

HEALTHCARE

A HEALTHY START(UP)

Ricardo Grant and SoCap Accelerate pump new life into healthcare innovation. —AIESHA D. LITTLE



Ricardo “Rico” Grant is no stranger to entrepreneurial culture. A long-time startup mentor with the nonprofit Cintrifuse, he founded CrownMob for the Black haircare marketplace in 2017. The mobile platform attracted 46,000 users in its two years and spawned a three-day conference/festival called Paloozanoiore in 2019. Grant then took his startup know-how to Northern Kentucky University’s Institute for Health Innovation to help launch SoCap Accelerate, a new accelerator focusing on the healthcare industry.

“My passion for innovation stems from my understanding of the need for fast change, the type of change that allows startups to win,” says Grant, who serves as SoCap’s executive director. “As a young founder, I participated in accelerators, and now having the opportunity to build one is a dream come true.”

SoCap’s inaugural cohort kicked off in mid-October with the selection of five companies, ranging from those whose products are in the early stages of beta testing to those already generating sustainable revenue. Participants are EMDR VR (Cincinnati), a virtual reality therapy vehicle providing therapy to treat post-traumatic stress syndrome and anxiety disorders for medical practices and individuals without access; Kare Mobile (Louisville), a mobile van offering dental services; PopBase (Burbank, Calif.), an online learning platform focused on health education for children; STRE.ME (Fort Wayne, Ind.), an online software delivery platform aiming to improve patient satisfaction, outcomes, and hospital profitability; and Xen Mystic Pillow (Dover, N.J.), an orthopedic cushion product providing neck support with an adjustable surround system. The fast-paced six-week program builds a custom curriculum for participating companies to improve the most vulnerable areas of their businesses.

Grant says SoCap is being intentional about changing the narrative of health and wellness in Northern Kentucky through the power of innovation. “There is no better time than now to focus on healthcare,” he says. “I have conversations with founders every day who are building mind-blowing solutions to real-world problems, and it’s the most refreshing aspect of entrepreneurship I’ve already been engaged with. My startup experience paired with the grit and hustle of awesome founders is why we’ll not only produce wins but change lives while doing it.”

Unlike regular accelerators, SoCap does not engage with cohort companies for months at a time and does not make financial commitments in exchange for equity. The goal is to drive value to startups and founders who are passionate about the solutions they’re creating and, in turn, encourage healthcare companies to take a hard look at the gaps in their innovation needs and use SoCap’s cohort companies to fill those gaps.

“As a new program,” Grant says, “we have to show up to work every day and ensure that these companies come out on the other end of this experience as prepared as they deserve to be.”