

Contact: Deanna Draze or
Deborah Nale
231-723-4325

For Immediate Release

"I NO LONGER FEEL AFRAID."

MANISTEE-BENZIE ENTREPRENEUR PROGRAM GETS HIGH MARKS

Manistee and Benzonia, Michigan - "Hearing people say that it can be done is so important. The training gave me confidence that I could really start a business."

These were typical of comments reflected in a Final Evaluation Report of the Manistee-Benzie County Micro-Business Initiative, a partnership between the Manistee-based Alliance for Economic Success (AES) and Manistee-Benzie Community Mental Health to help people become entrepreneurs by making and selling products. All participants in the program were individuals recovering from mental illnesses in the two-county area. The pilot project was funded through a grant from the Michigan Department of Community Mental Health to the Manistee-Benzie Community Mental Health Agency. The project was managed by Deborah Nale, a consultant to the Alliance for Economic Success who also serves as a Business Consultant at the AES for the Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center.

The Evaluation Report was completed by Draze Consulting, Kaleva, Michigan. The Report focused on questions involving program outcomes as well as outcomes involving the entrepreneurs who developed micro-businesses and community outcomes.

The Report found that the two-year Micro-Business Initiative worked with 39 individuals to provide them with skills to run small businesses. To date, 60% have launched businesses. The Report also found that the Initiative generally met or exceeded "best practices" for micro-business programs based on research of best practices for micro-business programs throughout the United States and New Zealand.

"The Micro-Business Initiative accomplished a great deal in a short amount of time," said Report author Dr. Deanna Draze. "It established infrastructure to help individuals develop their micro-business and the results of the project are now being sought by other communities in Michigan that are interested in beginning similar programs." Draze's findings included:

- Self-esteem of Micro-Business participants was generally increased when they found that they could run a business
- The program exceeded its original goal by providing services to more individuals than originally anticipated
- Participants in the program have increased their participation in community life as a result of new personal and professional relationships
- Case workers for participants felt that the recovery of participants was accelerated
- Administrative goals of the program, including collaboration with other local governments, non-profits and private businesses were met or exceeded

Examples of Micro-Business products developed under the initiative include: fine jewelry, art cards and stationary, clothing and purses, desk top publishing, wood carvings and crafts, landscaping services, home cleaning, poetry books, food products, fishing lures and others.

Renee' Ihlenfeldt, Executive Director of the Alliance for Economic Success, said that the knowledge and infrastructure developed throughout the initiative and the Report will be used to develop a system to support and promote entrepreneurs and start up businesses throughout the region.

"The same best practices used for this Micro-Business Initiative will hold true as we develop a system to support the success of all entrepreneurs," Ihlenfeldt said. "We are working with our counterparts in Benzie and Mason Counties to develop a system of support to help people make and sell products and manage small businesses. The results of this study will be used to design that delivery system in keeping with our goal of being the very best at supporting entrepreneurial businesses with the programs and services they need to succeed."

"The Report will be disseminated throughout Michigan and other states to share our experiences and to offer our help in getting similar programs started in other communities," said Ingemar Johansson, Chief Operating Officer of Manistee-Benzie Community Mental Health. "Our short-term goal is to develop the resources to sustain this program and encourage increased participation by those we serve. This is a tremendous example of what can be accomplished through collaboration and a shared vision about the economic well-being and quality of life in our communities."

The Executive Summary of the Evaluation Report is attached to this news release. The Executive Summary and the complete Evaluation Report are also available on line at www.allianceforeconomicsuccess.com.

Attachment: Executive Summary
The Manistee-Benzie County Micro-Business Initiative
Final Evaluation Report
Draze Consulting, Kaleva, Michigan
2009