

a joint resource journal for professionals in workforce,
economic development, and education

WWW.WORKFORCEMARKETING.COM

Solutions

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 2 MARCH/APRIL 2011



Workforce Investment Works – National Campaign to Highlight the Success of Federal Employment and Training Programs

The Changing Role of Technology in the Employment Process

From Dream to Reality: Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities

Burmese Refugees Find New Opportunities Working in Indianapolis Hotels

Fidelity Bonding Program for At-Risk Job Seekers

From Dream to Reality: Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities



When Della Reese Brown first discovered the Inclusive Entrepreneurship™ program in Syracuse, NY, she had been out of work for ten years. Brown had been living with a disability that resulted in chronic pain and some mobility impairment. She received Social Security benefits for her condition, but missed working and wanted her own business. She wanted to do something she loved that could also accommodate her disability.

At the Inclusive Entrepreneurship™ program, Brown immediately found like-minded people and a staff that understood her and could provide the training and support she needed. The program, spearheaded by the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the University's Whitman School of Management, is a collaboration of community partners whose combined resources for entrepreneurship training are considerable. The Onondaga Small Business Development Center (SBDC) provides business planning; Onondaga Case Management advises on benefits; and the Inclusive Entrepreneurship™ program's

Business Navigator, El-Java Abdul-Qadir, guides potential entrepreneurs through the program.

When Brown first met with Abdul-Qadir, he helped her identify her talents, interests, and strengths, as well as the areas in which she would need assistance. In order to fill the gaps in her abilities and expertise, she developed a business support team. Brown narrowed in on a business concept: to open a restaurant cafeteria that would offer the specialty foods she loved to make. After all, she was known for her cooking throughout her neighborhood and among family and friends. Abdul-Qadir guided her in determining if and how her plan could be feasible.

Brown explained, *"El-Java asked me a lot of questions about myself and my business ideas—we were finding out who I am to see if I'm on the right level to be an entrepreneur. He also met with my support team—my husband, my nephews, and myself. He talked with them about my skills. He keeps us on our toes."*

Brown then met with the program's SBDC counselor, Nancy Ansteth, who guided her in conducting marketing, pricing, and location research. *"I knew a lot about cooking, but I didn't know a lot about business. It was kind of confusing at first because I didn't know what to do. How was I going to start? Nancy opened my eyes to the business world and guided me in developing my business plan. She gave me a booklet that took me through the process step by step,"* noted Brown.

"I did all my own research: all my footwork, my online contacts, and my Internet research. I visited and observed different restaurants, experimented with different recipes, and determined appropriate pricing. But I brought everything back to Nancy. She went over it with me and okayed it. She was an excellent business advisor—she kept me realistic about everything."

Brown also met with the program's benefits advisor to learn how to best use the Social Security work incentives and take advantage of Social Security programs and policies regarding self employment. The advisor suggested that Brown develop a Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS)—a Social Security Administration program for people with disabilities who receive SSI benefits. Under this plan, she will receive an additional \$185 a month for the next 14 months that she can use toward her business.



During this time, Brown took a series of courses from the program's community partners that would form the foundation she needed to develop and run her business. Through the Whitman School of Management, she took a six-week Financial Literacy course and went through a six-week intensive Entrepreneurs Bootcamp. Through the SBDC, she took a twenty-hour Fast Track to Business Start-up course. Through the One-Stop Center, she took a series of computer classes. Brown also completed the ServSafe certification program offered by the National Restaurant Association. In addition, she worked with a student team that helped her develop her business by conducting marketing research and events as part of their coursework in Inclusive Entrepreneurship Consulting at Syracuse University.

Brown is also a regular at the monthly luncheons held by the Inclusive Entrepreneurship™ program for participants. *"Often we had speakers who had already become successful through the program. They would explain how they started out, the classes they took, the challenges they faced, and what is now going on with their company. Afterward, we go around the table and introduce ourselves and our own companies. In the beginning I was so nervous, I didn't even want to say my name. Now they can't shut me up."*

She also said that the luncheons were an opportunity for collaboration: *"One entrepreneur, Tom, has a farm--I may become interested in purchasing his tomatoes or peppers. Someone else has a graphic design business--I may ask them about doing a logo for me. A couple of people have told me that seeing me and what I've done has given them the confidence to go after their own dreams. And that really made me feel good."*

Program staff guided Brown through a number of strategies to finance her business. She applied for and received two small business loans and an individual development account (IDA) from the local credit union. In addition, through the state Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, as part of her Individual Employment Plan, she received funds to pay for her final marketing and equipment needs. Her restaurant, Tacolicious, held its grand opening in November and received local newspaper and television coverage.

Many people dream of owning their own businesses. For those with disabilities, entrepreneurship can provide not only a source of income, but also the opportunity to develop a business around their particular needs. When organizations collaborate to support self-employment for people with disabilities, by blending and braiding resources in efficient and effective ways, entrepreneurship can flourish.

The Inclusive Entrepreneurship™ program provides training for people with disabilities or with low income who would like to start their own businesses. It started in 2006 as a three-year demonstration project, entitled StartUP NY, and was funded by the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. It is currently funded by the Small Business Administration.

For further information about Inclusive Entrepreneurship™, call Program Director Mirza Tihic at (315) 450-0714 or visit <http://whitman.syr.edu/eee/startupny//sbaprime.htm>.