WBDC
Women's Business Development Council

State of Connecticut General Assembly

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

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Women's Business Development Council

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Thank you Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Genga, Representative Porter, Senator Kane, Representative Ziobron and committee members. It is an honor to speak before you today. My name is Fran Pastore and I am the Founder and CEO of the Women's Business Development Council (WBDC). WBDC is the leading organization for women business owners in the state, providing entrepreneurial and financial training, access to capital and advocating on behalf of women business owners - with remarkable results.

I have been actively engaged in the women-owned business movement for more than 20 years in Connecticut and in Washington DC. I served for three years as a member of President Obama's National Women's Business Council and I have a long history of working with Connecticut's Department of Economic and Community Development. I am here today to ask you to reinstate the line item of $500,000 in the state budget for WBDC.

Why Should You Reinstate the $500,000 line Item for WBDC?

1) WBDC is the only organization of its kind in CT that works predominately with women entrepreneurs to start and grow small businesses
2) Everything we do falls under the umbrella of economic equity, which I understand to be one of this administration's primary objectives
3) WBDC provides an impressive return on your investment. In fact, we are the only organization in the state to be recognized by the world-renowned Aspen Institute, which focuses on economic impact outcomes of organizations such as ours, and our outcomes are higher as compared to our counterparts around the country.

As this committee already knows, small businesses and entrepreneurs are the backbone of America's economy, creating 65 percent or more of new jobs in our country each year. In fact, women owned small businesses are expected to create almost 60 percent of projected 18 million new jobs to be generated by 2018. But small businesses, owned and operated by women, minorities and other diverse populations, also have been disproportionately affected by the worst recession since the Great Depression. While many believe this economic downturn is behind us, for many entrepreneurs and small business owners in this state, it is not. In order for Connecticut's economy to fully recover, we must strategically deploy Connecticut's existing assets to women and minority owned businesses. This is exactly what WBDC does and has been doing for more than 18 years.

WBDC Established to Fill Gap in Connecticut

Established in 1997, WBDC grew out of a need in Connecticut for entrepreneurial training and services for women. In fact, Connecticut was the only state in the country that did not have such a service for women. WBDC secured a grant in 1998 from the US Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Women's Business Ownership (OWBO). In 2007, 10 years after receiving its first federal grant, WBDC received another grant from the SBA to establish a second WBC in Waterbury, Connecticut. With its state funded line item, WBDC then leveraged its resources and opened offices in Danbury, Hartford and provided services in New Haven in conjunction with Mayor Toni

Harp's Small Business Initiative. WBDC has expanded our statewide network of offices and programs throughout the Stamford, Danbury, Shelton, New Haven, Waterbury, Bridgeport, Derby, Norwalk, and Hartford regions with plans for additional expansion in 2015. WBDC offers programs in the fields of business development/management and financial education.

How Does WBDC's Work Impact the Community?

The programs and services provided by WBDC have historically had a direct impact on the communities we serve. Our own internal impact analysis shows that for every dollar invested in WBDC, **87 cents** is reinvested in the community. **Overall in 2014, WBDC worked with more than 1800 people who created or expanded over 280 businesses, and sustained and added more than 300 jobs to our economy.** WBDC fosters alliances with local government, higher education, and community organizations that result in thousands of dollars of in-kind services, rent and volunteer hours. Furthermore, WBDC serves as a model small business to clients and to other not-for-profits. WBDC is perceived as the preferred provider of entrepreneurial and professional development with expertise in marketing, management, capacity building, program delivery, and fiscal responsibility. **In 2014, WBDC served more than 1,800 people from nearly all of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns.**

Since 1997, WBDC has been a respected and innovative provider of counseling, training and technical assistance to both aspiring and established businesses. We have

been continuously funded for over 17 straight years by the U.S. Small Business Administration to provide our service model to women entrepreneurs across the state and have been recognized as one of the top ten business centers in the nation. Our expertise and success is well-documented, and our ability to attract female and male entrepreneurs makes WBDC a unique service provider.

Data shows that women-owned businesses are poised to play a major role in revitalizing Connecticut's economy. According to the American Express OPEN State of Women-Owned Businesses Report 2013, Connecticut businesses owned by women soared in the past decade. Since the late 1990s, growth in Connecticut businesses owned by women far outpaced their national counterparts in overall revenues and number of employees. Furthermore, the net increase of 5.3 million jobs economy-wide has come almost entirely from very large public corporations and women-owned firms. However, many micro-and small- businesses are not meeting their full potential and experience stymied growth in the hands of entrepreneurs with limited resources and little experience dealing with lenders and financial institutions. WBDC is well-positioned to create meaningful and lasting economic impact through small business development, helping women gain technical knowledge, access capital and grow their business to scale.

The Biggest Barrier for Women Entrepreneurs: Access to Capital

One need shared by all entrepreneurs, aspiring and established, is in accessing capital.

Women business owners and entrepreneurs face unique challenges and have extreme difficulty in growing their businesses due to a combination of critical factors:

- Women entrepreneurs still face challenges getting fair access to capital. Only 4% of the total dollar value of all small business loans goes to women entrepreneurs—even though women own 30% of all small businesses according to the 21st Century Barriers to Women's Entrepreneurship: Majority Report of the U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, July 2014/ Urban Institute;

- Women entrepreneurs often possess very little experience dealing with lenders and financial institutions, and are not sufficiently prepared to develop and present complete and compelling loan applications to lenders;

- Banks and other lenders persist in their reluctance to invest in small businesses in general and women-owned small businesses in particular. An article by the Hartford Business Journal indicated that the number of loans to small businesses dropped 71%, from approx. 120,000 to 35,000 loans, between 2007 and 2010. Research shows that women's business loan approval rates are between 15 percent and 20 percent below men's (Biz2Credit.com). Additionally, women do not look as "credit-worthy" as men to lending institutions— in 2013 women's credit scores were on average 20 points below men's.

