

OSEDA

Ontario Self Employment Delivery Alliance

**Final Report
1999/2004**

Prepared by: SEDI

Funded by: The Ontario Trillium Foundation

I. MISSION & OBJECTIVES

The Ontario Self-Employment Delivery Alliance (OSED) was a Consortium of non-profit organizations, with SEDI as the lead partner. With the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, OSED launched the Self Sufficiency Through Self Employment project in 1999. The Consortium's mission was to provide self-employment services over a five-year period to low-income men and women, serviced through six primary and two secondary organizations across Ontario. In addition, the Consortium aimed to design and test a distance education model for building the training capacity of non-profit agencies. These activities would allow self-employment service deliverers to come together for peer mentoring initiatives, resource sharing, and the development and exchange of best practices.

OSED Consortium members believed that all Ontarians, including low-income people, should have access to the opportunity to explore and, if appropriate, participate in self-employment as a means to enhance their economic self-reliance. The general growth in self-employment has resulted in a demand for services which assist people pursuing self-employment to access the confidence, competence, connections and capital they need to become successfully self-employed. This has proven to be particularly true for low-income people.

Self-employment and other forms of enterprise development are legitimate self-sufficiency pursuits for low-income Ontarians; however, they often face significant learning and regulatory barriers which inhibit their access to enterprise development. In 1999, in-depth self-employment services available across Ontario were available primarily through the federal government and restricted to Employment Insurance (EI) recipients. And, while self-employment was considered a legitimate option for Social Assistance recipients by the Ontario government, development services were limited. The member organizations of the Consortium joined together specifically to enhance access to the option of self-employment for low-income men and women.

Through the creative sharing of resources, combined with the availability of adequate and appropriate incentives, the Consortium believed that significant numbers of low-income people could enhance their self-sufficiency through enterprise development. The Consortium's target group was defined as unemployed low-income people (at least 50% women) who clearly needed self-employment services and who were not eligible for EI or Social Assistance self-employment services, or were eligible for Social Assistance services, but required more guidance than was available through Ontario Works Self Employment.

II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Within its five-year period, the project had two areas of focus: building the capacity of OSED organizations and delivery of self-employment programming. Consortium members acted as a network of service deliverers across Ontario for the purpose of integrated sharing of resources, development of standards for service delivery (e.g. curricula), access to mentoring between the partner organizations and collaboration on the development of best practices. Project activities were as follows:

- Ongoing delivery of self-employment awareness workshops and full self-employment training programs.
 - Outreach to social service and community agencies.

- Recruitment of clients through self-employment awareness workshops and full self-employment training.
 - Development of a management information system to track results.
 - Professional development conferences and workshops that brought together self-employment service deliverers (front-line practitioners and management) from the OSEDA Consortium to network and share best practices.
- Distance learning model integrated at the local service delivery level:
 - Implementation of the strategy to get clients online by incorporating technology into the training program.
 - Several of the program delivery sites tested a number of approaches to incorporating self-directed distance learning in their program delivery.
 - An online facilitators project was created to encourage regular online participation by the front-line staff of the OSEDA organizations.
- Sustainability planning on an organizational level:
 - Ongoing discussions and presentations were made to the provincial government and municipalities around revising the Ontario Works Self Employment strategy to incorporate the OSEDA Consortium approach.
 - SEDI applied its capacity developed around distance learning/best practices to a related area – that of developing a model for self-employment services for people with disabilities.
 - Partner organizations leveraged the track record and experience within the OSEDA Consortium to secure ongoing funding.
- In 2004 SEDI established SEDI Awards to recognize the entrepreneurial spirit and accomplishments of unemployed and low-income Canadians. One of the awards was specifically for graduates of the OSEDA program.

III. KEY RESULTS

- In addition to SEDI, eight organizations constituted the OSEDA consortium and were involved as primary and secondary self-employment delivery partners. Primary partners included:
 - JobStart (Toronto)
 - WRED (Kemptville)
 - Unemployed Help Centre (Windsor)
 - Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Centre (Toronto)
 - PARO: A Northwestern Ontario Women's Community Loan Fund (Thunder Bay)
 - Women's Centre of York Region (Aurora)

Secondary partners included:

- LifeSpin (London)
- Niagara Women's Enterprise Centre (Welland)

- The following are five-year project results as of September, 2004:
 - 541 participants entered self-employment training programs.
 - 412 clients (76%) completed the training and developed a business plan.
 - 294 clients (71% of those who completed training) started a business or were expected to start by the end of 2004.

- In 2000 SEDI obtained an additional two years funding through the Volunteer @ction Online Grant (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship) to build and sustain a technical foundation – a web based network of trainers named CapacityNet – for the distance education and online activities of the OSEDA project. As well as OSEDA members, 65 additional trainers used the CapacityNet website to exchange information and to support one another in delivering self-employment programming.
 - Six educational modules and training resources were made available on the CapacityNet website.
 - Workshops were held using real time conferencing software where participants learned new skills, posted questions and shared experiences with peers.
 - Weekly e-networking sessions were held on CapacityNet with a live chat format and a discussion board. Topics ranged from technical assistance workshops to discussions of best practices in the field to brainstorming on outreach and marketing strategies.
 - A series of discussion forums were developed specifically tailored to meet client needs. For example, the Just Ask Forum provided an online resource and teaching tool for low-income clients during the training phase, while the Frequently Asked Questions Forum targeted new business owners with questions related to business start-up.

- The E-Business Primer Resource Kit was developed and included a CD ROM that provided practical and relevant strategies for clients to effectively use the internet in developing their business.

- All OSEDA sites used the E-Business Primer in their self-employment training program. Participants received a copy of the primer for self-directed use and skills training on using the tool.
 - Dixon Hall successfully provided training to six clients through their online pilot.
 - Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor worked with 20 clients using the E-Business Primer and a self-directed curriculum approach.
 - PARO incorporated technology for the support phase of their program along with in-person training.

- SEDI has consulted with the Ministry of Community and Social Services to recommend a new model for the delivery of the Ontario Works (OW) Self Employment Program, based on the model developed within the OSEDA Consortium.

- As of September 2004 two organizations (PARO and Women's Centre of York Region) secured multi-year funding for five years through the Canadian Women's Foundation's Economic Development Collaborative Fund.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED

The first key lesson learned was the important impact a multi-year approach has on supporting organizational capacity for program design and delivery. This five-year grant allowed for several of the organizations to establish the experience and proven track record required to leverage additional funding, plan and promote their programs over a longer timeline, and integrate learning to make continual improvements to their programs.

The Consortium also found that integrating technology into program delivery of self-employment training and support services was a slow and gradual process. While we were able to create a distance learning model with tools for use on the ground; introducing technology to both non-profit organizations and low-income clients presented some challenges. Access to equipment, concern over the costs involved, and virus problems were obstacles to the effective use of technology by clients; however, once clients used technology for their businesses, they were more apt to see that the benefits outweighed the obstacles.

Given the multiple needs of the target group, identifying those needs early in the process and providing a range of services, over and above training and business counseling (access to computers, daycare and office services) increased the potential success of marginalized clients. As well, providing opportunities to practice newly developing skills in a hands-on way resulted in increased self-esteem and the confidence necessary for successful self-employment.

The target group of low-income Ontarians served by this project benefited by having access to services that were unavailable elsewhere. The OSEDA Consortium was unique in that it delivered customized self-employment services to a broad group of unemployed and underemployed people, e.g. social assistance recipients and recent immigrants, who were ineligible for the federal or provincial self-employment programs; or needed more in depth services than were available from the provincial program.