Summary Report of the weEntrepreneurs Project

Parsippany Public Library

1. **Approach**

   The Parsippany Library has initiated outreach to the business community through its membership in the Parsippany Chamber of Commerce and through our staff's participation in the Morris County Economic Development breakfasts, as well as business fairs sponsored by local corporations. Through the weEntrepreneurs grant award and our partnership with NJIT and LibraryLinkNJ, we learned more about the services that could be provided to entrepreneurs. After we received the grant award letter, I met with our management team for ideas. We discussed various options such as speaker presentations and finding audiences for this presentation by reaching out to the business community.

   At one of our grant meetings, Brian Auger mentioned that Bill Loges of REF USA was conducting a presentation on how to effectively use their database to find business contacts at a Chamber of Commerce breakfast hosted by the Somerset County Library. Bill agreed to do a second presentation here in Parsippany.

   Based on staff recommendations, we partnered with the Professional Support Group of Morris County (PSGMC) and invited that group to the REFUSA presentation. (This organization uses our community meeting rooms every Wednesday morning.) At the time the Library staff did not realize how much of a role this organization plays in encouraging unemployed mid-life professionals to find jobs and to investigate entrepreneurial ventures. We also invited the Parsippany Chamber of Commerce members to attend. Lunch and handouts were subsidized by grant funds.

2. **Results**

   - Participants were very grateful for the tips from Bill Lodges of REF USA and pleasantly surprised that the Library offered this database. Thirty-five people participated in the session.

   - This presentation jump started partnerships between the Library and the Professional Support Group of Morris County. Many of the members of this group are entrepreneurs as well as unemployed people. The group worked with the librarians and attended REFUSA practice sessions in the library's tech lab.

   - Through this group, the librarians were able to promote our services to a large number of people since attendees at the PSGMC meetings changed from week to week.

- Based on feedback from the Parsippany Area Chamber of Commerce and the PSGMC, we used a portion of the grant funds to purchase books on starting a business. The list continues to be updated as titles are added to the collection.

- A partnership has been established between the Information Services librarians and Dale Favia, coordinator of PSGMC. The Library advertises the PSGMC interviewing and skills building courses on our website and Dale asks the Information Services librarians to explain library resources to the group. This is a quote from Ms. Favia:

  > Knowing how to use REF USA is a must in job search. For most of us we have never even heard of this database before we became unemployed. The training provided by the library guides us through the database to know how to make target company lists and how to do a deep dive on companies we are interviewing with. Many interviewers complain that candidates don't know enough about the company they are interviewing with, but savvy job seekers (like those in PSGMC) will spend a considerable time doing research of which REF USA is a primary tool. The use of the library meeting room gives PSGMC the space to provide speakers on all subjects related to job search, as well as for our members to network and get help from each other.

- The Parsippany Area Chamber of Commerce, concerned about its membership, appreciated that many people are unemployed and in search of entrepreneurial opportunities. They are changing their focus to offer programs to this changing demographic.

- Our Library staff has become more aware of the entrepreneurs in our community. Many of these people visit the Library daily to use our Wi-Fi connection. The Library provides the entrepreneurs with services such as the attached booklist, and database and other technology training in the library's tech lab. The staff also helps them promote their skills by encouraging their involvement in STEM programs for children and by inviting them to use their skills for Makerspace training.

3. **Replicable Programs**

- Libraries might look at the groups using the library community rooms and see if they include job seekers and entrepreneurs. Librarians can then promote the library's services. At the Parsippany Public Library, we partnered with a group of unemployed professionals; in other libraries partnerships might be formed with other community groups such as local business people, an inventors club, or a robotics club.

- Programs may be conducted by vendors or by staff that explain how library resources (especially databases) can be used to support the needs of the entrepreneur. Surveys can be distributed to collect information about the types of programs that would be of interest to entrepreneurs.

- Unemployed people and people who work from home like places to gather. Libraries can promote their free Wi-Fi connections and the availability of tech labs and Makerspaces.

4. **Partnerships**

The partnership with the Technology and Entrepreneurship Talent Network and LibraryLinkNJ:

- Provided us with a better idea of the services offered by the Technology and Entrepreneurship Talent Network and a knowledge of how people benefit from these services;

- Gave us the opportunity to learn about the services offered by our colleagues, which gave us ideas for programs and services that we could offer at our library;

- Encouraged us to offer services that focused on another segment of our population;

- Strengthened the Parsippany Library's local partnerships with the Professional Support Group of Morris County, and the Parsippany Area Chamber of Commerce;

- Offered us the opportunity to see our Makerspace as a place for entrepreneurs to promote their talents/inventions.

5. **Future Plans**

- We plan to find ways to reach more of the entrepreneurs who live in our community through additional programming and by promoting their talents through our Makerspace.

- We will continue to build our partnerships with the Professional Support Group of Morris County and the Parsippany Area Chamber of Commerce by conducting joint programming, including the promotion of the New Jersey Technology and Entrepreneurship Talent Network.

6. **Other**

- In addition to providing traditional library materials and services, libraries could act as facilitators to the entrepreneurial community, by keeping them informed about all the support groups and services that exist locally and statewide.