
TRAINING FOR MICROENTERPRISE CREATION: THE CASE OF THE CENTER FOR WOMEN AND ENTERPRISE

Colette Dumas
Management Department
Suffolk University

Abstract

Women-owned firms are one of the hottest growing sectors in the American economy. Many of these businesses are home-based microenterprises. To support these new entrepreneurs, there are now training programs designed to help women entrepreneurs. The author conducted a follow-up study of 16 women who participated in such a training program at the Center For Women and Enterprise in Boston. Participants were interviewed to determine whether they were progressing toward the goal of becoming economically self-sufficient through entrepreneurship. An analysis of the results of these interviews reveals the program to be very successful thus far in enabling participants to start their own businesses and to acquire the skills necessary to do so. Implications for future practice and research are addressed as well.

Women and Entrepreneurship

In this decade, women entrepreneurs have launched new ventures faster than any other segment of our society. Women-owned firms are being created at twice the rate of all businesses. According to the National Foundation of Women Business Owners (NFWBO) women own 8 million firms, a 78% increase since 1987. Women-owned businesses comprise about one-third of all U.S. companies and generate \$2.3 trillion annually. These businesses employ 18.5 million people or 27% of all U.S. employees (NFWBO, 1997). By a ratio of 2 to 1, women entrepreneurs are taking on more workers than is the average employer in nearly every major industry. In doing so, women-owned businesses

have become one of the hottest growth sectors in the American economy (Mallory, 1996). Minority women-owned businesses have grown at triple the rate of overall business growth. According to NFWBO, the number of minority women-owned firms increased by 153%, employment grew by 276%, and revenues rose by 318% between 1987 and 1996 (NFWBO, 1997). During this nine-year period, the number of Hispanic women-owned businesses more than tripled (206%), the number of Asian/American Indian/Alaska Native women-owned firms more than doubled (138%), and the number of Black women-owned firms more than doubled (135%). Women are clearly embracing entrepreneurship as a viable career alternative.

Micro-enterprises and Home-Based Businesses

Women-owned businesses range from full corporations to micro-enterprises. Micro-enterprises are small, often home-based businesses that can mean self-sufficiency to those traditionally left out of the economic mainstream. Women own a total of 3.5 million of the 15 million home-based businesses in the United States, providing 14 million full- and part-time jobs. Most home-based businesses owned by women, (52% of home-based businesses), are service-related, ranging from computer consulting to desktop publishing to public relations. Only about 17% of women's home-based businesses produce goods.

Numbers of home businesses owned by women are increasing, possibly due to corporate downsizing (Stern, 1996). In addition, technology now makes it possible to open a business anywhere. Computers, faxes, modems, on-line information services, and the ability to conduct business by telephone, enable entrepreneurs to link up with clients from home and, in many cases, to open their businesses with an initial investment of less than \$10,000 (NFWBO, 1997). Contrary to popular belief, women do not choose to create a home-based business for the purpose of taking care of their children. Of the 1,435 women surveyed in the NFWBO study (1997), only 32 percent had children at home. Instead, women cite an assortment of reasons for starting microenterprises at home, such as: corporate downsizing, the glass ceiling, the fact that many corporations are not family friendly, the desire for greater flexibility, and refusing to work 60 or 70 hours a week.

In addition to these challenges, women often encounter the following barriers to business ownership: lack of socialization to entrepreneurship in the home, school, and society; exclusion from traditional business networks; lack of access to capital and information; discriminatory attitudes of lenders; gender stereotypes and expectations, such as the attitude that women entrepreneurs are amateurs or hobbyists; socialized ambivalence about competition and profit and lack of self-confidence (Gould and Parzen, 1990). Low-income women, seeking self-sufficiency through business ownership, run up against barriers in the system. For example, the following make it extremely difficult to start a business: restrictions on the amount that recipients of government aid can save; the hours they can work; the amount of health care and other assistance they receive, as well as regulations that do not distinguish between personal and business assets. These barriers make it very hard for low-income women to become self-supporting (Goldoftas, 1992; Gould, 1992). These women need support through programs and training to start their microenterprises.

