

EP Native Hits Ground Running in Behavioral Science Field

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By Kelly White, Correspondent

An Evergreen Park native was hired onto a not-for-profit organization this past month with a very specific mission.

Rich Daker has taken on the position of associate at ideas42 and is currently working on projects aimed at increasing financial inclusion to low-income communities and facilitating achievement and continued enrollment in postsecondary education.

“Rich is a great fit for our team,” ideas42 Director of Communications, Andy Plews, said. “He’s passionate about doing good, about the field of behavioral science and he has a stellar educational background which is a good fit with our group.”

“It’s a great non-profit that’s really at the forefront of this movement to apply behavioral science to solve very tough, very important social problems,” Daker said, “ideas42 was a perfect opportunity for me to use the scientific skills I gained in college to really do some good, and it was an opportunity I knew I couldn’t pass up.”

ideas42 was established in June, 2008 and began as a social science laboratory at Harvard University. The group is a unique design and research lab bringing together highly creative practitioners and industry and policy experts with world-renowned economists and psychologists from top-tier universities.

Daker graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Princeton University with a BA in Psychology and a certificate in Neuroscience. Before joining the team, Rich worked in multiple psychology research labs at Princeton that studied topics ranging from inter-group relations to working memory. His own research focused on understanding the mechanisms by which stereotypes can affect academic performance.

“We recruited him straight from the university and I believe it’s been around three weeks he’s been on board,” Plews said, “We already have him on travel in Philadelphia, so he’s hitting the ground running. It’s very competitive to work here, so he’s done a terrific job.”

“I just graduated from Princeton, and while I was there I made a point to take courses that would allow me to develop my skills as a scientist,” Daker said, “I’ve become proficient in applied statistics and have received solid training as a researcher in psychology and neuroscience, two of the behavioral sciences ideas42 uses in their work.”

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The organization uses insights from the field of behavioral science to design innovative solutions to tough social problems. It hopes to bring the solutions to scale, benefitting people around the world. As well as the U.S., it has projects in around 15 countries.

The employees work globally in consumer finance, poverty alleviation, health, education, energy and the environment. Their day-to-day work begins with re-conceptualizing problems, designing new solutions and testing them in the field, then finally scaling them up to reach millions of people.

“Using insights from behavioral science helps us understand the choices and decisions people make,” Plews said.

Some recent work includes “Poverty Interrupted,” a study that proposes new solutions for breaking the cycle of poverty, reframing HIV risks in South Africa, and creating playable cities around the world. ideas42’s many partners include foundations, government and government agencies, and other non-profits and corporations.

“We’ve got some projects in their very early stages now that aim to serve the Chicago area, and it’s very rewarding for me to know that I’m working at an organization that’s beginning to apply our behavioral expertise to do good in the area where I grew up,” Daker said.

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