WBDC seeks to overcome these challenges by implementing a number of strategies. WBDC's Access to Capital initiative helps businesses develop sound financial management strategies by providing technical assistance. This includes a variety of hands-on workshops, seminars and one-on-one financial counseling that provide clients with the critical information and tools to better understand and prepare financial documents and projections. Our goal is to provide business owners the technical assistance they need to secure capital by developing realistic business plans, accurate financial statements and complete loan packaging documents. As a result, in the past two years through Connecticut's Small Business Express Program, WBDC clients secured nearly $2M in grants and loans - increasing sales and creating new jobs. WBDC clients represent 6% of the Business Express Program women awardees.

WBDC's Clients are Statewide & Outperform the National Average

Because of its state funding in 2014, WBDC was able to reach more clients and provide more services. In addition to improving organizational infrastructure, we opened offices in Danbury and Hartford, focused on the DECD Small Business Express program, collaborated with the New Haven's Mayor's Initiatives, expanded our programs in Stamford to include Spanish language services and outreach to the most vulnerable entrepreneurs located on Stamford's West Side.

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WBDC served more than 1,800 participants from nearly all of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns—a 20% increase over 2013. We have seen increases in the number of low to moderate income (LMI) clients and in the number of college educated clients. Over 50 percent of our clients are LMI and all are seeking to improve their lives and the lives of their families with the goal of economic self-reliance. Nearly 10% are female single heads of households, and 36% are racial/ethnic minorities.

The median number of years a WBDC client has been in business is five years, employing one employee. On average, our established businesses employ three staff members, compared to the national average of one employee in addition to the owner.

WBDC clients generated approximately $65 million in gross revenue in 2014. Overall, WBDC's clients are out-performing their national counterparts in terms of reported gross revenue. On average in 2014, WBDC women-owned businesses averaged over $276,000 in revenue—this is much greater than the national average of $155,000. Nearly 20% of WBDC clients generated more than $500,000 in the past year (compared to the national average of 4%). Forty-two percent (42%) generated $100,000 or more in 2013 (nationally, only 22% of private, women-owned firms generated$100K or more).

56% of WBDC's clients come from Fairfield County; 24% from New Haven County; 9% from Hartford County; 5% from Litchfield County; 2% from Middlesex County; 1% from New London County; less than 1% from Tolland and Windham Counties combined.

WBDC is a Life-Changing Catalyst for Vulnerable Populations

While WBDC serves women from all socio-economic backgrounds at all income levels, more than 50% of clients are low-moderate income. For many low-income women, self-employment is a viable alternative to an economy plagued by sluggish job growth, and can be a pathway out of poverty for them and for their children. However, these women often cannot compete in the small business marketplace because they lack personal financial stability, appropriate training, and access to capital and credit opportunities. In order to create economic stability and success for themselves, women require specific skills, knowledge and relationships that have historically been difficult to access.

For women facing economic hardship- -such as chronic under-employment, divorce, unforeseen debt, or a recent layoff--a lack of financial literacy and skills poses a serious threat to economic security. Without understanding the full impact of our financial choices, low- and moderate-income women are likely to pay more than they have to for financial services, fall into debt, damage their credit records, or declare bankruptcy.

Immediate needs such as credit card debt, mortgage payments, child care, and car payments, take priority over saving for the future, or for establishing their own businesses. Clients who erode their personal financial positions when starting a business make themselves less attractive to lenders and investors. For many entrepreneurs, personal finances are intrinsically linked to their business finances and heavily affect chances of obtaining external capital.

The core elements of success for any business -- knowledge, networks, support and capital -- have historically been beyond the reach of low and moderate-income women. Three of these four core elements are non-financial services that are in scarce supply for the inexperienced, aspiring entrepreneur. WBDC's array of programs helps fill these gaps.

By focusing our programs on income stability, wealth accumulation, and job creation through entrepreneurship and financial education, WBDC attacks the triple threat of joblessness, poverty and income inequality through skills building, planning/counseling, and networking.

Let's not destroy the hopes and dreams of women entrepreneurs, many from low-income and minority backgrounds, many of whom are single mothers, working multiple minimum wage jobs, who see the dream of entrepreneurship as a game changer.

Owning and operating a microenterprise and developing good financial habits empowers these women to achieve their goals: a roof over their heads, a secure future

for their children, and a way up. Thus, it has a positive impact on their children and their communities because they become active contributors to the American economy as taxpayers and by creating jobs for themselves and others.

I believe that economic equity for all women is the single most important piece of unfinished business in our society today. When women have access to their own source of income, many of the recent headline-grabbing issues are minimized. From domestic violence, to equal pay, to the minimum wage, economics transcend all social issues for women. When a woman has access to credit and the capital to create jobs for her and others, she can improve her life the life of her family and ultimately impact the vitality of her community our nation and the world.

This concludes my prepared statement. Thank you for your commitment to Connecticut's Small Businesses and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be pleased to answer your questions.

