

Keys to My Dream:

Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities to Start a Small Business

A Fact Sheet from the Client Assistance Program of the
Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, Inc.

Small Business Statistics for Persons with Disabilities

1. National Picture:

- Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) statistics for 1997: 2.7 % of the 223,668 individuals who were employed by VR agencies became self-employed or started a small business. 6039 individuals were assisted.
- The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) reported an 80% success rate for home-based and small business enterprise. Additional research indicates that many businesses are microenterprises that are owner-operated, home based, and were started with \$5000 or less in capital.

2. Florida Picture:

- According to the 2000 U.S. Census and The Able Trust, there are 1.5 million disabled Floridians who are working age, between 21 to 64 years of age.
- Based on calculations from the 2000 U.S. Census, the overall unemployment rate for person with disabilities in Florida is 42%. Approximately 870,000 disabled working age Floridians are employed.

Vocational Rehabilitation: A Possible Solution for Small Business Funding

3. How Can Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs help me reach my Goal of Starting a Business?

The 1998 Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act contains language that emphasizes consumer control and “informed choice”. This federal law enhanced the definition of “employment outcome,” thereby strengthening self-employment as a viable rehabilitation outcome. Section 103(a) authorized vocational rehabilitation (VR) to fund technical assistance and other consultation services for persons who are interested in pursuing self-employment or small business. Consumers can request a copy of VR policy on self-employment or small business free of charge.

4. How many small businesses has the Florida VR Program sponsored?

DVR reported that from SFY 2002/2003 they had assisted 140 persons start a business. In SFY 2003/2004 DVR assisted 112 individuals. To assist qualified individuals in achieving their employment goal, DVR spent \$1.4 million in SFY 2002/2003. In SFY 2003/2004 DVR spent \$778,669 on small business sponsorships. In 2003, DBS reported spending \$160,398 on self-employment ventures.

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5. What are the steps to obtain small business funding by Florida VR Programs [Division of Blind Services (DBS) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)]?

- Discuss your interests and small business idea with your counselor.
- Be willing to participate in evaluations that may assess your strengths and weaknesses.
- Develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with your VR Counselor. The IPE must reflect your small business goal and the services tailored to help you achieve that goal.
- Ask for VR policies/guidelines governing starting and managing a business.
- You may be asked to take several work shop/courses through the small business development centers.
- You will have to develop a business plan, have the plan reviewed and ultimately have it approved before it can be implemented.

A network of assistance - Small Business Development Centers

6. What are Small Business Development Centers?

Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) are a network of centers designed to serve as the statewide single point of contact for the advancement of an entrepreneurial environment. The SBDC offers business education courses, providing assistance in developing business plans, assistance in obtaining Federal, State, and local governmental agency contracts, as well as guidance in identifying and locating funding sources.

7. Does Florida have a Small Business Development Center?

Yes! The Florida Small Business Development Center (SBDC) State Director's office is located in Pensacola and can be reached by dialing 850-473-7813 or 850-473-7800, or on the web at www.floridasbdc.com. The Florida SBDC

network consists of 8 regional offices:

Pensacola: 850-473-7830
Tampa/St. Petersburg: 813-905-5800
Panama City: 850-271-1108
Orlando: 407-420-4850
Tallahassee: 850-599-3407
Ft. Myers: 239-225-4220
Jacksonville: 904-620-2476
Miami: 561-297-1140

8. Where can I obtain funding to start my business?

Powerful social, economic, and business start up support for small business owners with disabilities are available from several places. Please see the resource section on this fact sheet to locate organizations that may be able to help you with funding opportunities. For more details contact your regional Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

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9. Are you a Social Security, Medicaid or Medicare Recipient?

Did you know that under certain circumstances if you have an approved Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS), you can use your resources (money) to pay for the items or services you need to reach your work goal? The resources you set aside under a PASS to cover items and services needed to start a business do not count against the \$2,000 per individual or \$3,000 per couple asset limits set by Social Security, Medicaid or Medicare.

Microenterprises: The Self-Employment Opportunity for Individuals with Limited Income

10. What are Microenterprises?

Microenterprises are very small businesses that have no more than 5 employees. Although microenterprise describes the size of the business, these businesses are usually self employment ventures. Microenterprises are subsets of small businesses and are too small to access small business commercial loans. They are usually sole-owner-operator businesses. They can be family run such as mom and pop operations, or partnerships, all of which are able to benefit from start up loans that range up to \$35,000.

