

RHODE ISLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL'S SELF-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM ACHIEVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION AND ADOPTION

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council \(RIDDC\)](#) celebrates the profound success and national impact of its Self-Employment Business Incubator Project, a program that empowers

individuals with disabilities to become successful business owners and economic contributors. Since 2018, the RI Developmental Disabilities Council has conducted eight years of business start up classes, initially in person, and online since Covid. The program's success has been recognized yearly by local and national organizations.



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Our success is due to growing interest from aspiring entrepreneurs with disabilities interested in starting their own business and support from State agencies including ORS and DD community agencies.”

Sue Babin

The program, which was the first of its kind in RI, has progressed from a little-known option for employment to a nationally recognized model. The program's core success is built on a comprehensive approach that includes professional business instruction, one-on-one peer and staff mentoring, and crucial ongoing support - a key distinction from programs in many other states that primarily offer only business classes.

The successful model is supported by comprehensive components, all funded by the RI Department of Labor and

Training (DLT):

Entrepreneurship Training: An eight-week business class series that covers business basics including the development of a “Business Plan Portfolio”.

Personalized Support: One-on-one mentoring, technical assistance from professional experts in specialties like marketing and finance, selling platforms and ongoing weekly support from project staff and peers.

Financial and Resource Support: Mini-grants (up to \$1,000) for startup and growth costs, access to SBA and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) resources, and community vendor events. Additional financial resources of up to \$500.00 for each entrepreneur is also available through funding provided by the John E. Fogarty Foundation.

Visibility: Opportunities to participate in the annual "Small Business Saturday SHOP RI" signature event of the Council as well as other vendor marketplaces throughout the state.

Continued Professional Development: Opportunities to participate in advanced learning sessions and join a weekly "Entrepreneur's Forum" networking opportunity for graduates of the program and people interested in exploring self-employment.

National Recognition and Leadership

The program has garnered significant national recognition for its innovative model:

National APSE Award: Sue Babin, Director of the RI Self Employment Business Incubator Project, was awarded the 2024 David Hammis Employment Innovation Award at the National APSE (Association of People Supporting Employment First) Conference. The award specifically honors innovation in customized strategies and self-employment for individuals with significant disabilities. Ms. Babin was recognized for her "fantastic leadership in developing self-employment outcomes in RI and across the country".

National Adoption and Replication: The National Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center (DETAC) has adopted two courses created by the RIDDC to teach other councils and organizations how to launch their own self-employment programs. The Rhode Island program has also been adopted in Maine and is under consideration in other states, including MA, Ohio and Indiana.

National Webinar Series: RIDDC was chosen by the federal US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and DETAC to lead two National Community of Practice Webinar Series on self-employment and family perspectives, Georgia's Advancing Employment Center and nationally recognized Griffin Hammis and Associates, and GSA has also featured RI's self Employment project for their 2025 annual national Success Story, further establishing the program's national leadership. Additional webinars showcasing RI's Self-Employment Business Incubator project and various entrepreneurs from RI have been hosted by the National Disability Institute (NDI) and the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS).

Local Impact and Program Components

Citizens Champion in Action: In 2025 RIDDC's Self-Employment Project was recognized for its work in building career pathways, including self-employment, for individuals with neurodiversity and diverse abilities, receiving a \$50,000 grant to fund mini-grants, offer a statewide Pitch Competition and track data on the entrepreneurs' economic contributions.

In 2023, RIDDC in collaboration with the [RI Cross Disability Coalition](#) was also awarded the

Providence Business News's Diversity Equity and Inclusion Award in the Non-profit/Social Services category for work in the areas of self-employment, employer engagement, and transformational workforce initiatives.

"These awards and recognition are a very big deal for Rhode Island. We have developed a great program and team, and they deserve these noteworthy acknowledgements," comments Kevin Nerney, RIDDC's executive director.

Sue Babin emphasizes the collaborative spirit, noting, "Our success is because we have such a solid team of family members, special educators, business people and peers, a growing interest from aspiring entrepreneurs with disabilities interested in starting their own business and support from State agencies including ORS and DD as well as DD community agencies". She adds that entrepreneurial education provides important life skills for people to learn such as problem-solving, public speaking, and self-esteem, all important skills to have in life whether or not a business is ultimately started.

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About the Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council (RIDDC)

The Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council (RIDDC) is committed to the belief that people with developmental disabilities should fully participate in community life, including working, having friends, and living as independently as possible.

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