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The Leader for Entrepreneurial and Financial Education for Women in Connecticut

Economic Impact Report

2012-2014

5,500+
Individuals Served

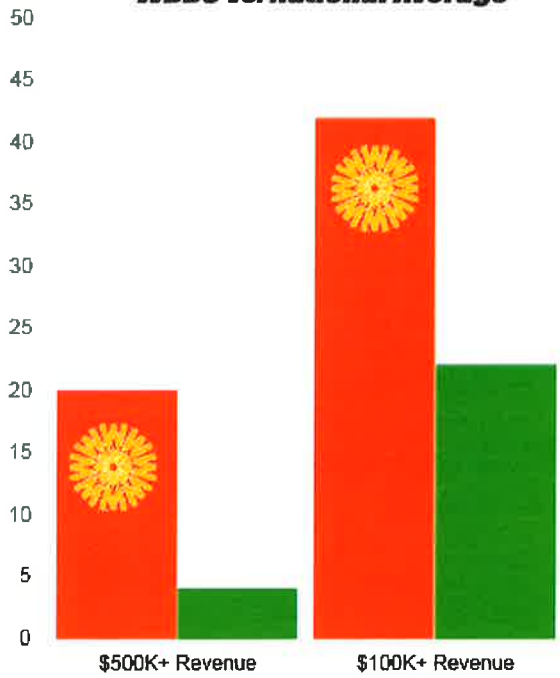
1,000+
Jobs Created or Maintained

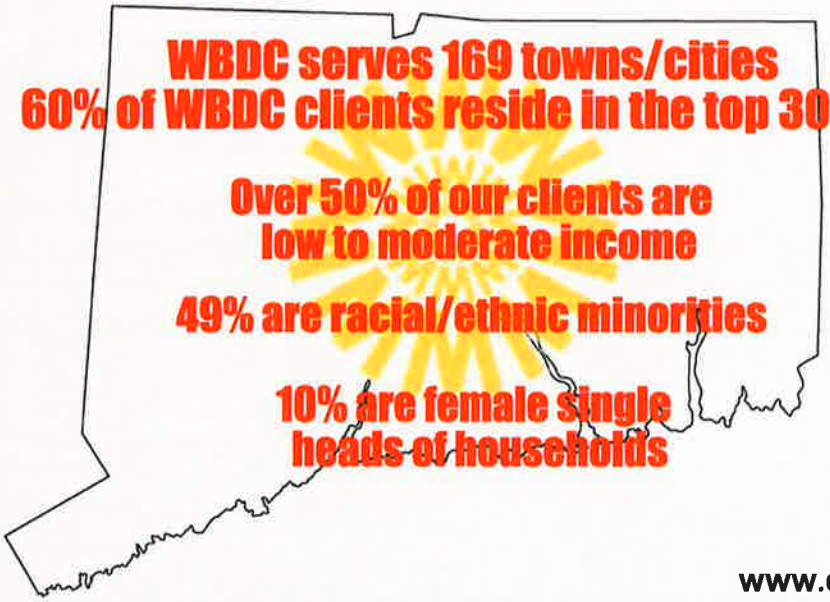
200+
Small Businesses Started

WBDC Women-owned Businesses have:

- *Generated over $120M gross revenue*
- *Secured $2M in capital via the DECD Small Business Express Program*

Annual Revenue Percentage: WBDC vs. National Average





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WBDC . . . the people behind the numbers

NEW HAVEN

Jennifer Mastriano is the CFO of MGM Carting & Recycling, a New Haven family owned and operated business based in New Haven, Connecticut. Jennifer was honored with the WBDC Deb Ziegler Award for Entrepreneurial Excellence for her dedication and commitment to embracing the nearly 60 hours of business education she received at WBDC and for her eagerness to implement the new tools she learned to grow and sustain the family business she now helps to lead. Jennifer came to WBDC in 2011, worked with a business counselor and then enrolled in Passion to Profit, WBDC's business plan writing class. Through the many hours of WBDC training, seminars and workshops, Jennifer learned best practices for working with the federal government. As a certified women owned business, MGM was able to secure government and corporate contracts. The Mastrianos embraced the marketing training and coaching they received as part of WBDC's Hands on Marketing workshop and decided to highlight their unique status as the only certified woman-owned carting company in the state of Connecticut. Jennifer Mastriano, MGM Carting & Recycling

BRIDGEPORT

Torise Baker started her Bridgeport tax preparation business, 101 Things 2 Do, LLC located in Bridgeport Connecticut, in 2009. The company offers personal and business financial services ranging from tax preparation, and credit repair aide to payroll assistance. Already an established business owner, Torise came to WBDC in 2013 looking to grow her business, which currently serves nearly 700 clients in 15 states. With the pending birth of her son, Torise looked to expand her service offerings to include safe and affordable child care for herself and her community. She attended WBDC's "Day Care" series and learned about the other services available. She attended WBDC's "Access to Capital" workshop and worked with a WBDC counselor to secure capital, including an SBA backed loan and a DECD Small Business Express grant. The additional business funding allowed Torise to purchase and renovate a 4000-square foot building in Bridgeport, which now serves as the new location. Since coming to WBDC, she has tripled her business revenues and plans to add two additional full-time employees in 2015.

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HAMDEN

Nancy Coffey and her husband combined their skills of sales, marketing, and manufacturing to create KTT Enterprises, a foam production company. Nancy attended WBDC's QuickBooks, Access to Capital Counseling, Doing Business with the Government, one-on-one computer instruction and the FastTrac Growth Venture programs. "I learned an incredible amount. WBDC really opened my eyes and gave me the incentive to move forward with new products and ideas. I've been spreading the word to everyone I know." Never thinking she would find herself in the manufacturing industry, Nancy credits WBDC for helping her pave the way, opening doors, and giving her the "kick in the pants" she really needed to get going. Nancy has recently released a new product called "Sleep On It," a mattress foam cushion targeted towards college students as well as a cosmetic applicator in the style of red lips that QVC has picked up. "WBDC has been a tremendous support to me in growing my business. I think it's a fantastic organization that supports women." —Nancy Coffey

SHELTON

Ten years ago Marta Cuminotto abandoned a traditional 9 to 5 career in search of a new profession. She knew she wanted a business that afforded her flexibility and her desire to help women in need of her very specialized services – Permanent Hair Removal. In 2003 with help from WBDC, Absolutely Permanent Hair Removal doubled the size of its facility from 200 square feet to 500 square feet. Marta credits the education and training she received from WBDC as a student in WBDC's FastTrac New Venture™program. "The education I acquired in small business management, included P&L basics, marketing strategies and the ability to interpret marketing studies and utilize them. I entered the class with basic skills, with a need for essential business knowledge. In addition to the classroom training and one on one counseling sessions, WBDC's FastTrac New Venture™ program provides an incredible network of other business women pursuing similar goals. From home based businesses to businesses with millions of dollars in revenue, women in the program share common goals to create jobs for themselves and others and help our State get its economy back on track. Marta Cuminotto, Absolutely Permanent Hair Removal

