, so they've already kind of got their foot in the door for that, we're hoping that they kind of expand on those relationships with a new subsidiary.

Keith Warner:

And part of our job at Miller Center then, is to introduce investors to this local nonprofit that we propose start this for-profit spinoff, or subsidiary. Impact investors are looking to take their investment capital but invest it in making good in the world as well as getting return on their investment, and so we know of a couple that might be interested in helping start this and so taking that dynamism that we breathe and live here in Silicon Valley and find ways to share it and provide roadmaps for others to be able to recreate that in their local communities as they struggle with these very significant human challenges, that's what's exciting about the work that we get to do together.

j:

Gentleman, the world is an interesting place right now and needs lots more people working to do good, what role can social entrepreneurs play in offsetting climate change naysayers and current policy makers who seem uninterested in saving our planet?

Keith Warner:

As part of our mission at Santa Clara, we want to foster global understanding and engagement. It's part of our DNA, we trace it back to the origins of Jesuit education, because we believe in the common good, and we believe that everyone in the planet should have access to the basics

that they need, and in fact there are plenty of resources for everyone if we learn how to share them and how to create them, and so I think that a lot of the climate change deniers and the people that stick their head in the sand or who say “this is a problem that we don’t have to address” are really avoiding reality. We can do that to a certain extent here from the United States, but it’s not possible in places like Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where climate change is very evidently going on, and if someone is a farmer or working in a rural community, it’s very clear what’s happening. The present day is not like the past, and the future is going to be even more disrupted. Denial and despair are really of no use, and they’re frankly equally of no use. What we need are creative solutions and people who are going to look at a really really big problem and say “that’s an opportunity”.

Aidan O’Neill:

Yeah, as far as what you said about the current climate of today’s government, I think that the tone of social entrepreneurship has changed, but the purpose has not. So it may now seem like it’s a little bit more rebellious of a movement than kind of being like the poster children of the next generation, that’s definitely a shift, but it doesn’t change the work that needs to be done. One of the greatest things about it is that it’s not dependant on the public sector, it’s change from the private sector, the last sector that people would expect it to come from. They always expect these changes to come from the government or the nonprofit area. This is the private sector that’s doing this, so there’s a lot of freedom; while it may make things a lot more difficult, it’s still independent from what’s happening here in our government.

j:

Aidan, when you explain you know what you do through this program to your family and friends at home, do they get it?

Aidan O’Neill:

Yeah, it’s a lot of times kind of difficult to explain what the fellowship is because it’s so unique to Santa Clara. It’s not something that you’d expect to be able to do as an undergraduate students, it’s just an opportunity you don’t see a lot of the time; so explaining the fellowship in that way exciting but very-- kind of challenging to just impart on them just how cool it is, just how great of an opportunity it is, but yeah it’s fostered a lot of great conversations with other students, and it fits in very well with kind of the overall Santa Clara experience.

Keith Warner:

I think it’s significant that your team included yourself, an econ student, plus a public health science student, and an environmental science student, so talk a little bit about how those students from non-business backgrounds were able to engage in the entrepreneurial dimensions of this.

Aidan O’Neill:

Those three areas of study were really the three different dimensions of the project. So there was obviously the business component; we are trying to start a business, we are trying to foster an entrepreneurship, but then there's clearly also the public health aspect. People are drinking contaminated water: people are drinking contaminated water, and then there's the environmental aspect. So coming at it from those three different angles as a team, we created a great synergy there of like-- we're more than the sum of those three different areas of study, they come together to form the complete picture. So each of us had our own area of expertise, but spending a lot of time together, we were able to kind of like meld minds over those couple months and then even when we got back to campus kind of create that same dynamic.

j:

Mind melding for good, I love it. And you know that's really what most successful teams would say is the key to success right? Diverse people, diverse thinking coming together to work on a single problem. Aidan, when you were together in this new country trying to solve this big, critical problem, what was your guy's process to thinking through the challenges and the opportunities of your idea and your business model?

Aidan O'Neill:

There's a lot of times you know, we'd do our community visits, we'd get back to the hostel where we were staying, and we'd be talking about kind of what we saw that day, and we'd each talk about something different. I'd talk about you know, what people's living conditions were, like what I saw in their homes like, "Oh, they paid for a TV, that's an appliance, so maybe they'd pay for a water filter, that's another appliance", and then Elia, the environmental science major, would talk about the water you know, there was only one community where there was any water source there, and she'd also be talking about how many different spouts there were, and then David would be talking about whether they looked healthy or not. After awhile we stopped kind of having those roles, and each of us were kind of like-- we took each other's spots. So Elia would-- I remember very clearly her saying, "Oh, I saw satellite dishes on people's homes", or she also said one time that there was like a mom that looked sick or something like-- you know, that kind of thing where you start taking each other's roles because you're used to each other's thinking.

j:

So they're seeing it from different perspectives, cool. Aidan, how was this trip and this just entire project-- really changed you and how you view potential career paths?

Aidan O'Neill:

So I definitely think that this experience shapes how I think about my career path as far as-- beforehand, I was thinking you know, I could get out of Silicon Valley, right as I graduate, just go to a developing country and start working with you know a social enterprise or something like that. This experience showed me that, you might want to become good at something first. So get training from a consulting company, a tech company, something like that, go back to school.

You know, basically have an area of expertise and then go abroad. Basically, it showed me that I'm not quite ready for that but that it's definitely something that I want to keep as a theme of my career.

j:

Well I wish you luck sir, and I'm sure in the decades to come you'll look back at this experience as a pivotal one. As you know, from just four years ago, young men and women all over the world have to make the decision about which college to go to, just as you did! And you know, they potentially want to live the types of experiences that you have, what advice do you have for them you know, at that moment of decision?

Aidan O'Neill:

I would say that, for me personally, I was considering a lot of statistics. I would say definitely look at those numbers, but then kind of put them in the back of your mind, and then just imagine yourself you know, walking around with a backpack on the campus, imagine yourself waking up there every morning. Don't just imagine yourself in the classroom, because that's the easiest thing to do. Imagine graduating and looking for a job in the area and maybe setting down a couple roots there. So just imagine kind of the whole picture, because four years is a long time and you're gonna-- it's gonna be almost a fifth of your life by the time you're done, so just kind of imagine kind of everything else, you're getting the whole package here.

j:

Great advice, not getting stuck in all the stats but really just envisioning yourself in-- yeah, you know like you said, you know what you call your second home and possibly the place that you live for years afterwards. Gentlemen, thanks again for your time here with us on Life Invented, the world needs more Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship fellows in it. Aidan, good luck on graduation and beyond, and Keith, thanks man, thanks for continuing to produce the world's next great social entrepreneurs. Thanks y'all.

Aidan O'Neill:

Thank you j.

Keith Warner:

j, good stuff.

Eddie Kelinsky:

My name is [Eddie Kelinsky](#), and I am the Assistant Director for Undergraduate Admissions, and I invite you to invent the life you want to lead, and go Broncos!

Narrator:

You've just listened to the Life Invented podcast presented by Santa Clara University, and there's so much more to explore. Visit us at scu.edu/podcasts, and learn more about Santa Clara's commitment to innovative and inspiring opportunities.