

# Juma Ventures

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**A**s the glossy black coupe cruises through San Francisco's Mission District, the driver, a twenty-something blond woman in dark glasses, and the passenger, a wiry Filipino-American just a few years her junior, compare car models and insurance rates and commiserate over the city's exorbitant auto registration fees.

The trunk is full of tender cargo: Ben & Jerry's ice cream cakes ordered by friends and lovers in honor of Valentine's Day. Rebecca Juhl, a manager and Malek Nativad (*pseudonym*), a

shift supervisor, comprise one of half a dozen teams from Juma Ventures spending a Friday delivering these frozen tokens of affection.

The days around February 14th are like homecoming week for Juma Ventures, a youth employment program that runs two Ben & Jerry's shops, an ice cream catering service and Ben & Jerry's concessions at San Francisco Giants and 49ers home games. Once a year, workers and managers from every division of Juma pair up and drive all over the Bay Area dropping off Valentine cakes.

## Rebecca Juhl and Malek Nativad

Juhl tells Nativad that she grew up in DeKalb, Illinois, the town where barbed wire was invented. On his right biceps, just above a stylized pattern of barbed wire, Nativad wears a tattooed map of Mindanao, which he



explains is the Muslim part of the Philippines, where his father lives. These two share a passion for sports, movies and hard work.

Juhl, who worked for a while as a substitute teacher, is a refugee from the San Francisco public schools. Before joining Juma Ventures nearly two years ago, she considered getting her teaching credential.

"I didn't feel comfortable in such a rigid environment," she said. "This is different. In this job there's a certain level of professionalism and respect that gets lost in the school setting. If youth are open to keeping the job and learning the skills, that's their choice; whereas school is something they have to do.

"I get stimulated working with the youth," she continued. "As a manager, you really need to be willing to roll up your sleeves and work side by side. That's where the trust starts."

Juma Ventures was designed to help young people transition to adulthood while learning about work in a fun workplace – the ice cream stores the agency franchised from Ben & Jerry's. Most of the employees, who are between the ages of 14 and 24, are people of color. Many of them come from poor and troubled backgrounds. In addition to forming close relationships with adult managers, youth also learn marketable entry-level food service skills.

"This is not a mentoring program; it's a business," said Diane Flannery, CEO of Juma Ventures. "The mentoring grows out of working together."

Juhl, the manager of the Candlestick Park operation, uses the opportunity to schmooze Nativad, a star employee from the Ben & Jerry's shop in San Francisco's Marina District. While he is running a cake to an office at a community college, she explains that this is the second year of her campaign to draft him.

"I was without an assistant manager at Candlestick and I was trying to get Malek because he is so good," she said. "I'm totally trying to move in on him."

Even though with commission he could make up to \$21 an hour working at the baseball stadium, Nativad is reluctant to quit the shop because of Ian Fraser, his boss at the ice cream shop.

Nativad moves fast, hustling between the car and various offices, but he has a slow way of talking and one of those gradual smiles that takes time to develop, like a Polaroid.

"I love Ian," he said, his happiness coming into focus. "He is so fun to work with. He really cares about people. He gets really personal and when you're down, he gets down."

Nativad's workday begins at 3:45 a.m. when he gets up to drive from his home in the Mission to the Financial District where he starts at 4:30 a.m., preparing to open a Briazz Café. When his shift there ends, he heads down to the Marina where he works in the ice cream store from about 2 to 7 p.m. He works every day but Sunday, averaging 55 hours a week.

"I think it's awesome that you've been making this work," Juhl said. "A lot of my youth can't handle two jobs. How do you do it?"

"You have to like both of your jobs," he replied. "And you have to have a boss who will

work with you. Ian will give me any schedule I want. It's good that you show people you can work really hard; then, they'll work with you."

There was a time, Nativad said, when he was the kind of guy who stayed out until two in the morning and got out of bed at two in the afternoon. These days, he usually rents a movie and turns in early. He measures his good times in terms of how many hours he's worked and what he's learned on the job.