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NORWALK

Chantal Coffey, a Norwalk resident, is the owner of 4 Nurses at Work Home Care Services, a Private Duty Nursing Agency. In 2007, Chantal started a business to provide skilled home-based health care in Connecticut. Having made the decision to grow her operations, she enrolled in WBDC's entrepreneurial training and counseling services to learn how she could expand her service markets and reach new customers, Chantal participated in WBDC's four-part series, *Saturday Studies*. Program topics included *Capitalizing on the Changing Consumer Shopping Experience, Marketing Through Alternative Sales Channels* and *Building and Managing Your Business' Social Media Profile*. She participated in WBDC's teleclass *Doing Business with the State of Connecticut* to further develop her strategy; participated in WBDC's *Contractor, Consultant or Employee* seminar; and continued to work with WBDC to better understand the financial climate of her business. In addition, Chantal has attended WBDC's financial training class, *Beating the Fear Factor! Why Business Financial Statements Matter* and worked one-on-one with WBDC's *QuickBooks* advisor. Chantal currently employees 30 privately contracted home health aides who service clients throughout the state of Connecticut. Chantal Coffey

STAMFORD

Maxene Mulford, Uniquely U. College Essay Consultants. After helping a neighbor write a college application essay that won over Princeton admissions officers, Maxene knew she had a business opportunity in the works. She came up with the concept of Uniquely U. and enrolled in WBDC's FastTrac® NewVenture™ followed by Hands-on-Finance to learn how to expand her business, set up an accounting system, and understand P&L analysis, billing and marketing. Maxene is now successful in her business as well as being a valued WBDC volunteer.

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NEW HAVEN

In pursuing our work to build the financial stability of lower-income households in Greater New Haven, we were looking for a partner that brought content knowledge, local credibility, and trust. From our first interactions with WBDC I found that alignment. WBDC has a clear focus and they execute against it with great care and purpose. Our partnership has built the capacity and breadth of both organizations, and most importantly is delivering results for the people we serve. Amy Casavina Hall, Senior Director, Income and Health Initiatives, United Way of Greater New Haven

NORWALK

Renata Papadopoulos, a Norwalk resident, originally from Brazil, is the owner of Lovely Cakes, a full service specialty cake company located in Norwalk, Connecticut. Lovely Cakes services banquet halls, restaurants and private clients, creating beautiful custom cakes for all occasions including weddings. In 2007, Renata decided to start her own business when her desire to bake was reignited by creating birthday cakes for her three children. She attended the French Culinary Institute in NY to perfect her baking and decorating skills, but realized she would need more help to start a successful business. Already utilizing a commercial kitchen facility, Renata dreamed of owning her own facility that she could use both for her baking and to supplement her income stream by renting space to other aspiring food entrepreneurs. Taking advantage of WBDC's no-cost entrepreneurial training, Renata attended WBDC's four-part series *How to Start a Food Business,* met one-on-one with a financial counselor and participated in a workshop to learn more about the Connecticut Business Express Program. After securing an SBA loan to purchase her own commercial kitchen facility in Stratford, Renata returned to WBDC in the fall of 2014. She participated in a four-part class, *Saturday Studies*, with a focus on optimizing marketing to grow her business and worked with WBDC's *QuickBooks* advisor to organize her business financials. Lovely Cakes has been featured in *Brides* magazine and has won numerous awards including Wedding Wire's Couples Choice Awards and was named a category winner at the U.S. Confection Connection NY Cake Convention.

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WATERBURY

"WBDC has provided me with the clear vision and the beginning is the most important part of the work. WBDC's coach/instructor helped me solve my major problems including starting and completing my business plan. The scholarship that I received was truly appreciated and a relief when I was accepted to the Fast Trac New Venture program. The Fast Trac New Venture program gave me sufficient skills to begin my journey in becoming a minority, woman business owner. I truly believe that because of the program I can achieve my goals with satisfaction and happiness. It gave me the confidence in my ability to follow through with my vision for my business. It was an unforgettable experience and I will continue to attend other programs provided by the WBDC." Melissa Serrano-Adorno

NORWALK

Sheri Kaufman, started Sugar LuLu, a Norwalk based company in 2012. The company, a lifestyle brand for tween girls was launched in response to her tween daughter's insistence that nothing on the store shelves appealed to her. Sheri saw the opportunity to fill that gap. Now in its third year, the company sells to several major retailers including Nordstrom and Learning Express. Sheri was seeking to expand her product line and reach new markets when she came to WBDC. Sheri applied for a DECD Small Business Express Loan and in February 2015 was awarded $284K in grants and loans. The money will be used to hire 3 full time employees.

