

Alaska Small Business Incubator, LLC  
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RE: InnovateHER Statement of Support

Our panel of judges at the Alaska Small Business Incubator local competition unanimously nominated Abigail Kokai & Homer Whales for the National 2016 InnovateHER Competition.

Homer Whales took Homer, Alaska by storm in June. Abigail was inspired to create them by the pods of whales swimming by in our “backyard” of Kachemak Bay. This led her to create the plush toys that are now Homer Whales. Since her whales are created with repurposed fabric, Abigail was able to support a local women’s shelter Haven House through their thrift store. Their mission is: “To support and empower people impacted by domestic violence and sexual assault and to promote healthy families.”

The whales are a fantastic product on their own. However, the relationship with Haven House inspired Abigail to create a program to introduce these women to entrepreneurial business development, along with teaching them a new skill set. Women would learn skills associated with sewing, marketing, website development and management, and business operations. The facility would employ women to hand-make the stuffed animals and guide them through the process of establishing additional franchises.

The term “hand-made” attracts many audiences. The model for Homer Whales provides women with technical skills, direct marketing exposure, pre-establishes distribution and wholesale sales contracts, and offers the ability to work-from-home. Together, these opportunities present the skill-set for women to become their own entrepreneurs. So when a woman works for Homer Whales or starts their own franchise, they already have established active buyers.

As mentioned on FairTradeUsa.org website: ““The increased commitment to Fair Trade by major U.S. brands marks a unique opportunity for American consumers to choose responsibly-sourced products everywhere they shop,” said Mary Jo Cook, Chief Impact Officer at Fair Trade USA. “The 2011 SPINS data only further supports the idea that people want quality products that improve lives and protect the environment; they want to make every purchase matter.”

Additionally, [new] research from Cone Communications showed that an overwhelming 94 percent of consumers are likely to switch brands, assuming price and quality are similar, to one that is associated with a good cause." Many business models are directed at marketing to American consumers with the mission of empowering women living in third-world countries. Homer Whales draws attention to the economic needs and cultural significance of rural communities within the United States.

Because of the way the Homer Whales addressed the three key issues put forth by the SBA, measurable impact on women and families, potential for commercialization, and fulfillment of a need in the marketplace, our panel of judges selected Abigail Kokai as our finalist.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to host the event in Homer, Alaska and thank you for considering our finalist as a possible competitor for your event in March. I am more than happy to answer any follow-up questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nickie Knight", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nickie Knight  
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