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**Fifth Winner Announced in Annual Staples/Ashoka Youth Social Entrepreneur Competition**

*Rocco Falconer starts Planting Promise to give the poorest in Sierra Leone opportunities for education*

**ARLINGTON, Va. — Sept. 13, 2010—** [Ashoka](#), the world's community of leading social entrepreneurs, and [Staples](#), Inc. (NASDAQ: SPLS), announced today the fifth of eight winners in the [Staples/Ashoka Youth Social Entrepreneur \(YSE\) Competition](#). The fifth winner, 22-year-old Rocco Falconer, a social entrepreneur from the U.K., created a farming project in Sierra Leone that supplies the funds needed to build local schools and offer free education for children and adults. The global competition recognizes youth-led organizations addressing social issues affecting their communities, and is part of Ashoka's [Youth Venture](#)<sup>®</sup>, an initiative that identifies and fosters young entrepreneurs all over the world to become changemakers who are creating positive change.

The eight winners of the Staples/Ashoka Youth Social Entrepreneur Competition will receive cash prizes, consulting from Staples executives and an all-expenses-paid trip to speak at TEDxYSE, a Youth Venture-hosted conference held at Sidwell Friends in Washington, DC on Nov. 13. TEDxYSE leverages the global TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conference model, which enables local community groups to organize, design and host their own independent, TED-like events. For more information, please visit <http://www.tedxyse.com>. Tickets for the event are now on and are available at <http://www.tedxyse.com/register>.

After traveling eastern and southern Africa, Rocco Falconer wanted to help deliver lasting sustainable change for the poorest communities in the world. To successfully escape the poverty trap, Rocco believes that efforts must focus on giving people the capacity and inspiration to change their lives. Rocco founded Planting Promise, a community-based organization in Sierra Leone that develops the prospects of the world's poorest country by giving local citizens the opportunity to create sustainable business and pursue education.

To create Planting Promise, Rocco connected with a local partner in Sierra Leone and found a half-finished building to use for free – “just four walls,” as he put it, to which he completed by adding a roof. After assembling the minimal basics needed for the school, he opened for registration and received more than 400 students interested in enrolling. .

Rocco then focused on securing funding – but was adamant about not using a traditional fundraising model. “You don’t help people by making them dependent on you,” he said. “You help people by giving them to chance to control their own futures.”

In addition, Rocco also identified another problem: food security. More than 70 percent of Sierra Leone’s food is imported, and like many countries around the world, farming has diminished as a valued vocation. Rocco visited local village chiefs and secured their support to begin a community farming project. Once the farming began, the initiative created jobs, produced food for the community and set up proceeds that could be used to fund the new school. Planting Promise uses an innovative model that not only creates meaningful jobs with high social value, but also creates a financially stable model for education. Rocco began Planting Promise in 2008 with just 25 acres of farmland and one school. It’s grown tremendously, with 850 acres now being farmed to fund four schools, and the model continues to scale as funds increase. Rocco projects that September’s harvest will pay the costs through the next academic year.

“Rocco Falconer embodies the basic notion of a changemaker,” said Gretchen Zucker, executive director for Ashoka’s Youth Venture. “He wanted to make a difference and he acted upon it. He saw a need and even though he ran into obstacles, he tried something else instead of giving up. His commitment and drive has taught us that anyone can make a difference.”

“By creating Planting Promise, Rocco Falconer is creating a positive, lasting impact on youth and families throughout Sierra Leone,” said Paul Capelli, vice president of community and public relations, Staples. Inc. “His success serves as inspiration to other young people, particularly in the communities where he’s made an impact, and encourages them to become leaders of their own social change.”

The Staples/Ashoka YSE competition is open to existing and new Youth Venture teams, which are made up of young people between the ages of 12 and 24, who are creating entrepreneurial ventures that make a positive impact on communities. Nominations and entries will be accepted on a rolling basis through Sept. 30, 2010. For additional information on the Staples/Ashoka Youth Social Entrepreneur Competition, please visit <http://www.genv.net/en-us/staples-yse>.

Ashoka’s Youth Venture<sup>®</sup> engages over 75,000 young people in pursuing their dreams to create change in 18 countries around the world. Since its founding in 1996, Youth Venture has launched nearly 4,000 Venture teams worldwide – one-third of which have launched as a direct result of SFFL’s five-year partnership with Ashoka. SFFL’s commitment to supporting Ashoka’s vision of Everyone A Changemaker<sup>™</sup> has been instrumental in expanding Youth Venture’s offerings and opportunities to help young people, like Shiv Dravid, create positive change. Since 2006, [Staples Foundation for Learning](#), the charitable arm of Staples, Inc., has enabled Youth Venture to expand to eight countries in North America, South America and Europe through more than \$2.5 million in funding.

### **About Youth Venture**

Ashoka’s Youth Venture aims to help an entire generation of young people develop as changemakers, who will improve their communities now and throughout their lives. Youth Venture inspires and supports teams of young people to launch and lead their own civic-minded organizations and businesses. Youth teams access workshops, tools, adult allies, a global network of like-minded young changemakers and seed funding to establish their own ventures that solve problems around them. Youth Venture was created by Ashoka, the global pioneer of the social entrepreneurship sector and the world’s biggest network of changemakers. We believe that the greatest contribution we can make to the world is to increase dramatically the number of changemakers today and in every future generation. This is the key factor for success for every part of society, from a school to a company to an entire country. Ashoka’s Youth Venture operates in 18 countries and online at [www.GenV.net](http://www.GenV.net).

### **About Ashoka**

Ashoka is the world's community of leading social entrepreneurs—individuals with innovative and practical ideas for addressing social needs. Working with these social entrepreneurs, Ashoka builds communities of innovators who work collectively to transform society and design new ways for the social sector to become more productive, entrepreneurial and globally integrated. For more information, please visit [www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org).

### **About Staples**

Staples, the world's largest office products company, is committed to making it easy for customers to buy a wide range of office products and services. Our broad selection of office supplies, electronics, technology and office furniture as well as business services, including computer repair and copying and printing, helps our customers run their offices efficiently. With 2009 sales of \$24 billion and 91,000 associates worldwide, Staples operates in 26 countries throughout North and South America, Europe, Asia and Australia serving businesses of all sizes and consumers. Staples invented the office superstore concept in 1986 and today ranks second worldwide in e-commerce sales. The company is headquartered outside Boston. More information about Staples (Nasdaq: SPLS) is available at [www.staples.com/media](http://www.staples.com/media).

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