EASTON & STAMFORD

"I am so glad I was able to participate in the Hands on Marketing Workshop this spring. My antiques and retail home furnishings shop is at the point where I need to expand my marketing efforts and this workshop was exactly what I needed to inspire me with new ideas and directions for future promotions and events. I like the interaction between the attendees; their businesses are very diverse and everyone has such a great spirit about their companies. And special Kudos to our instructor; she's terrific!" Barbara Zionce Hedgehog & Company

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BRISTOL

"Finally, I found the program that helped me clarify our company's business goals and now know the actions I will need to take to get there." -- Dorothy Suter, Graham Tool and Machine

BRIDGEPORT

"I'm a graduate of Fast Trac New Venture and a huge fan of WBDC programs. The Instructors are qualified and motivating. I have made lasting connections with my classmates." Gabrielle F., owner of Gumdrop Swap Kids Boutique

WESTON

Hilary Berger has been counseling women in transition for close to 20 years. Work Like a Mother was born three years ago, growing out of Hilary's response to what she calls a tremendous need for professional, highly educated women to re-establish themselves psychologically so that they can make important decisions about their career and future. Hilary first discovered WBDC when she attended a WBDC Business breakfast a year ago, and was immediately in awe of their purpose and their mission. "This is really about women building women. It is a 'builder' in that it acknowledges women's intelligence and competency. That is not always a given. It's what makes WBDC unique." Hilary plans to expand Work Like a Mother's presence on the internet with the goal of reaching a national audience. Part of her work with WBDC has been to create a wide spread audience through larger scale programming. "It used to be a fantasy; now it's a vision," she says. "This is an organization with extremely competent women who understand the value of nurturing other women's businesses because they understand the challenges that women face." -- Dr. Hilary Berger, Work Like a Mother

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DANBURY

Have you ever been frustrated by inconvenient household products? Bryan Welch did something about it. After coming to WBDC, Bryan started E-Z-er Products, LLC. By enrolling in FastTrac® New Venure, Bryan was able to create a viable business plan, including a fully functional website. The business planning class helped him to improve his already established business, while also providing him with networking opportunities. "WBDC helped me stay motivated and focused on my product and goals. This motivation was a huge part of the success of my business." "Trash in a Flash," his newest product, has been accepted by WalMart. However, Bryan would like to work with smaller retailers first. He wants to first build a product line and work on publicizing it, because he believes the best kind of marketing is catering to supply and demand. Bryan has been marketing Trash in a Flash in a few Mobil stations and local hardware stores. He is also in the process of affiliating with other companies around the country for his other products. "Overall WBDC was helpful, and inspiring. It definitely gave my business a more professional imprint." — Bryan Welch, E-Z-er Products LLC

NORWALK

Monique Wilson, a graduate of WBDC's FastTrac® NewVenture™, completed her business plan and was awarded a business technology grant through the WBDC Opportunity Fund in the form of a Dell laptop. She can now keep track of clients and business financials with QuickBooks and visualize the growth potential of her business. She says, "Completing the FastTrac® program was a very empowering experience for me". Monique Wilson, Oasis Therapeutic Massage for Wellness

STAMFORD

Davette Stephens, Just a Helping Hand, LLC. Davette, a WBDC FastTrac® NewVenture™ graduate, realized that her successful home-based daycare business would increase revenue considerably if she could expand the space to accommodate the maximum children allowed by state regulations. After completing FastTrac® and the QuickBooks program, Davette created financial projections and architectural plans. She enrolled in WBDC's Access to Capital program where she completed a business plan and secured capital with the CT Community Investment Corporation (CTCIC).

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ORANGE

I found the budget coaching program to be incredibly helpful in that it gave me someone to be accountable to regarding my household spending. For me, knowing I would have to explain my purchases made me think twice before I bought something to determine whether or not it was actually necessary. I work with budgets in my job, but I was never good at applying those principles to myself and the program helped me to do that. During the course of the program we took steps to lower our credit card debt and I am now confident that we will not get into debt further, but will work toward paying it off. My WBDC coach Alex was incredibly helpful and I am very happy that I went through the program and I know that the program can be very helpful to others. Jennifer Moffett

BETHLEHEM

After graduating high school, Carol Mulready began working in construction. Seeing the prospect of autonomy, she started CBJ Foundations, LLC., which specializes in concrete foundations and home improvement. WBDC became a vital resource in the betterment of Carol's business. After enrolling in a variety of WBDC classes including Access to Capital/Business Development Counseling, WBDC "Lunch and Learns," and "Hands-on Marketing," Carol gained the tools to become a successful business woman. She has created a viable business plan, achieved certification both by the state and as a minority-owned business, and has launched her own website. "I feel very fortunate to have been involved with WBDC and have found many, many advantages" as a result. Being named 2009 Entrepreneur of the Year by the Waterbury Regional Chamber of Commerce's Small Business Council is only one of her numerous business awards. Carol hopes to be able to make her business more environmentally friendly by offering her clients alternative products such as thermal mass foundations. She is always looking to grow and expand her business and its revenue. She found WBDC classes to be valuable, and is thankful to have taken so many! "You always walk away with something new. Every class I attended gave me something new to work with." Carol Mulready, Owner: CBJ Foundations, LLC.

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WEST HAVEN

Phyllis Haynes, Mariah's Chow Chow. During her first business counseling session at WBDC, Phyllis recognized that her family's recipe for Mariah's Chow Chow Relish had business potential. WBDC's business planning programs gave her the knowledge and confidence to turn her idea into a real business. Mariah's Chow Chow Relish is now sold in national supermarket chains, retail shops, farmers' markets and gourmet restaurants.

WEST HARTFORD

Cathi Nelson has always enjoyed bearing witness to stories through photographs. Her organizing skills and love of photography have given her incredible opportunities. After being hired by a friend, the idea of opening her own business brought her to WBDC. Cathi enrolled in FastTrac® where she realized the value of peer learning and networking. Her business has two aspects. One deals with organizing photographs through scrapbooking, creating photo yearbooks, and graduation albums. The other focuses on recruiting associates for a conjoined photo-organizing business. WBDC helped her think of herself as a business woman, and see the necessity of hiring an attorney, making a business plan, and better managing her finances. "I was naïve about how business really works." Cathi is always looking to expand revenue and clientele. She is currently focused on growing her associate group, which currently has 68 members in 22 states as well as in Australia and Canada. To attain this goal, WBDC helped Cathi create her website to increase her networking "WBDC's classes immediately got me to take myself more seriously; they helped me turn my hobby into a business." —Cathi Nelson, Personal Photo Organizer LLC