Microenterprise Programs

To help these women entrepreneurs, the field of microenterprise assistance has grown from only a few programs to more than three hundred in 46 states and the District of Columbia (Economic Opportunities Program, 1997). Twenty three percent of these programs were started between 1995 and 1997. These include programs which provide loans and/or technical assistance and training directly to micro-entrepreneurs, as well as access to regional networks, trade associations, research organizations, and credit services. Together, these programs have served over 200,000 people and loaned over \$44 million (Clark, Huston and Meister, 1994). The majority of the programs target low-income individuals as part of their mission. Ninety-two percent of the practitioner programs either target low-income individuals, or have assisted them directly. Three quarters of the programs have a client base made up of 50% women or more. Twelve of the programs (5%) serve only women.

The philosophy of microenterprise assistance in the U.S. and the developing world has been described as recognizing “the fundamental ability of people to apply their individual talents, creativity and hard work to better their lives” (Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark, 1996: p. 1).

Microenterprise programs are designed to support these individual efforts in business development and start-up by providing business assistance and small amounts of credit. Such programs often function from a philosophy of affirmation and transformation by starting with the skills, abilities, interests and experience that the client currently possesses. In this context, the term “credit” takes on its root meaning “credo” “to believe,” in appreciation for the potential of participants (Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark, 1996).

The results of a research study called the Self-Employment Learning Project (Economic Opportunities Program, 1997; Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark, 1996) revealed the following about microenterprise training programs:

- There is considerable demand for non-credit training and technical assistance services – almost all programs have large numbers of non-borrowing clients;
- Appropriate methods for assessing the effectiveness of microenterprise training and technical assistance are being developed and refined over time as the importance of this component of program methodology becomes clear;
- Microenterprise programs effectively reach large numbers of female clients—78% of the clients are women ;
- Microentrepreneurs are relatively well-educated – 83% are high school graduates, 58% have some education past high-school, 19% have 4-year college degrees, 8% have graduate degrees;
- Large numbers of microentrepreneurs patch together more than one earnings source to make ends meet;
- Microenterprise programs serve a diverse group of clients, including large numbers of low-income people;
- A typical microenterprise is a sole proprietorship that has been in operation for two or more years, with sales of less than \$12,000 per year. Most microbusinesses are in wholesale or retail trade or services, with some manufacturing and construction firms;
- Over time, microbusinesses show high survival rates (78%), gains in net worth, and employment generation. Profitability over time fluctuates;

- The majority of poor microentrepreneurs show income gains over time (55%), and 25% had income gains large enough to move out of poverty.

Results of qualitative interviews with clients from the Self-Employment Learning Project (Economic Opportunities Program, 1997) also reveal that participants see such programs as helping them fulfill their earning potential, as well as their human potential as productive and active members of families and communities. Clients defined their success in self-employment not only in financial terms, but also for the sense of pride, control over their own lives, and the self-realization self-employment gave them.

In a study of microenterprise in the U.S., Edgcomb, Klein and Clark (1996) identified three principal program strategies defined by the service delivery package offered by microenterprise programs: credit-led individual loan programs, group lending programs, and training-led strategies. Nine programs in their study utilize training-led strategies, which are pertinent to the case described in this article. These nine programs have several underlying premises in common: business knowledge and skills are the most critical gaps that must be filled before business success can be achieved; with knowledge, clients can move more quickly to self-sufficiency; training provides a safe environment for clients to test their business idea and aptitude before the risks of a loan are taken on; and outcomes other than taking a loan are also positive results – many clients will start their businesses using personal or family capital; or they will postpone starting their business to seek additional education or to take a job.

The nine programs fall into two general categories: business development strategies and low-income strategies. The business development strategy focuses on guiding participants through the creation of some form of business plan. In addition to formal training, several also offer one-on-one consulting to achieve that end. The business plan is also viewed as essential to successfully starting or expanding a business, and is the path to obtaining a loan. Training courses are designed for both business start-up and expansions, and range from seven to 17 weeks, incorporating classroom work and home assignments to complete the plan. Programs assess fees based on household income (sliding scale). In addition to a focus on business planning, some programs offer a variety of short term training courses

aimed at a number of issues: market research, tax implications, business presentations, franchising and personal empowerment. These courses allow clients to seek help on specific issues pertinent to their business, in a short amount of time. "The focus on client choice, and "to-the-point" seminars, allows business women to efficiently obtain information of the greatest importance to them. Again, the emphasis is on knowledge as the critical gap, and filling that gap in as streamlined a way as possible." (Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark, 1996: p. 14.) The low-income strategies, on the other hand, emphasize personal skill development, and communicating business development concepts in a step-by-step manner, in keeping with the lower educational levels and entrepreneurial experience.

