

## Washington Enterprise for Equity

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**Focus:** Our mission is to ensure that low income people in the South Puget Sound region near Olympia have access to training, technical assistance, support and credit for small business development. These services are provided with the belief that people can and do transform their lives as they bring their strengths, initiative and dreams to their entrepreneurial efforts.

Enterprise for Equity grows entrepreneurs! Enterprise for Equity is a community supported nonprofit that helps people with limited incomes start and sustain small businesses.

**Geographic Area Served:** South Puget Sound Region.

**Participant Age Level:** No age is specified only income limitations. To be eligible, participants must have an income of no more than 185% of the federal poverty level (in 2009: \$20,036 for a single person, \$26,955 for a household of two, \$33,874 for a household of three, \$40,793 for a household of four, or \$47,712 for a household of 5).

**Funding Sources:** The Board of Directors actively participate in the development and expansion of the program, raises funds, and oversees the management of the organization. Volunteer Board members and other volunteers serve on organizational pillars (committees) and provide valuable expertise and guidance for the operation and expansion of Enterprise for Equity. Scholarships are available for classes; no one will be turned away for lack of funds.

**Key Services Abstract:** The decision to start a small business often stems from the need to supplement income due to low wage work, job loss, divorce, illness or disability, lack of affordable child care, and/or lack of alternatives in the labor market. We have worked to ensure that our support is relevant, meaningful and compatible with the needs of these entrepreneurs. Grants have assisted with funding for operations and partner organizations provide benefits to clients that assist with the training they desire in order to become self-sufficient.

Enterprise for Equity has implemented a full menu of business training, technical assistance and support services to help people increase their income, confidence and financial security. Enterprise for Equity is uniquely qualified to support low-income entrepreneurs in the development of their business. The curriculum is comprehensive and the staff, trainers and volunteers are experienced in supporting micro-businesses.

Enterprise For Equity offers assistance to individuals in the following ways:

- Training to build skills and confidence:
  - Technical assistance and support
  - Peer support from learning circles
  - Assistance in obtaining start-up funds

- Each Participant will:
  - Pay a fee\* (Scholarships are available for classes; therefore no one will be turned away for lack of funds.)
  - Attend classes and complete homework
  - Develop and write a business plan
  - Receive technical assistance
  - Learn practical business skills
  - Present his or her business at the Business Showcase (formally known as Community Graduation)

Enterprise for Equity has been helping low-income people start small businesses since 1999. The Microcredit Summit in Washington, D.C in 1997 initially inspired this effort. After the Summit a small group of volunteers brought together 30 representatives of low-income serving agencies in the South Sound such as the Food Bank, Refugee and Immigrant Services Center, and Housing Authority to learn about the self-employment needs of the people they serve. Since then they have developed relationships with these agencies, conducted comprehensive training programs, obtained our 501(c)3 designation, established an active Board of Directors, and received sponsorships and funding from foundations, businesses and public agencies.

Within the field of other employment and income assistance programs that target disadvantaged individuals, Enterprise for Equity is distinguished for its appreciation of the skills, assets, and potential of its participants. Because of this they provide entrepreneur training, technical assistance and micro-credit assistance with one eye on who these entrepreneurs are, and another on who they can become. With the guidance and support provided by Enterprise for Equity, even a person with limited income can dream of owning their own business.

**Summary of Key Benefits and Results:** The best national research shows that:

- Low-income micro-entrepreneurs reduced their reliance on government assistance by 61% with the greatest reduction in the amount of cash benefits received. Average benefits declined by \$1,679.
- 72% of low-income micro-entrepreneurs experienced gains in household income over five years. The average change in household income was \$8,485, rising from \$13,889 to \$22,374 over five years.
- 53% of low-income micro-entrepreneurs had large enough household gains to move out of poverty. The micro-enterprise business was a major source of earnings for households moving out of poverty.
- Average household assets of low-income micro-entrepreneurs grew by \$15,909 over five years.
- 49% of micro-enterprises owned by low-income entrepreneurs survived after five years - a rate comparable to the national average.
- On average, micro-enterprises create 1.5 full and part-time jobs per business.
- Micro-enterprises also generate a wide range of social and economic benefits such as life-long skills development, further education and training, improvement in self-esteem and family relationships.

- The Aspen Institute

**Lessons Learned:** The business directory web pages at the Enterprise for Equity site feature only a few of the business owners who have graduated from Enterprise for Equity's business training program. All of these businesses have been in operation for at least six months, and many of them have been profitable for much longer. They have invested time, energy, and passion in order to bring their unique talents and gifts to the South Puget Sound community through their business enterprises. Enterprise for Equity is proud to showcase them as buying their products and services will keep consumer dollars in the South Puget Sound region, and foster the creation of an inclusive local economy in the South Sound. Information is provided with each business so that you can contact each of them directly through the contact information listed on their individual pages.

Enterprise for Equity Graduates shared the lessons they have learned through the programs and services provided to them as shown below:

"Enterprise for Equity helped me to evaluate my business interest, develop a business plan that will continue to be refined, provided a supportive environment and extensive information. The instructors helped a diverse group of individuals in the class strive to meet their goals." - Enterprise for Equity Graduate

"... Enterprise for Equity provided me with the support I needed to find a way to fit into the work force. My ideas and organization skills were recognized as strengths and the interactions with others broke up the routine pattern of isolation I sometimes get in."  
-Enterprise for Equity Graduate

"I have had struggles with DSHS about self-employment as a viable option for getting off welfare, but many of the skills I learned in class gave me the resource base necessary to demonstrate my business could successfully meet requirements for getting my family off welfare." - Enterprise for Equity Graduate

If you don't have a solid business plan you're not going to go anywhere. It is vitally important to define your goals and have them close to you." At Enterprise for Equity, "I got to hear other people's versions of what they're doing. I realized the amount of time I needed to give to my business, especially the marketing end of things, and now I'm more focused than I've ever been."  
- Enterprise for Equity Graduate

