

[STORIES](#) / [PROFILES](#)

# Not 'Too Good to Be True': How the WIN Program Helps Build and Enrich CLT's Tech Talent

Email

Facebook

LinkedIn

Twitter



WIN students in the classroom. Courtesy photo.

By Courtney Gabrielson

July 03, 2019, 11:33am EDT

"We hear a lot, 'This is too good to be true,'" Pasha Maher, associate director of the [Carolina Fintech Hub](#), told me. He's talking about the entity's [Workforce Investment Network](#) program, which provides paid professional development, training and jobs to participants.

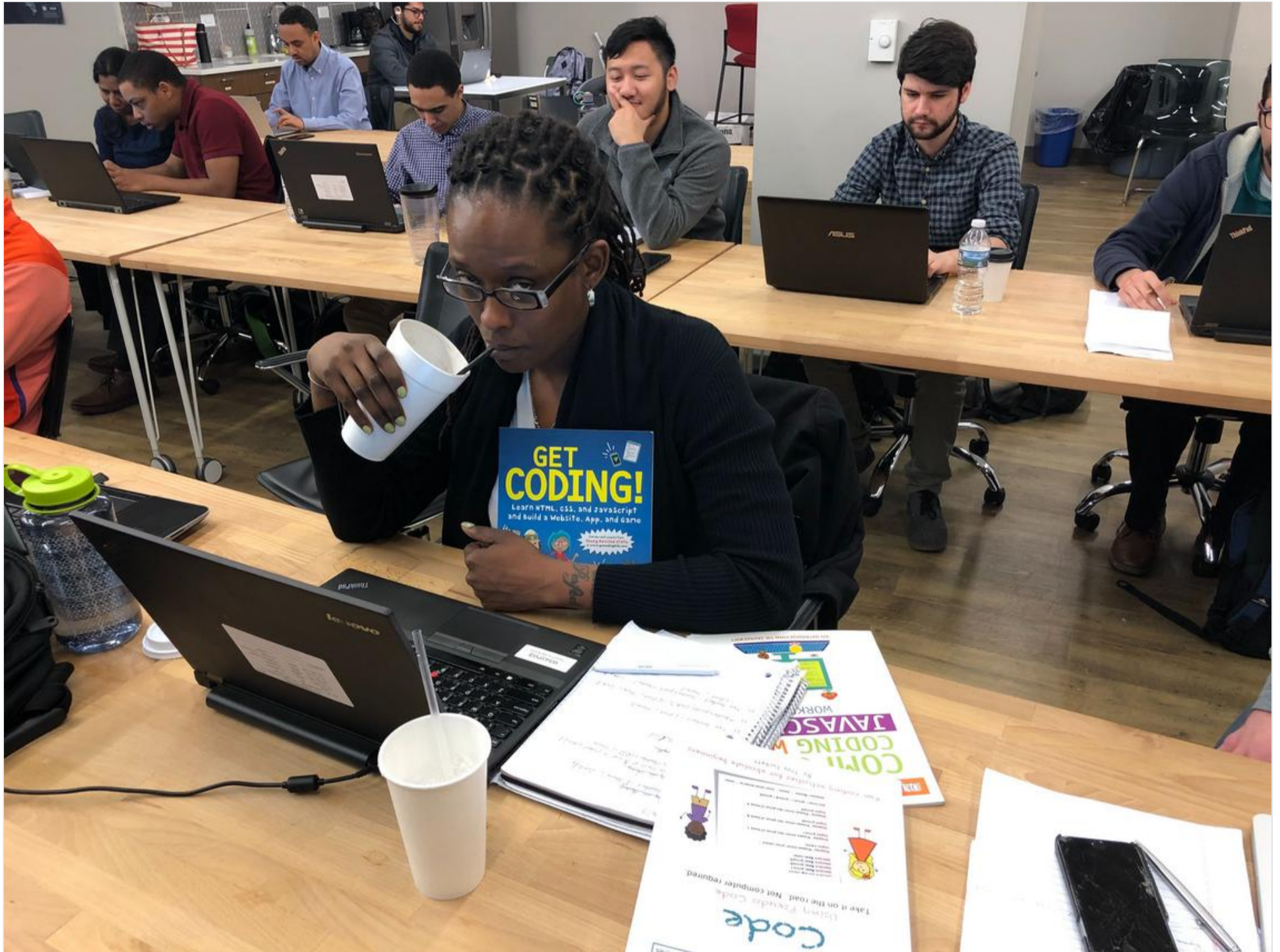
But I'm getting ahead of myself.

For the uninitiated, the Carolina Fintech Hub is a nonprofit with a simple goal: "advancing fintech in the Carolinas." HQed in Packard Place, it boasts events, free membership and a [leadership team](#) comprised of movers and shakers in the (local and national) fintech scene.

It also includes the WIN program, which was created to serve as both a bridge to and ladder for individuals who were looking to join the tech workforce, but didn't have the resources or training to do so — yet.

"According to the people in the program, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to catapult your socio-economic status," Maher said.

The fintech community benefits, too, as participants become additional members of a tech talent pool that employers frequently bemoan as being too shallow.



A WIN student in class. Courtesy Photo.