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WESTPORT

Judy O'Meara began working with Mac computers in the 80s. As the years progressed, she did freelance work and worked at a number of computer store jobs, continuing to focus on Macs. A colleague opened his own business in 1993 and Judy joined him as an employee. In 1995, Judy became a partner in the business. There were no catalog companies then so they did huge sales. When the advent of catalog companies forced them to reinvent themselves, they became a value-added reseller, and, in 2000, moved to a bigger space so they could add a service dept. In 2006, Judy's partner passed away suddenly, and it became apparent after his death, that the business needed more visibility. In Spring 2010, she enrolled in WBDC's Hands on Marketing program. "It was a whirlwind course," Judy says, packed full of real-life business examples. "It was very eye opening." Judy hopes to grow her business to a dozen employees and possibly move to a new location. At the same time, I want to continually work on improving my knowledge and skills in terms of satisfying my customers' needs. Since the class, Judy has concentrated on marketing to her growing customer base. She is grateful to know that she will always have WBDC as a resource for her business. "I know I have people at WBDC that I can call for help." -- Judy O'Mera, TBI Computers

NEW CANAAN

After recently experiencing a time of dramatic transition in her life—including closing her business due to disability, dealing with her aging parents, as well as illness in her family—life began to settle down enough for Lori Dunn to take stock of her financial situation. "When you have a big change in your life, you really need to know where you're at before you can move forward," Lori says. Lori signed up for budget coaching with the Women's Business Development Council in the Spring of 2010. She worked with a budget coach. They met regularly and formed a one-on-one mentoring relationship. "I needed to hold myself financially accountable so that I could concretely assess my position. Learning Excel and Quicken allowed me to begin to keep track of my differential number so I could track what was going out and coming in," she says. Lori describes her budget coaching experience as incredibly empowering. "It's been liberating to know that WBDC is there to give me the emotional support I needed to confidently meet the future." "That this circle of women exists, that I can ask WBDC for advice with no strings attached, that they'll answer the question with exuberance, is very cool." Lori Dunn

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MIDDLETOWN

"I love this class!!! I have learned so much about the key components of starting a business and how to write a business plan. The instructor is great. She makes what can sometimes be a confusing topic easy to understand for someone without a business background. The speakers are very helpful and informative. I really enjoy working with the other members of the class and exchanging ideas. I really feel like I'm part of a learning community. I have already begun to implement some of the ideas I've formed as a result of the class. I am extremely satisfied with the Fast Trac New Venture program and the Women's Business Development Council. Thank you for helping me process my ideas and providing me with tools to help me succeed with my entrepreneurial experience. Diane Smith

GREENWICH

Lisa Grant heard about WBDC's Budget Coaching program while working as Marketing Coordinator at Patriot National Bank, a WBDC sponsor. "I saw the program as an opportunity to learn how to do things in a new and better way," she says, "on both a professional and personal level." She signed up for the pilot program in Spring 2010, meeting bi-weekly with a coach. Working on goal-setting was an important part of the coaching process, and Lisa learned how to set short and long-term financial goals and work toward them in a comfortable way. "I had a plan for the first time," says Lisa, "Instead of being intimidated, I was empowered." For the first month, she wrote down every expense in a little booklet. "It gave me a real sense of where my money was going," she says. It also helped her put together a realistic budget, looking at all her expenses over the course of the year and taking the guesswork out of it. Lisa has found her experiences with WBDC as both a client and a volunteer to be life-changing and rewarding. "I can't sing their praises enough. I think they're vital and worthwhile. I appreciate their energy and enthusiasm and sense that they themselves are gratified by the sense of empowerment they offer to women. She says she now thinks more carefully about her own purchases in light of her financial goals. "Taking the WBDC Budgeting Coaching program was personally life-changing for me. Since the class, I've taken control of my financial future with a sense of empowerment I didn't have before." Lisa Grant

OXFORD

High end, custom, designer hardware made in the U.S.A. may not be the first thing you think of when you hear home based business, but that is exactly what Susan Martovich and her family create. After the company she worked for relocated out of state, Martovich decided to join her husband in what became a family business. They affectionately called themselves "Garage Entrepreneurs" running a machine shop manufacturing product for industries including medical, automotive and aerospace in their basement. With the additional resource of having Susan join the business, productivity increased and the team was able to support contracts from statewide companies including Black & Decker in Shelton, Engineered Inserts & System in Watertown and Norco, an aerospace company formerly located in Ridgefield, Connecticut. In 1999, the couple looked to expand and grow their business including incorporating the new home hardware items. With little formal business education, the couple found themselves in a wayward partnership. Though they had acquired more space and clients they were nearly in a million dollars of debt and sinking fast. Susan and her husband filed bankruptcy and began the business again. This time the couple scaled back and sought help. They knew they had the skills and the family owned the equipment to produce a quality high end product. By 2009 the family decided to focus on manufacturing for the aerospace industry maintaining their established contracts and working to develop the market for the designer hardware. Susan enrolled in business and marketing classes including our nine week business plan writing course. MS Design employs Susan and her husband full time as well as their son, their daughter and a full-time artisan. Throughout the process of growth and rebirth or her business, Susan has used the resources she has found at WBDC to ensure the healthy growth of MS Design. She has worked with counselors to guide expansion efforts, focused on not running before walking and optimized the networking opportunities WBDC provided. In addition to the business knowledge Susan has earned at WBDC, she has connected with other established businesses in the state. Susan has increased her sales with a new website design, brand logo and marketing strategy which she worked to create with a graphic designer she met while attending a WBDC class. Due to her work with WBDC the family chose to focus on a narrower product line which increased their exposure within the architectural hardware industry. Today, steadily increasing sales are approaching the $1 MM mark. The company is healthy and distributors and local designers are taking notice. Sue Martovich, Owner: MS Design Connecticut Inc.

