

Verizon Awards Grant to Vera House, WISE, and SSIC to Provide Entrepreneurship Skills to Survivors of Domestic Abuse
Thursday, April 12, 2012 01:30:00 PM (GMT)

First of its kind grant in CNY focuses on empowerment turning domestic violence victims to survivors and survivors to financially independent entrepreneurs who control their own futures

SYRACUSE, N.Y., April 12, 2012 /PRNewswire/ -- Project Phoenix, a first of its kind program for Central New York that empowers domestic violence victims to become entrepreneurs, was announced today by Joanne Lenweaver, director of the WISE Women's Business Center, and Randi Bregman, director of Vera House, and Bob Herz, director of the South Side Innovation Center (SSIC).

The project is funded by a \$100,000 grant from Verizon, one of five \$100,000 grants awarded to workforce development organizations and domestic violence agencies across New York State to develop entrepreneurship training programs for domestic violence survivors.

"The project will help women become independent and take control of their economic futures," said Randi Bregman. "As Vera House helps women to move from victim to survivor, this program will multiply their choices and expand their opportunities."

"Verizon has created this opportunity that connects domestic violence programs and self-employment development programs," said Joanne Lenweaver. "Many DV survivors have all the skills and ambition needed to become entrepreneurs and take advantage of that level of freedom and security." Lenweaver noted that each member of the counseling and training team brings unique value to the program, reinforcing complementary skill sets and services.

- Vera House (referrals, full knowledge of the program participants)
- SSIC (coordination and presentation by experts in training and teaching)
- WISE (support, networking, and one-on-one counseling)

Lenweaver and Bregman noted that the entrepreneurial side of the program will focus on opportunity recognition, exploration, and education. Often women are left financially dependent, their credit ruined, their life opportunities minimized by what has happened to them. The program goal is to show them what is possible, and then help them get there.

Program admission will take place on a rolling basis, as clients are ready, with services provided on an individual and cohort basis. Services will include everything from Orientation through SSIC's robust counseling and educational training package, to business plan development. Several course areas will focus on credit, money, and financial instruments -- key issues for any entrepreneur but also helpful for individuals trying to rebuild their credit standing in the community -- and on public speaking and time management. In addition, we will reserve funds to allow program participants to attend the WISE Symposium.

At the conclusion of the training period, individuals will create a business entity and be eligible to apply for a Verizon Domestic Violence Entrepreneurship Grant, up to \$5,000, to receive start-up funding to help launch their new business.

Some individuals will want to take their business plans to the next level and seek additional funds for their enterprises through traditional financing entities. To this end, the program will enroll them in the advanced NxLevel business track, providing advanced and optional courses, and access to the SSIC Community Business Partners program, to credit loans, and procurement aid.

Information About the Entities

Verizon Domestic Violence Entrepreneurship Program

Participants who complete one of the five entrepreneurship training programs being developed across New York State will be eligible to apply for a Verizon Domestic Violence Entrepreneurship Grant, up to \$5,000. To date, 14 entrepreneurship grants totaling \$57,500 have been awarded across New York State, with more planned in 2012. Information on the Verizon Domestic Violence Entrepreneurship Grants is available at

<http://aboutus.verizonwireless.com/communityservice/YourArea.html>

About Verizon

Verizon Communications Inc. (NYSE, Nasdaq: VZ), headquartered in New York, is a global leader in delivering broadband and other wireless and wireline communications services to consumer, business, government and wholesale customers. Verizon Wireless operates America's most reliable wireless network, with nearly 108 million total connections nationwide. Verizon also provides converged communications, information and entertainment services over America's most advanced fiber-optic network, and delivers integrated business solutions to customers in more than 150 countries, including all of the Fortune 500. A Dow 30 company with \$111 billion in 2011 revenues, Verizon employs a diverse workforce of nearly 194,000. For more information, visit www.verizon.com.

About HopeLine

Since the national recycling program began in 2001, HopeLine has collected more than 9 million phones nationwide; awarded more than \$14 million in cash grants to prevention and awareness programs nationwide; and donated more than 123,000 HopeLine phones with more than 406 million minutes of airtime to domestic violence victims, survivors and organizations. The program has also disposed of more than 1 million phones in an environmentally sound way and refurbished the remaining units. To learn more about HopeLine from Verizon and to become involved, visit www.verizonwireless.com/hopeline.

About Vera House

Vera House works to end domestic violence and sexual assault in our community through various programs and services. The agency provides a 24-hour crisis, support and information line, and emergency shelter to ensure that all individuals are safe from violence. Actively engaged in domestic and sexual violence education and training in the community, Vera House offers counseling and advocacy services for victims of domestic and sexual violence as well as youth and elder abuse education programs.

About WISE

The WISE Women's Business Center features ongoing training programs all year long, targeting women entrepreneurs at various stages of entrepreneurial development. The Center also provides periodic workshops and special entrepreneurial events that offer important opportunities for learning, networking and mentoring. WISE Center clients are offered the opportunity to participate in programs of the South Side Innovation Center as well as the Falcone Center for Entrepreneurship at the Whitman School of Management. All events will include opportunities for individual follow-up counseling, coaching, mentoring and training.

About SSIC

The South Side Innovation Center (SSIC) was founded in 2006 and has provided its trademark Inclusive Entrepreneurship hands-on counseling, training, and mentoring services to almost 8,000 people since. SSIC helps many to launch new businesses -- on average some 30-50 businesses a year begin operations and about 50 new jobs are created. SSIC was nominated this year (2012) as Incubator of the Year by the National Business Incubator Association.

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Countries: United States

Industries: Telecommunications

Languages: English

Primary Identifiers: VZ-US

Related Identifiers: VZ-US, VZ

Subjects: Corporate Social Responsibility, Not For Profit Organizations, Human Interest Groups