Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Launch Businesses

Armed with the knowledge and skills she acquired through Start-Up NY and a range of entrepreneurship resources she received as part of Syracuse University’s Inclusive Entrepreneurship™ initiative, Della Brown, a Syracuse native, has transformed her business ideas into reality.

“Starting my own eatery would not have been possible if it were not for the Start-Up NY program,” noted Brown, who recently opened Tacolicious in downtown Syracuse.

Brown isn’t alone in achieving her dream. Start-Up NY – an innovative partnership between the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University, the Whitman School of Management through its South Side Innovation Center (SSIC), and Onondaga County – has assisted dozens of budding entrepreneurs with diverse disabilities in Onondaga County gain access to business development resources to help them launch and grow successful business ventures.

Since 2007, the program has served 204 individuals with disabilities, resulting in 48 of the entrepreneurs starting businesses, from a car repair garage to a dog grooming and day care service.

Start-Up NY has expanded to become a model for “Inclusive Entrepreneurship” that works with partners to leverage financial resources and access to financial literacy and benefits planning.

The model also includes teaching and guiding college students who work with entrepreneurs with disabilities as business development consultants, a component of a new jointly-taught Whitman School and BBI course.

“We know that people with disabilities can become successful small business owners given the opportunity, training, and resources,” said Gary Shaheen, BBI Senior Vice President.

BBI managed the design and implementation of Start-Up NY on behalf of Onondaga County, led by the County Department of Social Services.

Start-Up NY provides participants with business plan development and review, benefits planning assistance, financing consultation, and training programs, among other resources.

“One of the most beneficial aspects of the program,” said Brown, “was having a business navigator coach, someone who worked with me one-on-one throughout the process.”

Start-Up NY was funded by a three-year, $3 million grant to Onondaga County from the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). The program has been so successful that BBI is now working with its community partners to replicate the model in other locations.

For more information, visit www.startupny.org or http://bbi.syr.edu.

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• **Test Your Site for Accessibility with Cynthia Says** This site can help Web content developers determine how accessible their websites are for people with disabilities. Visit www.icdri.org/test_your_site_now.htm.

• **Your Child’s Strengths – a Guide for Parents and Teachers**, by Jennifer Fox, $15, the Search Institute, www.searchinstitutestore.org. The author, an educator, argues that “fixing” kids’ weaknesses is not the way to achieve success. Rather, Fox promotes focusing on youth’s activity strengths, relationship strengths, and learning strengths.

• **Career Spins**, This video shows teens conducting themselves inappropriately and then models what is appropriate. $69, Northwest Media, Inc., www.sociallearning.com. Designed for visual learners, this interactive software uses fast-moving images and music to help teens identify potential career goals.

• **What Kids Need to Succeed**, by Peter Benson, Judy Balbraith, and Pamela Espeland, $6.99, Search Institute, www.searchinstitutestore.org. This award-winning book includes more than 900 ideas for building the 40 Developmental Assets.