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BRIDGEPORT

" Not a day goes by that I don't think back on when I started my business – how hard it was, the people who helped me, the people I could trust. For me, the support and encouragement of family, friends, and neighbors meant everything. Three years ago, my partner and I started our business in Bridgeport. We had demand for our products and services, we had a ton of expertise in our field, but what we didn't have was a business plan, a bookkeeping system, a marketing plan ... all the things you need to start and grow a successful small business. Without WBDC, that's where the story would have ended – as a dream we couldn't fulfill. We wisely chose to make extensive use of the vast array of tools within the three pillars of WBDC's programming: Entrepreneurial Training, Financial Education, Professional Development. As a result, we have increased our gross revenues by over 50 percent, created two jobs, and expanded our presence beyond the greater Bridgeport region. Today, WBDC is helping us hire additional staff, broaden our client base, and boost our profits." Christina Kazanas, HK Consulting Group, LLC

FAIRFIELD

Lib DeNure had a dream of owning a "specialty store " and in the last two years she was able to make it happen! The decision to actually open Hazel Daze was created in a conversation between Lib and her son Peter on a train back from the NY Gift Fair in 2012. They had been shopping for the on-line store that Lib built many years prior, and were taken by the beautiful crafts designed and produced in developing countries. They purchased unique products, created by artists from all corners of the world and supported by the Fair Trade Federation. These products were produced in positive working conditions and in an environmentally conscientious manner. Lib and Peter imagined sharing these amazing crafts with people face to face, not just through the internet. Hazel Daze was born that day. Striving to create some peace and harmony in her life, she began to build a plan - "Hazel Daze Boutique ". Hazel Daze has brought Lib back to her roots where being and working with the community is important to her. Now in its 2nd year, the shop has expanded and grown. As a socially conscious store, Hazel Daze promotes the work of several local artists whose creations include an eclectic array of crafts. Hazel Daze has been a client and active WBDC member since 2012. The organization has been an important partner as Lib has worked to help her business grow. She graciously acknowledges the amazing mentoring workshops and business development courses that WBDC has to offer and was honored to host a very successful networking event with WBDC last year. Lib DeNure, Hazel Daze Boutique

NORWALK

Cicily Mandoza says that if it were not for WBDC's financial coaching she would not be enrolled in the community college today; would not have secured an apartment for her family and would not have kept her full time job. "I have control over my financial future." Cicily established goals and worked one on one with her financial coach to learn how to achieve those goals. This was achieved through a combination of intense personal reflection, paradigm shifts in financial behavior through education and on-going evaluation to ensure Cicily continues to move forward.

STAMFORD

Marta Barbera, a Stamford resident, originally from Spain is the co-founder and owner of Next Print Apparel, a full service printing and design company. With nearly seven years of retail and fashion experience as a general manager for Zara, USA, Marta wanted to utilize her knowledge of fashion and apparel in her entrepreneurial venture. As she prepared to start her company, Marta knew she would need assistance with creating a business plan and marketing her products and services. She sought out the entrepreneurial training offered by the Women's Business Development Council (WBDC). Marta first worked on completing her business plan by attending WBDC's nine week business plan writing class, *Passion to Profit*. She then took advantage of several marketing classes including, WBDC's Saturday Studies, a program covering topics such as *Eliminating Your Competition, Get the Business Result Your Want Using Social Media, Managing Your Website and Social Media* and *Marketing Your Business on a Shoe String.* With over 23 hours of classroom time completed, including participating in WBDC's business preparedness planning class, *PrepareCT, Preparing for a Disaster or Business Disruption*, Marta has launched her business website and has been open for business for nearly a year.

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BRIDGEPORT

Rosie Jones-Clark, owner of Bright & Morning Star Daycare is a true WBDC success. By taking advantage of the WBDC programs and resources made available to her, Rosie and her business have grown immensely. A graduate of FastTrac®, Access to Capital Counseling and Hands on Marketing, she worked with a WBDC Financial Counselor to make her business plan "bankable." Rosie is ambitious; however she has set realistic and measured goals for herself and for her business with WBDC's guidance. In 2009, WBDC proudly honored Rosie with the Deb Ziegler Award for Entrepreneurial Excellence. Not only does Rosie exhibit the hard work and passion representing a successful entrepreneur, but she understands and exemplifies the importance of giving .back to the community. She has come full circle as a WBDC donor and volunteer.

MILFORD

Kristina Foreman, a WBDC FastTrac graduate, is a professional makeup artist, hair stylist and has been in the fashion and beauty industry for over 20 years. Her work has been seen in top fashion magazines such as Elle, Cosmo, Esquire, Martha Stewart Bridal, film and television. She also contributes beauty tips and stories for many magazines. Kristina owns MakeupMakeup, a studio that provides women with the highest grade mineral makeup customized for each individual. In addition, she offers bridal services, makeovers, private makeup lessons, and anti-aging products. After completing a WBDC business planning program and with the help of business counselors, Kristina opened a Makeup Studio in Milford, CT providing makeovers, consultations, makeup lessons, and an array of incredible custom-blended products including foundation, blush, eye-shadow, lipstick and gloss prepared specifically for the individual skin type, coloring and taste. Her made-to-order makeup is created from the highest grade micronized minerals and botanicals on the market today, without additives or fillers to promote healthy skin.