More than 2,000 women get free advice each month through the Office of Women's Business Ownership's community-based Demonstration Training Program; others are assigned mentors through the office's Women's Network for Entrepreneurial Training, which matches established business owners with fledgling entrepreneurs. In addition, the Small Business Administration runs 57 Small Business Development Centers, with a network of more than 1000 service locations (Stern, 1996).

The Federal government provides support for women business owners through the following programs and services of the Small Business Administration (SBA, 1990):

(1) Women's Business Ownership Program; (2) the Women's Network for Entrepreneurial Training, a national mentoring program; and (3) the Women's Business Ownership Act of 1988, which offers incentives to banks to make loans of less than \$50,000, authorizes eight demonstration counseling and training centers, and establishes the National Women's Business Council. However, the SBA has not typically focused on very small businesses.

New approaches are emerging from strategies being used in less developed countries to support women in development. These strategies are arising from: international initiatives in self-employment as a solution to welfare dependence and poverty, faith-based economic development activities (Reese and Shields, 1999), a focus on new ways to combat gender discrimination in employment, to empower low-income women (Guy et al., 1991) and as a means to strengthen local institutions (Snow, 1999). The primary strategies are stimulation of

microenterprises, microcredit lending (making small loans available for start-up), and peer group lending, which makes borrowers accountable to one another as well as to their bank for loan repayments (Blakely, 1992). The following are examples of U.S. projects that use these emerging strategies.

One of the oldest and most successful programs for low-income women is the Women's Economic Development Corporation (WEDCO) in St. Paul, Minnesota, which merged with an employment counseling program to form WomenVenture (McKee et al., 1993). WEDCO/WV stresses self-pacing and self-selection throughout the process so that participants continually reevaluate the self-employment decision, allowing them to screen themselves out if for some reason they cannot commit to business ownership. The Women's Economic Development Project in Boston (Goldoftas, 1992) helps women organize worker cooperatives and provides start-up assistance while they continue to receive government aid. The program teaches basic economic literacy, provides 6 months of business training, and continues support throughout the first year of operation. Cooperatives are used because they are a "middle way" to business ownership, enabling women to control their labor, gain experience in work skills and leadership, and have flexible working conditions.

Another type of worker-owned business is the Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA) in the South Bronx. Owned and operated by over 200 African American and Latina home health workers, CHCA features family health insurance, a profit-sharing plan, and higher hourly wages than the industry average (Gould, 1992; Steinem, 1992). The holistic assistance new entrepreneurs need is illustrated by the Lakota Fund, a South Dakota microlending program based on the vision of development of Oglala Lakota Tribe (Blakely, 1992). Its loan recipients are required to attend workshops on money management, sales techniques, self-esteem, networking, and alcohol and drug education.

These projects provide lessons about the wide range of needs women business owners have: the need to assess results from a long-term, flexible perspective; flexible financing tailored to individual needs; and small amounts of working capital to enable them to test ideas, make repayment, and build up their businesses without substantial debt (McKee et al., 1993). NFWBO (1992) identifies other

critical skills women entrepreneurs should acquire: using information strategically, having a global perspective, and creatively employing technology, especially telecommunications.

Realizing the enormous potential of small business depends on the existence of political, social, and cultural climates that encourage formation of businesses by women and minorities (Agora Forum, 1993). As women of all colors and at all economic levels find it difficult to have their needs met in the workplace, they are turning to entrepreneurship to create their own opportunities. Small businesses tend to have the flexibility and innovation that are critical business needs in the coming century. As women form microenterprises and bring their values and concerns to the marketplace, they are changing the face of the nation's business. The following case illustrates this point.

The Center For Women and Enterprise

The Center for Women & Enterprise, INC. (CWE) is a not-for-profit educational organization providing courses, workshops, consulting, and access to resources that enable women to start and/or expand their businesses. Started in 1995 by Andrea Silbert, the Center's mission is to empower women to become economically self-sufficient and prosperous through entrepreneurship. Such centers are needed, since the number of women-owned firms increased by only 58.8% in Massachusetts, compared with a national increase of 77% in the last decade (NFWBO, 1997). With an annual budget of \$500,000, CWE is the only women's business assistance center in the state of Massachusetts to offer a comprehensive array of courses, workshops, mentoring opportunities and access to financing for women who seek to start and grow their own businesses. Over 1,100 women entrepreneurs of diverse cultural, economic, and professional backgrounds from 100 cities and towns in Eastern Massachusetts have gone to CWE for assistance. Sixty percent of CWE's clients are in the start-up stages, and forty percent seek to grow and expand their existing businesses. CWE focuses on education through multi-week courses to give participants the skills to improve their businesses; provides comprehensive programs and services, offering a continuum of education throughout a client's business life cycle; and CWE provides socio-economically and racially integrated classes to foster lateral learning and networking.

