



Opportunity Through Entrepreneurship Francine Hardaway

Years ago, I received a great piece of advice from my parents: "Be a little different." Today I'll tell you about a program for kids that are more than a little bit different - kids with challenges, but who also have plenty of talent waiting for the right opportunities.

For most of the 1990s, I was a foster parent. I could see what happened to foster kids when they aged out of the system - they became under-educated high school or college dropouts trapped in low wage jobs. As my former foster kids became adults, one went to prison, one worked at Starbucks, one disappeared, and one for lack of skills did literally nothing. I felt as if there were thousands of people like this in Arizona - former foster kids, returning felons, domestic violence victims, teen runaways - who would never be able to make enough money to raise a family, and who would always be trapped in these dead-end, low-wage jobs.

But my experience with them also told me they had unique survival skills that would make them fine entrepreneurs: the hunger to achieve, the ability to take a risk, and the capacity to adapt to imperfect circumstances and soldier on. So I started the [Opportunity Through Entrepreneurship Foundation](#) (OTEF) to offer programs to these people in how to be entrepreneurs - how to find their passions and skills and make them into businesses.

How to fund the Foundation? That's where the [Arizona Entrepreneurship Conference](#) comes in. :-)



The Opportunity Through Entrepreneurship Foundation provides training and support to help at-risk youth and adults improve their lives by creating and growing entrepreneurial ventures. Its major fundraiser is the [Arizona Entrepreneurship Conference](#), happening on November 12th in Phoenix.



The Arizona Entrepreneurship Conferences raise money for OTEF by bringing the community's entrepreneurs together for a day of learning, networking, and access to information and resources from more experienced mentors. Its objective, besides raising money for OTEF, is to grow and fertilize the entrepreneurial infrastructure in Arizona.

Why do I think this is important? Because in all my travels globally, I've come to the conclusion that "jobs" are a myth unless you live under socialism. I believe self-sufficiency

comes through entrepreneurship in vibrant communities where people help each other build businesses.

So a business partner and I decided to form a foundation to provide support to the disadvantaged and charge a fee to the "advantaged" to see the content. Every year we hold the conference, raise some money (we have NO administrative overhead), choose a non-profit beneficiary, and offer the entrepreneurship program.

We started OTEF in 2006 with a program for women from a domestic violence shelter called the [SEEDs](#) (Support, Education, Empowerment & Directions) House. We brainstormed business ideas for them and taught them principles of entrepreneurship. At the end of the program, they felt empowered, but for a year their business plan sat on hold while the board of their non-profit organization struggled with the idea of an entrepreneurial venture run by former addicts, convicts, and victims.

But I am thrilled to report that, at long last, the business plan we helped the women from SEEDs write last year has been executed. They closed on a coffee shop in Mesa, which was sold to them for \$1.00 by someone who was tired of running it. The women took it over, changing the name to [Cup o' Karma](#). Cup o' Karma: Community Café for a Cause opened to the public on June 16, 2008, and it's running today!

The Workforce Investment Act provides the funds to employ the women as they learn job skills. I believe this is a wonderful use of WIA funds, because the women are working in their own business, and they are very motivated to be successful.

Mona Lou Collery, the Executive Director of SEEDs, is a true entrepreneur herself, because not only did she start the non-profit safe house, she also started the business for the women.



Year Two

We began working with Tumbleweed, the program for youth runaways. We helped them expand the Drop In Gallery and the accompanying T-shirt printing businesses safely (without risk to Tumbleweed's main

funding sources) and taught the managers to train Tumbleweed youth to intern at the DIG and start their own ventures.

One of the most exciting facets of this business was that Tumbleweed also has a program for refugee youth. Many of them are not able to stay in the United States, so the goal is to send them back to their own countries (mostly Central America) with skills to start their own businesses or create crafts that can be imported by Tumbleweed and sold at the DIG.

I felt blessed to provide some help to Tumbleweed, which helps so many others. And I'm doubly blessed because, as usual, I had the strong support of Phillip Blackerby and Ed Nusbaum, two fantastic facilitators and business counselors.

Last spring, the Foundation Board voted to target out-of-work and laid off residents of Maricopa County for our entrepreneurial training. The Board agreed that enough people were laid off that wide-ranging outreach was necessary to help people consider alternatives to the traditional job search.

Using as a template the [LaunchPad](#) initiative of the [Kauffman Foundation](#), which targets the same population, we developed a three-hour workshop called Blueprint for Survival, and offered it six times this spring. After word got around about the value of the first one, we had crowds that overflowed the room every time thereafter!

We had a great deal of community participation in the program, but I should highlight one person, Derek Neighbors, co-founder of [Integrum Technologies](#) and [Gangplank](#), who volunteered his time and talent to help us offer the program, and actually also hosted it at Gangplank four times.

Gangplank, which itself is a community service, has joined forces with us to help struggling entrepreneurs get started and grow. It will be a prime player in our major fundraiser this fall, the 4th Annual Arizona Entrepreneurship Conference.

And here's a testimonial from one of our non-profit beneficiaries.

"Both DIG and TumbleTees are growing steadily. We just got approved as a vendor for Magellan for selling T-shirts, and have been invited to get listed as a City of Phoenix vendor for them too. DIG partnerships continue to grow. Steven is doing a wonderful job. We are not offering classes to the community during the week that we charge for and local community artists do the teaching mostly as volunteers or for a piece of the proceeds. The ASU partnership with the Art Department grew as ASU named the DIG their main project in a \$1 Million Grant from BofA. We don't get cash, but don't have to pay artist any more either.

"Be watching for TumbleDogs, a hot dog care business, that is about to kick off. Entrepreneurship is of the most exciting programs we do in my mind.

"Thank you for all you have done to make these entrepreneurial programs entrenched into our culture."

--Dick Geasland, LCSW
Executive Director
Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development

So if you are interested in entrepreneurship, the Arizona economy, youth, and ideas, come by on November 12th and check it out. Here's the registration link: <http://www.azec09.com>.

For those of you not in the Arizona area, I invite you to go to the OTEF website at <http://www.otef.org/> and click on the donate button. Your donation may be the one that launches not just a business, but a confident and productive member of our global community!

Rushton's comments:

Our club's programs are designed to tell interesting stories, help us all see the world in new ways, and spread the word about honorable efforts. What a pleasure it is to get all of this in a package designed by one of our own! While our guests are certainly encouraged to help Francine's project, I hope all of us who are members of this eClub to toss a donation her way and see what we can help make happen as a group.