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NORWALK

Coming into the program I was working a job I loved with a great schedule that made me happy. The problem was I didn't generate enough income. I knew after my first meeting with my coach that I needed to make changes. Within two weeks I had a job interview in a field that I used to work in. My coach helped me to negotiate a schedule that allowed me to do the other work that I loved. I felt less stressed since starting my job in December. Kristen Traunecker

STAMFORD

When Tess Abalos first heard of WBDC in 1998, she was working in the financial services industry but feeling unfulfilled. When tragedy struck a client, Tess came to a deeper understanding of the prime importance of health in people's lives. Realizing that she would rather help her clients with their health than their finances, she explored a career change, including medical school, but decided Eastern medicine was more closely aligned to her own beliefs on health and wellness. She attended a school weekend discovery workshop at a massage therapy school and enrolled shortly thereafter, receiving her massage therapy license in 2003. Tess spent several years building her massage therapy business, working on an on-call basis in different doctor's offices and gyms. She opened her office and came to a WBDC walk-in day shortly thereafter to discuss her plans and marketing strategy with a counselor. "I always appreciated that they were an available resource for me." Tess has found resources and networking at WBDC invaluable. She has attended a WBDC Alternative Financing class, Women and Minority-Owned Business Certification, and Hands On Marketing. "I love that WBDC is an available resource dedicated to helping women entrepreneurs succeed. When you're an entrepreneur, especially a solo-preneur, it's good to have a sounding board; a group of other women where you can meet in a safe setting; where you can talk about ideas to help your business grow. That's one of the things I found really wonderful about the Marketing class. There was such a range of businesses represented in the small group. It's always a great learning experience when I go to a WBDC event." *"I love that WBDC is an available resource dedicated to helping women entrepreneurs succeed. " – Tess Abalos,* CT Massage and Bodywork

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WILTON

"I have been impressed with every counselor/adviser and each information session I have attended at WBDC. Each advisor has been professional, inspiring and knowledgeable. I am so grateful for having found WBDC. I also wanted to send this email to specifically share my praises about Anne DiFrancesco, the Mobile Business Advisor for Marketing. As a professional organizer and owner of Everything In Its Place, I offer a service that so many people need, yet I am unsure how to target my market audience. My experience meeting with Anne exceeded my expectations. I thought I would gain general advice. Instead, Anne gave me concrete, practical tasks that I could imagine myself doing. After listening to me, Anne gave me direction and focus. In fact she gave me an 'Aha moment' by immediately keying into what niche I could fulfill. I knew I have a knack for financial organizing, but Anne helped me see a snapshot or close-up of how this sets me apart from others in my field. The WBDC Advisor was prepared, professional, encouraging, motivating, sincere and invested in helping me. She had the rare mixture of the ability to help me narrow down and focus, yet feel empowered with infinite possibility. Before WBDC, I had no idea there was a track, let alone one meant for me. A talented, authentic advisor such as Anne makes me believe in myself, and what I have to offer as a business person. Anne is a truly gifted mentor!, Jul's Arthur, Professional Organizer, Everything In Its Place

MIDDLETOWN

"My experience with the WBDC Fast Trac New Venture program has made all the difference for my new grant writing business. I did not realize how much is involved in starting and running a successful business. The instructor/facilitator is well informed and extremely helpful, and comments from my classmates have also been invaluable. Thanks for all the help, please keep up the good work. Patricia A. Alston

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STRATFORD

In 2007, when Nikita Aleksjuka was completely broke, she never imagined that six years later she would be a successful business owner with four different cleaning service companies and eight full-time employees on her payroll. This transformation process started when she took the WBDC FastTrac New Venture program, a business planning program to help aspiring business owners develop a coherent and clear business plan. "WBDC, and specifically FastTrac® along with other courses I attended, helped me see the business spectrum in a totally different way and also where I should focus my efforts", says Nikita. "I started the course at the same time that I started my cleaning services company. I remember going to work by myself and I was pregnant. It was hard but I kept persevering. One day, the instructor advised me to diversify my services and look at other niches inside my business concept", she adds. That advice was what changed her life because it encouraged her to broaden her services and create three other companies: in addition to her original business -Cleaning Service CT, Nikita has also created Building Maintenance CT, RecoUnit (which focuses on crime scene cleanup) and Painter CT, serving the whole state of Connecticut. Nikita also has clients from Massachusetts and New York State.
Today, this native from Latvia and mother of 6 children has seen an increase of almost 40% in her profits and gross receipts of her businesses in the range of $50 to $100.000, which has allowed her to expand not just in the number of companies she owns but also physically with a recent renovation of her home-based business located in Stratford. Nikita has taken other WBDC classes, which, she affirms, will help her and her husband continue their diversification efforts by exploring business opportunities in the food industry. Nikita Aleksjuka, Cleaning Service CT

FAIRFIELD

The fear and instability around money affected more than my bank balance - it bled into my daily life creating a tension and uncertanty in my home. Tackling the problems has helped remove that fear & uncertanty - the budget was a key element here. To be able to see the true picture of my finances was liberating - perhaps not what I wanted to see but it's easier to fight in the light than in the dark. This coaching course has enabled me to move past the fear I have lived in surrounding money and to take the first steps to creating a solid financial foundation for my family. For the first time in years I feel I'm getting control of my personal finance. Will Jameson

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SEYMOUR

Wildflour Confections, a new Seymour bakery specializing in cupcakes and cakes, recently held its grand opening at the corner of Bank and Columbus streets. Alyssa DeMatteo, owner of Wildflour Confections dreamed of having her own storefront and fell in love with baking and decorating cakes while working at another bakery. She opened a virtual bakery in 2013 on Facebook, and while working at a shop in the Seymour Antiques district was offered an opportunity from the building owners to lease space. The 750-square-foot space, loaded with natural sunlight filtering through the large windows, oozes vintage charm, with the building's original bead board walls and ceilings. DeMatteo, who is now a client of WBDC said she can't believe the day has come where she's a business owner. I never thought, ever, that I would be here," she said. " I got here with lots of support." The Greater Valley Chamber's Women In Networking Group awarded DeMatteo a scholarship to attend the Women Business Development Council's "Passion to Profits Entrepreneurial Training" program, where she will create a business plan and further develop her business.