

# *The Empowerment Plan*

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Over 20,000 homeless Detroiters bear the frigid Michigan winter each year. 1 in every 42 people in the city go without a basic necessity: warmth. Because of this, shelters are often too overwhelmed and under-supported to help every individual in need. Each day people in need of basic amenities have to fend for themselves on the streets, and in freezing temperatures the difficulty to stay warm is only exacerbated.

The Empowerment Plan employs and trains homeless women to become full time seamstresses, who manufacture a garment that serves as both a coat and a sleeping bag. The coats the women make are then distributed back to homeless individuals within the community at no cost to them. Through training and steady employment these women are able to elevate themselves from the cycle of poverty. Within the first few months of working with the program, we actively help these women and their families move off the streets or out of shelters by finding them secure, furnished housing. These women have empowered themselves with the confidence and skills necessary for a more sustainable, financially stable and healthier life.

This organization is the result of extensive research done by the founder and CEO, Veronika Scott. Initially a class assignment at The College for Creative Studies in Detroit, the project gained outside support due to its disruptive business model and humanitarian agenda. The coat she invented was simple, effective, and ready for production. The Empowerment Plan is unlike the typical nonprofit model because not only do we run and function like a garment business, we also help our employees to advance themselves professionally through learning and effectively utilizing a unique trade skill.

The Empowerment Plan is predominantly supported by donations from private individuals as well as large corporations and foundations. Some of our major donors are Carhartt, The Sara Blakley Foundation, The Fisher Family Trust, The Women's Foundation, Bedrock Manufacturing and Shinola, and General Motors. Our investors are an integral part of our operation, not only by providing financial support, but by sharing experience and guidance with us. Long term, we hope to function as a one-to-one (buy-to-donate) distribution model that will not only sustain The Empowerment Plan, but aid in the development of an entire garment district in the city of Detroit. We are continually working on remodeling and improving our production facility (a massive building that was abandoned and neglected for years) to eventually evolve into a full scale industrial sewing facility. This building, called *Ponyride*, was bought and re-envisioned by Detroit entrepreneur Phillip Cooley to serve as a space where local artists and organizations can work and share knowledge, resources and networks. Along with

the other organizations operating out of Ponyride, we are dedicated to the development and evolution of the city of Detroit.

The Empowerment Plan is already beginning to show signs of success. We are producing 4000 coats this year (2013) for orders throughout the country. We try to maintain open communication with the individuals who receive our coats, and the outreach organizations who order them and give them out. This enables us to learn how our coats are working for the people actually using them on the street. Each of the mothers we employ, once homeless, are now living in their own safe and secure homes with their families. With the help of local organizations, such as *Alternatives for Girls* and *The Coalition On Temporary Shelter (COTS)*, we are able to provide these women and their families with the appropriate furnishings for their new homes, such as furniture and other amenities.

In the summer of 2013 we acquired a 3D printer and two computers to use for 3D modeling on the printer. Our hope is to train our ladies to use the modeling software and printer, and use the printer to create customized buckles and clasps for our coats. In the future, we would also like to offer these computers and the printer as educational resources for children in the Detroit Public School system, and we are working to implement a type of after school program where they can come to our facility and learn to use this technology. We are working with interns and students from the *College for Creative Studies* to train our staff in 3D printing. This new arm of our organization is still under development.

We have been featured nationwide in multiple media outlets. Please see our list below of accomplishments and coverage, with links to the sources where available.

### *Awards*

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library And Museum  
2012 New Frontier Award Recipient - Veronika Scott

Industrial Designers of America  
IDSA: IDEA Gold Award 2011

Crain's Detroit Business  
"Crain's 20 In Their 20's"

### *Speaking Engagements*

Pratt Institute of Art and Design  
March 12, 2011- To their graduate department at their Manhattan campus.

IDEA: Crain's Business Conference  
March 23, 2011- Spoke in front of 300+ individuals at the Detroit Taubman Center.

Rustbelt to Artist Belt Conference  
April 6, 2011- Spoke about the importance of community and network for start-ups.