"Juma helped me a lot," said Nativad, who has alternated between the ice cream shop in the ritzy Marina neighborhood and one in the Castro, the center of San Francisco's gay community. "I was kind of shy but I got over that. It's different, serving 30 or 40 people, learning to handle the different personalities. I love working Gay Pride in the Castro. The people are great and you make like three times as much in tips. A lot of people in the Castro have worked for tips and they understand. And I like it when the managers aren't there. I like the independence. They have a lot of confidence in us."

Nativad is toying with the idea of going to college in the fall but school doesn't seem to excite him the way that working does. One day he hopes to open his own restaurant, featuring Filipino and Mexican cuisine. Even though he hardly ever goes out anymore and is trying to save his money, the two jobs don't pay enough for him to be able to afford to move out of his mother's house. After 2 1/2 years at Ben & Jerry's, Nativad is trying to figure out how to leave a job he loves.

"My coworkers are so much more fun at Ben & Jerry's but I have more room to move up at my job at Briazz," he said. "I think I've kind of maxed out at Ben & Jerry's."

This is the dilemma that plagues Flannery, Juma's CEO. Even though Nativad has a marginally better job at the cafe, without more schooling he's going to have a hard time moving from behind a counter into management.

"We thought when we started this that we'd get them some experience and then they'd move on," she said. "Our challenge is how do we get them to that level where they are making \$10 to \$15 an hour – which is what you need for a living wage in San Francisco."

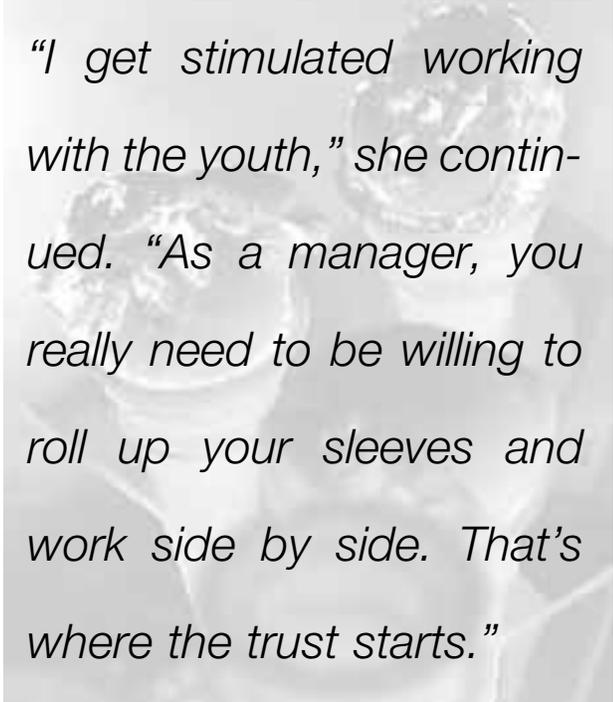
The program recently initiated a management internship program. For six months, two senior youth workers train as assistant managers. At the end of the intern-

ship, Juma's employment specialist will help them find management jobs in the retail mainstream.

## Diane Flannery

Flannery believes that in addition to education and health and housing, young people must have the means to support themselves. About 10 years ago she was executive director of Larkin Street Youth Center, a program for homeless and runaway youth in San Francisco. After years of running more traditional programs, she became frustrated with the limited services available for destitute youth. "I was interested in economic development and how to use business to move young people out of poverty."

Her last year at Larkin Street, Flannery started talking to the people at Ben and Jerry's Vermont headquarters. The ice cream moguls



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had begun franchising stores to nonprofit agencies and Flannery thought an ice cream shop might be a perfect vehicle for introducing young people to work. In 1995 the program opened its first Ben and Jerry's Scoop Shop on Chestnut Street in San Francisco's Marina District.

Flannery, who has a Ph.D. in organizational psychology, said that she found the

Juma businesses to be an effective way to work with youth dealing with a variety of difficult issues.

“The business becomes a container for the relationship,” she said. Youth employees work alongside adults for as many as 30 hours a week. “You have this tremendous opportunity to influence a young person while you are working with them. Things come out in work that might not come out in counseling or some artificial setting.”

Two teenagers recently told their managers they were pregnant. Not long ago, Laura Congdon, general manager of the stores, and Ian Fraser spent the night at the county jail waiting for the police to release one of their employees.

