



Cassandra Castillo Cruz
Entrepreneur • Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative

Kassandra Castillo Cruz is a successful entrepreneur is proud of her Vieques Puerto Rico roots. She loves to inspire young people to pursue their dreams. From a very early age, Kassandra was an integral part of her mother's small business of garbage removal and recycling in Vieques. Later, she received her Business Marketing Degree from Inter American University in Puerto Rico and spent a semester abroad at the Spain Business School in Barcelona.

Kassandra achieved her first dream as a top-fashion model and fashion designer. When she was 14-years-old, she joined the Institute's first bilingual demonstration project, the Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative. With VYLI's support, she participated in her first beauty contest, created a professional portfolio, received her first press, and was introduced to the fashion industry leaders who then organized her first professional photo shoots. For VYLI's Job Shadow Day, Kassandra was matched with Ileana Cambó, former Ms. Puerto Rico and VP of L'Oreal. Kassandra's modeling career then skyrocketed - and she received many professional modeling jobs and awards. In just 3 years, she became a model for UNICA, the top-modeling agency in Puerto Rico.

Kassandra helped develop VYLI's Entrepreneurship Initiative. She conducted workshops to train young people to turn local natural resources of seeds, beads, shells, glass and stones into unique jewelry, and once a week, VYLI youth sold their wares. They also raised funds to travel to the neighboring island of Tortola to exhibit their wares at the 3rd Annual Caribbean Artisan Festival. While there, the youth experienced quality craftsmanship from ten other Caribbean countries, learned how to preserve their unique culture, and contributed to the economic well-being of their own island. Kassandra helps aspiring models by providing guidance, organizing fashion shows and professional photo shoots, and leading college-prep workshops to encourage youth to strive towards higher education.

Kassandra's entrepreneurial efforts include designing her own line of bathing suits and accessories and studying swimwear design at Centro de Las Artes del Diseño y la Alta Costura. Kassandra was the first employee for the startup company Trendlee.com. In 2014, Kassandra moved with the company to New York City, where it is now a \$5 million enterprise. Kassandra is the Head of Operations at Trendlee.com and Rebagg.com, where she develops operation processes, and manages customer service, logistics, quality control, and leads a team of twelve people.

In 2016 Kassandra led an Entrepreneur Workshop for the Institute's newest initiative in Holyoke, Massachusetts. With Girls Inc. of Holyoke she showed girls how to use entrepreneurship to work towards her goals. She gave her first speech at VYLI's Youth Leadership Summit 2004, and served as faculty for the Institute's Summits from 2012-2014. In 2014 she assisted with the Institute's Hawaii Initiative and mentors young people to realize their dreams.