Eli Lilly Internal International Conference  
May 18, 2011- Indianapolis. Spoke on mental health in the homeless community.  
June 7, 2011- Orlando. Spoke on mental health in the homeless community.

The United Nations: Young Women's Change Makers Conference  
August 11, 2011- Spoke at The United Nations Headquarters

Maker Faire: Detroit and New York City  
July 30, 2011- Spoke at Detroit Maker Faire  
September 17, 2011- Speaking at New York Maker Faire

SOCAP: Social Capital Conference  
September 8, 2011- Speaking on the importance of Prototyping

TEDxDetroit  
November 3, 2011- Speaking about the Empowerment Plan

Aspen Fashion Week  
March 11-14, 2012- Speaking about the Empowerment Plan and running booth

Clinton Global Initiative  
March 30, 2012- Speaking about the Empowerment Plan

TEDxSanJose  
April 7, 2012- Speaking about the Empowerment Plan

Cusp Conference  
September 19, 2012- Speaking about the Empowerment Plan

Catalyst Conference  
January 30, 2013- Speaking about The Empowerment Plan and running booth

AIAG Corporate Responsibility Summit  
April 24-25, 2013- Speaking about the Empowerment Plan and running booth

Challenge Detroit Fellowship Dinner  
May 2, 2013- Keynote speaker to the 2013 Challenge Detroit Fellows

### *Documentaries*

Detroit in Overdrive  
August 2, 2011- Filmed by the Discovery Channel and Aired on Planet Green. A segment of a three part mini series on Detroit.  
Password: empowerdetroit

### *Media Features and Mentions*

Huffington Post  
"The Empowerment Plan's Veronika Scott Found A Better Way To Help The Homeless"

Womenetics.com  
"'Crazy Coat Lady' Changing Lives for Detroit Homeless"

**Fast Company**

“A Single Coat Design Combats Homelessness, In Detroit and Beyond”

**GOOD 100**

“Clothing and Empowering Detroit’s Homeless Population”

**ABCNews.com**

“Sleeping Bag Coats Warm, Employ Detroit Homeless”

**NPR, All Things Considered**

“An Entrepreneurial Seedling Sprouts in Detroit”

**Huffington Post**

“Sleeping Bag Coat Designed for the Homeless Draws Attention from Fashion Industry”

**PBS Newshour**

“Agents For Change”

“Sleeping Bag Coat for the Homeless Finds Fans in the Fashion World”

**Crain’s Detroit Business**

“Crain’s 20 In Their 20’s”

**CB2: In The Loop**

“influencers: veronika scott at work, The Empowerment Plan”

“influencers: veronika scott at home”

**Faces of GM**

“Design Project Benefits the Homeless”

**NBC Nightly News**

“I Think Detroit is Going to Come Back”

**EPA’s Blog About Our World**

“Veronika Scott and Her Amazing Dream Coat”

**Huffington Post**

“Veronika Scott, Stacy Abrams Win JFK New Frontier Awards”

**Forbes**

“Helping the Homeless, One Coat at a Time”

“Sleeping-Bag Coat for the Homeless Leads to a Garment Industry”

“What Chrysler, Eminem and Clint Eastwood Can Learn About Detroit From a Passionate Girl”

**CNN**

“The BIG I: Coat Transforms into Sleeping bag”

“Surviving the Elements”

**The New York Times**

“Altering Clothes, and Lives, With Design”

**San Francisco Chronicle**

“Design Student Creates Coat for Homeless People”

**SWISS MISS**

“A Coat to Help Detroit’s Homeless”

**NPR: All Things Considered**

“To Warm the Homeless, a Coat That’s a Sleeping bag”

**NPR: Morning Edition**

“Student Designs Coat to Keep Homeless Warm”

**Mitch Albom: Heart of Detroit**

“Heart of Detroit: Veronika Scott”

**Core 77**

“The Empowerment Plan: Veronika Scott’s Winter Coat for Detroit”

**Fast Company**

“How a 21-Year-Old Design Student’s Sleeping Bag-Coat Could Break the Cycle of Homelessness”

***Wikipedia***

Veronika Scott

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