For this research project, we collected and analyzed data concerning 16 participants of a program offered by CWE in the Spring of 1998. This study is the pilot study for a large-scale study that we will conduct to follow-up on the progress of the 1,100 plus women who have gone through various programs at the center thus far. The program these sixteen women completed, First Step FastTrac, is a nine week pre-business assessment course for entrepreneurs who have a business concept but have not yet started their business. This hands-on course, taught by a successful entrepreneur, offers aspiring entrepreneurs a framework for evaluating and developing their business concepts. This includes business terminology, concept statements, market research, pricing, revenue projections, start-up costs, and feasibility plan development, along with one-on-one support from a business advisor and peer support.

This study was undertaken to document the progress of 16 participants of the CWE's First Track FastTrac program. It is a case study of the impact of the training program on clients. We collected information about clients and their businesses as they entered the program and tracked their progress six months after the program. We expect to document their progress one year after having finished the program as well. We conducted structured and semi-structured interviews with 14 of the 16 participants, six months after completion of the program (we were unable to contact two participants who had moved). We also collected data using the CWE's intake form and the SBA's Women's Business Office Application for Services form. This is a form that collects information to be presented in aggregate to Congress to support the need for Women's Business Centers. In addition, the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1990) was administered to participants. The objective was to allow for follow-up following completion of the program for comparative purposes. Confidentiality of the data collected was guaranteed to participants.

CWE Participants: The majority (54%) of participants are 40 years old or more. Twenty-seven percent are in their thirties, 20% are in their 20's. Most are single, while 25% are married and 18% are divorced. Thirteen percent of the women had completed a high school education. Thirty-one percent had completed an Associates degree with some additional training as well, such as culinary training, advertising and design, or floral arranging. Nineteen percent had bachelor's degrees or the equivalent number of years of undergraduate study. The

remaining thirty-seven percent of participants had advanced degrees, such as an MS in education or a Ph.D. in psychology. These results are consistent with findings from previous studies, which indicate that microentrepreneurs, at least in the United States, are relatively well-educated (Economic Opportunities Program, 1997; Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark, 1996).

Number of Businesses Started: Twenty-five percent of participants have started a business since participating in the CWE program. Six percent began the business while still studying in the program. The others started their businesses in the six months following completion of the program. Thirteen percent had already started a business when they joined CWE, but were looking for help in starting different kinds of businesses. Sales and revenues for those who had started their businesses averaged \$19,000 to \$25,000, although one participant reported a much lower range of \$750.

Seventy-five percent of respondents had not yet finished their business plans and had not yet formally incorporated or opened their businesses. However, 15% of them had completed some work on tasks related to starting up the business. Reasons given for not having started the business yet included: still working on the business plan; no funding obtained yet; the need to save capital; the need to pay down debt; and the need to maintain the current level of income. These findings are consistent with those in a study by Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark (1996), indicating that outcomes such as postponing starting a business to take a job to raise capital or to seek financial stability can be positive indicators of a training programs success. In other words, through such actions, participants are still moving toward self-sufficiency, one of the goals of programs like that at the Center for Women and Enterprise.

Changes in Employment Status From the Beginning of the Program: Three-fourths of participants worked part-time or full-time for employers when they joined the program. Since then, twenty-five percent of participants have started their own businesses. Previous studies indicate that large numbers of microentrepreneurs patch together more than one earning source, such as working for someone else and their own business, to make ends meet (Economic Opportunities Program, 1997). Thirty-one percent are employed by someone else either full-time or part-time, but intend to complete their

business plan, obtain financing, or pay down their debt. Thirteen percent are unemployed and are either receiving public assistance, family income, or were recently laid off. Being unemployed or receiving public assistance may present obstacles to starting a business, since funds for the business may be tight or non-existent. We can also surmise, however, that for these participants, CWE's program may provide just the support and structure needed to move forward with their business plans in spite of the uncertainty of their economic situation.