The program, currently in its first iteration, chooses participants based on an application and secondary aptitude test. Ideal candidates demonstrate motivation and a "strong interest in jobs within the technology industry" and must be considered "ready, willing and able to do what it takes to be successful in a game-changing career." Typically, these applicants haven't had a "traditional" route to a tech position.

Upon acceptance, participants can expect a few things: more than 700 hours of classroom training, which include a curriculum by Tech Talent South; a job at a company within Charlotte for 12 weeks; and Charlotte Works-provided soft-skills training. The WIN program is free for its students, who receive both a \$30,000 to \$35,000 pro-rated annual salary throughout and a full-time job guarantee upon graduation. Tools and resources, such as laptops and access to public transportation, are also provided in an effort to strip students of any participation barriers.

"It's really a story about the community, from resources to curriculum," Maher said of WIN's development. "[Area employers said], 'We'll pony up jobs and trust you to take care of the rest.'" The result was a program backed by a suite of community sponsors (think [BLKTECH INTERACTIVE](#), the [City of Charlotte](#), [Goodwill](#)) and corporate sponsors (Ally, Bank of America, etc.).

"The most SURPRISING thing for me personally was how close we've all gotten."

"The opposite of death by a thousand paperclips. That's what this program has been," he added.

Maier said the response from the community itself has been overwhelming. But, he added, "I don't think that my job is to advertise ... I think the people always advertise themselves."

It was at this point in our conversation that I had the pleasure of speaking to two current WIN students, Bryant Allen and Torie Dominguez. Each had a unique story that brought them to the same classroom in Packard Place.

"I reached the point where I was just at a loss," Allen told me. "I just struggled at all parts of my life: relationships, family, just lost a job, just lost a place. I ended up on the street."

After two and a half years without a home or a gig, a friend helped him get a job at Einstein Brothers, where he quickly moved up the ladder. But after four years, he felt stuck again.

Enter the WIN program, brought to his attention by his mother. He applied, and the rest is history.

Allen, who divides his time between the WIN classroom and his program-provided job at Ernst and Young, explained the complicated technical aspects of what he's learning with ease and confidence, a testament to both his skill and the in-depth nature of the program itself. But his new skills weren't just tech-related.



The WIN program in action. Courtesy photo.

"There's a mentality that I think I had, that being a coder was a lot about 'knowing' — be it knowing your language, certain terms or whatever. That's totally unrealistic," Allen said. "Technology changes so quickly and is so broad in scope that a lot of being a developer is knowing how to find out [answers to different questions]."

Dominguez, meanwhile, had heard about WIN from her friend Taylor, who is also in the program.

"I think it was about two weeks into working here that I realized that it wasn't a scam or a social experiment," she said.

Dominguez emphasized that in addition to the practical skills she was learning, the community element of the program was a huge boon.

"The most surprising thing for me personally was how close we've all gotten," she said. "It's really remarkable how much of a team we were from day one, much like you'll be doing in the workplace. Being a good teammate is a huge part of being in this field."

She added that the program's consideration of a host of potential challenges for students made all the difference.

"Transportation was a big thing for me, and that's not an obvious [problem]," she said. WIN helps Dominguez get to class and work (for her, at Bank of America) every day.

"It's not [just] philanthropy, it's also an investment," she said. "We're being reminded that we determine whether this program continues and grows. It's such a motivation."

Sustained growth is certainly a goal of Maher and the rest of the WIN team, who hope to have larger cohorts in the future. Aside from high graduation rates, WIN and its sponsors measure success by the sustained promotions its alumni achieve in their post-grad lives.

For this cohort, that chapter begins on Sept. 5, when participants officially graduate from the program in a ceremony at the Wells Fargo building.

**Disclosure:** Carolina Fintech Hub is one of Charlotte Inno's founding partners.

## Keep Digging



How Charlotte startup aims to be game changer for CRE financing

Profiles



Skiptown CEO reflects on what's next for the pet-services startup

Profiles



Why this Miami-based fintech firm is growing its software team here

Profiles



How a local startup is using tech to disrupt commercial real estate

Profiles



Inside SkillPop's plan to revive in-person classes this summer

Profiles

SPONSORED CONTENT  
by Dualboot Partners

[Social challenge app from concept to launch](#)

SPONSORED CONTENT  
by Brinkmann Constructors

[4 features senior living consumers look for p](#)

# Spotlight

[More](#) 



1  
FIRE  
WARDS

Charlotte Inno's Fire Awards: Meet the 50 winners of 2021

[See More >](#)



INNO  
UNDE  
25

Inno Under 25: Meet 10 young innovators making waves in Charlotte's tech, startup scene

[See More >](#)

Want to stay ahead of who & what is next? Sent weekly, the Beat is your definitive look at Charlotte's innovation economy, offering news, analysis & more on the people, companies & ideas driving your Charlotte forward. Follow the Beat

[Share the Beat](#)

[Sign Up](#)

Founding Partners



[Back to Top ▲](#)

## CHARLOTTEINNO

[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)  
[Your California Privacy Rights](#) | [Ad Choices](#)

© 2022 American City Business Journals. All rights reserved. Use of and/or registration on any portion of this site constitutes acceptance of our User Agreement (updated as of 1/1/21) and Privacy Policy and Cookie Statement (updated as of 1/1/21). The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of American City Business Journals.