11. How successful are Microenterprises?

There are over 1,376,000 microenterprises in Florida. This represents 20% of all private employment in Florida, which is ranked 4th in the United States. In a five year study of microenterprises, the Aspen Institute found that:

- The survival rate for microbusinesses was 49% after five years—comparable with survival rates for businesses with similar characteristics.
- 72% experienced gains in household income over five years. Average change was \$8,484 (rising from an average of \$13,889 to \$22,374).
- 53% moved over the poverty line, and the microbusiness was a major source of earning for many.

There are no lists of specific businesses or types of microenterprises that are ideal for persons with disabilities. However, there are a number of examples of persons with disabilities who are successful artists, coffeehouse operators, home based cookie/bakery shop operators, seamstress, tax preparers, and sole-proprietor mobile car wash and wax operators.

12. Who benefits from Microenterprises?

Individuals with disabilities, public assistance recipients, women, and minorities.

13. How much money do I need to start my own microenterprise?

The average start up loan amount for a microenterprise is between \$10,500 and \$12,500. However, some microenterprises had a start-up cost up to \$2500.

14. Where can I learn more about Microenterprises?

Contact the Abilities Fund at 1-888-222-8943, the Small Business and Self-Employment Service at 1-800-526-7234, or the Association for Enterprise Opportunity at 703-841-7760, or online at www.microenterpriseworks.org.

Additional National Resources

- ❖ **Abilities Fund** is located in Iowa. It is recognized as the first and only nationwide community developer for entrepreneurs who happen to have a disability. The services provided include training, technical assistance, links to lending programs, and advisory services designed to help entrepreneurs. They also offer a menu of services designed to increase the capacity of microenterprise organizations. For additional information call 1-888-222-8943 or visit www.abilitiesfund.org. The Director of the Abilities fund is Ms. Patti Lind.
- ❖ **The Small Business Administration (SBA)** is the federal agency that sponsors small business development programs throughout the United States. The SBA can link you to programs nationwide who offer free of charge technical assistance, planning, information about financing your business, and information on enterprise development. You can contact SBA by dialing 1-800-8-ASK-SBA or TTD – 202-205-7333. You can also visit the SBA library by going on-line at www.sba.gov/lib/library.html
- ❖ **Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC**
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Serves as the Organizational Consultant for the Rural Institute's Rural Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Expansion Design Project. Mr. Hammis is an internationally known consultant on benefits analysis, support entrepreneurial employment and has helped persons with disabilities in the development of a Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS).
- ❖ **Disabled Business Persons Association**
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www.disabledbusinessperson.com

A nationally recognized businessman and entrepreneur who is dedicated to helping entrepreneurs with disabilities. He founded the Disabled Businessperson Association which provides such services as on-line consulting, market research, business plan development, and financial marketing.
- ❖ **The Small Business and Self-Employment Service (SBSES), a service of the Office of Disability Employment Policy/U.S. Department of Labor—**
SBSES provides comprehensive information, counseling, and referrals about self-employment and small business ownership opportunities for people with disabilities. Online at www.jan.wvu.edu/SBSES or dial 1-800-526-7234 (voice/TTY)

Florida Small Business Resources

- **The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)** is an employment program designed to assist persons with disabilities to pursue meaningful careers commensurate with their abilities and capabilities. DVR can be contacted at 1-800-451-4327 or by going online at www.rehabworks.org
- **The Division of Blind Services (DBS)** assists persons who have bilateral visual impairments with vocational services designed to allow them independence and full participation in the work place. Those wishing to know more about DBS can call 1-800-342-1828 or by going online at www.state.fl.us/dbbs
- **The Able Trust/Business Leadership Network (BLN)** is a public-private partnership foundation that provides Floridians with disabilities fair employment opportunities through fundraising, grant programs, public awareness and education. The grant program may be a resource to assist you with funding for your small business. The BLN is a network of Florida employers helping other employers who are committed to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the competitive work place. For online access regarding the BLN or The Able Trust, go to www.abletrust.org. They can also be reached by calling 1-888-838-ABLE or 850-224-4493.



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