****

**Connecting Bridges and Borders Program**

**⎻⎻⎻**

**Entrepreneurship and Innovation NJCU—Jersey City Connect Project**

**Kelly McKenna Wins Audience’s Choice at UPitchNJ 2020**

**Jersey City, May 5, 2020—**The IDR is incredibly proud to announce that its very own undergraduate research assistant Kelly McKenna advanced to the finals at the UPitchNJ 2020 competition and won the Audience’s Choice Award that comes with a $500 prize. This is a top tier award, and we could not be more excited about the attention her incredible pitch, Signs of Communication, is receiving.

Kelly and her startup team have worked tirelessly to develop Kelly’s vision for a way to bridge communication between deaf and hearing people. Through the development of AI technology that will automatically translate American Sign Language into spoken English language, and the reverse, so communication will be more accessible than ever before between the deaf and hearing communities.

"On behalf of NJCU, I am so proud of Kelly's amazing accomplishments at UPItchNJ. We are honored to have students as innovative and creative as her representing our institution, and we cannot wait to see what is in store for Signs of Communication!” — Dr. Sue Henderson, President of NJCU

“We are so proud of Kelly’s accomplishment winning the Audience Choice Award and how she exemplifies the new entrepreneurship and innovation culture of NJCU. She is a beacon of light for more students to get engaged and encouraged at NJCU be not just think entrepreneurship and innovation”

— Professor David Weiss, Founder and Director of the IDR and Connecting Bridges and Borders Program, and the Entrepreneurship and Innovation NJCU-Jersey Connect Project

“UPitchNJ showcases the top college entrepreneurs at universities throughout the state and Kelly McKenna was no exception. The innovative startup venture she is creating, Signs of Communication, addresses some of the biggest challenges faced by the deaf community. We congratulate Kelly and her faculty advisors and mentors at New Jersey City University.” — Susan Scherreik-Hynes, Founding Director of the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at Seton Hall University

Congratulations to Kelly Mckenna and her team. They worked very hard, to make things happen over a relatively short period of time. Kelly is passionate about helping hearing impaired people, and her vision is to find a way to build a communication bridge between deaf and hearing people. Her team, faculty and mentors supported Kelly’s passion and vision to help design a product, through AI technology, to convert her idea to a start-up. Great job by NJCU Jersey City Connect Project under the IDR to help foster entrepreneurship and innovation. It provides a perfect ecosystem to young student entrepreneurs like Kelly to establish their start-ups. I am so proud to be a part of this ecosystem as a mentor for budding entrepreneurs and a member of NJCU faculty community- Professor Usha Agarwal

“It was amazing to be invited into this year’s UPitchNJ Competition and an even greater honor to win the Audience Choice Award! Thank you to Nokia Bell Labs for providing me with a mentor, Dr. Itai Segall, in helping my project, as well as my other mentors David Weiss, Arun Shroff, and Usha Agarwal. There are great things to come for Signs of Communication.” — Kelly McKenna

**About Us**

The Institute for Dispute Resolution at NJCU is a platform under the School of Business that seeks to promote international negotiation and mediation techniques to manage disputes in cross border commercial and general conflict resolution forums.

**Contact**

Darby Zelaskowski, Public Relations

dzelaskowski01@manhattan.edu

<https://www.njcu.edu/academics/schools-colleges/school-business/institute-dispute-resolution-idr>