Income Range at beginning of Program: One-half had incomes of between \$20-\$39,000. Two participants declined to answer. 13% earned over \$60,000. 25% earned between 0 to \$19,999. This indicates that participants come to the program from a wide variety of income brackets. Having higher income when trying to start a business may provide more of an economic cushion to fund the business, depending upon the level of existing debt. Those coming into the program with little or no income face the obstacle of trying to make ends meet, put food on the table and fund a business at the same time. The Community Entrepreneurs Program at the CWE was created after I began this study to respond to the special needs of such participants.

Income Range Six Months After Completing the Program: Thirty-eight percent of participants reported an increase of \$10-20,000 in salary/income from when they had begun the program. This includes those who stayed in their same job, those who are still in the same job but have also started their business, and those who have changed jobs and have not yet started their business. Of those who have started their business, nineteen percent have had an increase of salary of approximately \$10,000. Six percent of those who had started a business experienced a decrease in salary of approximately \$10,000. Of those who have not yet started their business, six percent experienced a decrease of income. This decrease was due, in some cases, to changing jobs from full-time to part-time to have more time to develop the business; in other cases the decrease was due to being laid off. Thirty-eight percent of participants reported no change in salary/income.

Types of Businesses Participants Want to Create: The business ideas represented are as varied and diverse as the participants themselves. Forty four percent of participants had business ideas having to do with some aspect of the arts or craft-making, such as floral

design, ceramic creation, fine arts, creating an independent record label, a children's art center, and the restoration of furniture. Nineteen percent of the proposed business ideas are connected to the health or medical fields, such as creating an integrative health center, medical transcription, or a woman's health center. Eighteen percent were interested in opening a café – either a café/bakery or a café/bookstore. The remaining participants had proposed a variety of business ideas, such as personal and spiritual development, philanthropy management and consulting, or time-management and consulting. These results are consistent with national statistics, which indicate that the largest share of women-owned firms are in the services (52%) and in retail trade (19%) (NFWBO, 1996).

Sole-Ownership or Partnership: Among those who have had some business sales, 75% are sole owners, with one looking for a partner. One participant has a partner who has 10% ownership in the company. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies, showing that the typical microenterprise is a sole proprietorship (Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark, 1996).

Of all respondents, 69% are sole owners, with only 22% of those looking for partners. Both respondents looking for partners indicate need for more one-on-one coaching. Both did not have mentors and expressed the desire to find someone with whom they shared a common business interest. Only one of those respondents had a bad experience with a partner previously. Others expressed no interest in having a partner, because they want complete control of their business.

Home-Based Businesses: Eighty-eight percent of respondents planned to start their business in their own homes. Of the remaining participants, one had the opportunity to start her business out of her father's business space. The others (13%) had to obtain space in commercial buildings due to the nature of the business (i.e. café/bakery, bookstore). These results are also consistent with nation-wide results, which indicate that 3.5 million women-owned firms are home-based (NFWBO, 1996).

Self-Esteem: Self-esteem is defined as a set of attitudes and beliefs that a person brings with him or herself when facing the world. It includes beliefs about whether he or she can expect success or failure, how much effort should be put forth, whether failure at a task will

“hurt” and whether he or she will become more capable as a result of different experiences. (Coopersmith, 1990). Self-esteem is related in a powerful and distinct way to work. Through work we act out the level of our confidence and our sense of personal worth. The higher our level of self-esteem, the more likely it is that we will find work through which we can express ourselves in satisfying and enriching ways (Brandon, 1983). To help a person increase her self-esteem requires creating conditions within which she can develop her own abilities and overcome her fears of not being adequate. It is the experience of doing and being something that she did not formerly feel capable of being that will lead her to increased self-esteem (Secretan, 1996).

We had hypothesized that participants in such training programs might be lacking (lower in) self-esteem and might seek out such a training program to bolster their self-esteem. However, eighty-six percent of respondents scored in the higher median range or better, indicating above average to high levels of self-esteem. Forty-three of those respondents scored between 50-75 (high self-esteem indicator) and 43% scored between 26-50 (higher-median range). Fourteen percent of respondents scored between 0-25 (lower-median range). Yet participants reported that the program increased their sense of self-worth and self-esteem through the opportunity to apply their skills and talents and to take charge of their lives.