But such intense involvement comes at a cost. Congdon, who is available by pager and cell phone, trades off being on-call with other managers so that they each have at least one uninterrupted day off. What’s trickier is getting young workers to see the distinction between a friend and an empathetic supervisor.

“Someone tells you they’ve been abused or they’ve been raped – and both of those things have happened,” Congdon said. “They share something personal. Because we’re there, they are going to open up to us. But there’s a tension because you are their boss and what happens if you have to reprimand them?”

When managers become aware of a problem, they can refer youth to Juma’s workforce resources officers who make sure kids get the services they need.

But there are financial as well as emotional costs for that additional support. Flannery said that the \$1 million in sales Juma posted last

year covered goods and salaries for 55 to 60 youth employees and managers. Only about \$40,000 in profit was left for the training and workforce resources the young workers need.

“If we didn’t get foundation money, we couldn’t do this,” Flannery said. “If I were in the business to make money, I wouldn’t look at these kids as employees.”

Juma’s target population includes kids with a variety of fairly serious problems. Some of them have been in trouble with the law, many come from poor and broken families and most are behind in school. Few have any clear sense of how to behave in a service industry. Usually managers try to keep a mix of kids from the target population and those from the general population.

“That mix can stabilize your business and it gives you role models,” Flannery said.

Sometimes Flannery has had to pass on a great business idea because it would subvert Juma’s social mission. About three years ago she looked into the specialty license plates business.

“It would have been very lucrative but we didn’t want our kids to have ‘I made license plates’ on their resumes,” she said. “Because we had the dual goal, we had to pass.”



## Shannon Cunningham

Shannon Cunningham, 24, is a Juma Ventures alumnus who was able to move from entry-level job to first career stage during her time with the organization. When she came to Juma at 19, she was living with her boyfriend and had just discovered she was pregnant.

“I’d seen my peers on welfare and I didn’t want that,” Cunningham said. “I wanted a legitimate job, a secure job. I had few job skills but I decided my life is going to start now.”

Cunningham started out scooping ice cream at one of the shops. In a few months, she was promoted to supervisor. As her pregnancy progressed and it got harder for her to do the lifting and bending required in that job, she started looking around the organization for other positions. She landed a part-time job working with Juma’s enterprise director, Toody Maher. At that time, Maher and Flannery were the only people working in the Juma office; soon, they gave Cunningham additional hours to work as Juma’s receptionist.

Two weeks before her daughter Kaliya was born, Cunningham was named office manager at Juma. When she returned to work six weeks later, she brought her baby with her. Kaliya, who had a crib and a swing in the office, came to work with her mother for nearly a year. Cunningham is grateful that she could work and be with her child during those critical months in her development. She said she feels the years she spent working at Juma were nearly as critical in her own evolution from a struggling teenager to working woman.

“I learned most of my computer skills at Juma. Toody taught me how to write memos and all the details about professional presentation. Today, I refer to Diane as Kaliya’s godmother. It was really inspiring to be around all these women who kick butt in their careers.

“I learned to manage my life here. I learned to pay my rent and to take care of business at home so that I would be able to take care of business on the job.”

About a year ago Cunningham left Juma Ventures to be chief financial officer of the Center for Young Women’s Development, a youth-run nonprofit agency in San Francisco. She is saving money so that she can take an



unpaid internship in a computer graphics company. She plans to own her own business some day.

As she talks, she is sitting in the Juma Ventures office. This is the first time she’s been back for a visit in months and her old colleagues greet her with hugs and squeals of delight.

Cunningham feels she received an intense dose of the kind of mentoring and nurturing Juma hopes to offer all young employees.

“You might not see a future for yourself if you aren’t exposed to successful people – people who know what they want to do and are doing it,” she said. “The women here allowed me to be myself. It was a struggle but they worked with me. Just having someone stick it out with me kept me going.”

Cunningham, who is barely five feet tall, stands up on her three-inch platform sandals and prepares to go pick up her daughter at day care. Glancing around her old office, she beams.

“I live in a studio with my daughter. It’s small, but it’s all mine,” she said. “My daughter is happy and beautiful and I’m pretty happy too. Work has given me the freedom to give that to myself.”