Empowerment: All respondents felt empowered by the course. The most common themes expressed were around the concept of being enlightened by knowledge gained, and second, the environment and structure of women supporting each other, bonding with each other, networking, testimonials, guidance, which provided positive reinforcement and belief in one’s abilities. The following comments illustrate this:

“Before coming to the CWE, I believed I had the artistic talent and the confidence to start my own business. But I didn’t have a notion about how to start a business. CWE taught me the nuts and bolts and business skill that are necessary.”

“I got more than I ever imagined at the CWE. I keep working on my business plan and thinking of ways to address marketing and fundraising. I have a network of classmates I continue to be in

touch with. I am confident I can be economically independent and my goal is to be by the time my public assistance runs out.”

“CWE gave me inside knowledge of things I didn’t know anything about. The aura in the classroom was like a fix. No matter how tired or frustrated I got, I came away from class empowered with a sense of ‘I CAN do it!’ Networking with other women and the speaker testimonials was great—very uplifting.”

As Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark indicated (1996), such programs operate on the premise that with knowledge, clients can move more quickly to self-sufficiency. Training provides a safe environment for clients to test their business ideas and aptitudes before the risks of a loan are taken on.

Mentor: Two-fifths of respondents indicated that they did not have a mentor and were very interested in finding one. A few were looking into SCORE (Senior Corps of Retired Executives). They all wanted someone with either a compatible personality to theirs or experience in their proposed business idea. Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated that class members had mentored each other and continued to meet once a month. Others had mentors outside the program. Yet others obtained their mentoring from friends. In addition, CWE staff and the instructor were also mentioned as having mentored participants.

Reasons To Start A Business: The most common reason given for the desire to start their own business was for the love of the business idea. 85% of respondents expressed their passion for their business idea. Following that was having experience in the business idea. Other reasons included: creativity, natural ability, financial independence, lifestyle, appeal of home-based business, the “glass ceiling” in corporations, recognition of a need, and a lucrative business idea. These results support the findings of the National Foundation for Women Business Owners study (1996) which found that, contrary to common assumption, women business owners do not start businesses or base them at home, to balance the needs of work and a young family. Instead, they start their businesses, for example, due to the glass ceiling, a desire for greater flexibility, and a love of the lifestyle. As a study by The Aspen Institute (Economic Opportunities Program, 1997) revealed, women seek self-employment to fulfill their earning potential,

as well as to fulfill their human potential as productive and active members of the community.

Reasons For Coming to the Center: The two most common reasons for coming to the center were: 1) to determine the feasibility of their idea, and 2) to develop business skills and knowledge. The third reason was for support and networking opportunities. Other reasons were: to gain courage, for marketing information, for fundraising information, and to focus. All respondents except one, felt that they got what they wanted from the program or more. The one who did not felt that the program was very fast and less structured than she needed. However, she also noted that she was going through a major family crisis at the time she was enrolled in the program. These findings are consistent with the findings from other studies, that indicate women attend such programs for: access to information, to build a support network, to seek affirmation of their current skills and knowledge as a viable starting point to build a business (Economic Opportunities Program, 1997; Edgcomb, Klein, and Clark, 1996).

Funding: Three-fifths preferred self-funding, such as saving money, or cashing in investments. The rest said they would seek various outside sources of funding including: family loans, bank loans, credit union, grants, micro-credit, “angels”, investors, and credit cards. Participants found CWE’s financial advisor to be of significant help in determining how to obtain credit (including micro-credit). Participants estimated they needed, on average, between \$5,000 and \$8,000 to start. Two participants, notably in the restaurant/café business with equipment needs, estimated funding needs at \$25,000 and \$50,000 each.

Current Challenges: The biggest challenge facing respondents was time management. This includes balancing work, family, and financial obligations. A frequently asked question was “How is it possible to juggle start-up with other responsibilities?” Participants also spoke of needing more time to create and develop more materials for marketing their businesses. The second most frequently mentioned challenge was being driven and keeping focused on start-up and the business plan. Several noted that this became harder once the program was completed and they were out on their own. Still others identified finding capital and customers, and projecting figures necessary to do the business plan. Participants frequently mentioned the challenge of

having to deal with personal or family crises while trying to start the business. Some respondents spoke of the need to believe in oneself more as an ongoing challenge. Finally, consolidating debt and saving money for the business also represented a challenge for these women.

Forms of Support Needed: The majority of respondents indicated a need for continued coaching, mentoring, networking, and workshops. Respondents mentioned several special workshops and sessions with invited successful entrepreneurs, such as the “Breakfast of Champions” that they had attended at CWE as very useful and uplifting. They suggested that these workshops be continued. In addition, many mentioned the need for marketing and financial planning assistance. Respondents also suggested the following be offered by CWE: matching participants with mentors; advertising for employees and partners in the CWE newsletter or on a job board at CWE; a CWE website for advertising participant services; computer and internet access provided at CWE; technical focus including internet hands-on assistance and web marketing; more evening workshops since it is hard to get to classes during the day and on weekends; expansion of CWE courses and workshops regionally to fulfill a need outside of the city; follow-up with students after the program to provide a much needed push and incentive to continue; the possibility of prior students repeating courses or particular classes to brush up on their skills; workshops on promotion and marketing on a small budget; workshops on balancing family, business and financial obligations while still starting a business; workshops about advertising on the internet, and guidance about the next steps for those who followed the program and whose feasibility study was not viable; and, more specific legal advice.

Implications for practice and research

While this is a preliminary analysis of participant progress, the results, thus far, are very positive. The results of this study are consistent with those reviewed in this article. It appears that this training program does facilitate the creation of home-based microenterprises. In only six months following completion of the program, one quarter of participants had started their businesses. While it is too soon to know how well these businesses will do, or whether they will survive, such a high start-up rate so soon after the program is encouraging.

In the cases where respondents have not yet started their businesses, but are working on it, their evaluations of the benefits accrued by participating in such a training program are overwhelmingly positive. Participants gained knowledge about business, critical thinking skills to assess their ideas, a supportive network, and mentors. Participants identified these benefits of participation in the program as being highly valuable to them and worthwhile. As we follow-up with participants, it will be important to determine to what extent these benefits continue to be appraised as useful in business start-up.

In addition, while these participants entered the program with surprisingly high levels of self-esteem, the program still served to allow these women the opportunity to apply their individual talents, skills, and effort to improve their lives. Thus, the program contributes to supporting such individual efforts in business development and start-up by starting with the skills, abilities, interests and experience participants currently possess and, in so doing, appreciates and affirms their potential.

While the study confirmed that participants are relatively well educated, as are most microentrepreneurs, it also revealed that the kind of education these women seek cannot easily be obtained in traditional classrooms. Programs such as the CWE provide intensive, short-term and hands-on training that is invaluable to participants who are often working full-time out of necessity. The combination of: training by entrepreneurs, testimonials, networking with classmates and mentoring by staff and trainers, is a powerful combination which, according to these interviews, is just what participants need to move closer to their goals. Such programs fill a need for training in a way that universities and colleges do not. The increasing numbers of women

entrepreneurs and microentrepreneurs seems to indicate a growing need for such training programs.

We must still develop appropriate methods for assessing the effectiveness of microenterprise training. It is essential to monitor the effectiveness of these programs, to determine if the training currently provided does indeed accomplish what it appears to accomplish. How do we assess the efficiency and effectiveness of training activities? Are training efforts cost-effective? Are they becoming more effective over time? Are such centers providing the level of training that is most effective for a given client? Further study is needed to address such questions. We plan to address these questions a larger-scale study of 1100 entrepreneurs who have attended training programs at the CWE. Such a longitudinal study of participant's progress will contribute to efforts to monitor the effectiveness of such programs, through such things as the number of participants who complete the training programs, client demand for training services, as well as the survival rates of the businesses and their profitability over time. It will allow us to address the question of income gains over time, and, in the case of those currently receiving public assistance, whether these income gains allow them to move out of poverty and off public assistance. Finally, such a study will allow us to continue to gather feedback from participants on their evaluation of the value of the training received.

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Biographical Sketch

Colette Dumas, Ph.D., is an associate professor of organizational behavior and entrepreneurship at Suffolk University in Boston. She has published articles on women and entrepreneurship, family business management, leadership, and organizational values in *The International Journal of Value-Based Management*, *Family Business Review*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, and *Recherches Sociographiques*. She recently published a book entitled *Counseling The Entrepreneur* with the Institute of Canadian Bankers in Toronto. Her work on the subject of women in family-owned businesses was featured on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*.