

**The Vermont Kitchens Project**  
*Final Evaluation Report*

**JOLI Grant 2000-2004**



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## **Executive Summary**

The Vermont Kitchens project, operated out of Central Vermont Community Action Agency, Inc (CVCAC) in Barre, Vermont, focused on self-employment strategies of micro-business development and expansion for income-qualified individuals. The project offered core business and industry-specific training, linked participants with marketing resources, and provided intensive case management for the duration of the project. A major goal of the Vermont Kitchens project was that participants who completed the program would earn decent incomes, have access to benefits such as health care and childcare, and experience growth in their businesses.

### **Activities Evaluated and Methodology**

The Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont conducted the evaluation for the Vermont Kitchens project, which focused on project process and outcome. All clients who received training, including courses, seminars, information, and individual assistance were asked to participate in the evaluation. Process data was collected to document how activities were carried out, what worked and did not work, and ways to improve services. Process data was collected through staff and participant focus groups and participant follow-up interviews. Outcome data was collected to measure the effect of training on participants, based on the goals and objectives. Outcome data was collected through participant intake and activity records and focus groups and interviews.

### **Jobs Projected and Created**

The overall goal of the Vermont Kitchens project was to create a total of 105 new jobs for JOLI eligible clients. A total of 95 businesses were started, enhanced, or expanded through the Vermont Kitchens project for a success rate of 90.4%. A total of 116 clients were placed in newly created jobs, including self-employment and/or other employment for a success rate of 110%.

### **Major Project Accomplishments Achieved**

In addition to the goal of creating 105 new jobs, the Vermont Kitchens Project estimated that these new jobs would pay clients an average wage of \$8.00 per hour and clients would have access to quality childcare and health care. Client follow-up data indicates that clients were earning an average of \$12.41 per hour at the end of the grant funded period, which is \$4.41 more than the initial estimated wage, which is 55% higher. Eighty-eight percent of clients reported having access to medical and health benefits and 55% reported that they have access to affordable childcare at the end of the grant period.

Other major project accomplishments by clients surveyed include the following. The total dollar amount of loans received by clients ranged from \$150 to \$17,000, with an average of \$5,700. Business sales in 2003 ranged from \$50 to \$200,000, with an average of \$37,700. Clients reported their business net worth to range from \$1,000 to \$500,000, with an average of \$55,700. Forty-four percent of Vermont Kitchens business owners surveyed created a total of 34 other part and full time jobs, with 28 part time at an average wage of \$7.87/hour and 6 full time jobs at an average wage of \$10.00/hour. Regarding client income and public assistance, 61% reported that their annual household income increased because of their business, 25% reported a decrease, and 14% reported that it stayed the same. Further, 59% reported a decrease in reliance on public assistance because of the Vermont Kitchens project. Twenty-four percent reported having saved money in 2003, with a range of \$100 to \$25,000 and an average of \$5,000.

## Participants and Settings

The intended target clients of the Vermont Kitchens project are clients who are at 100% of the poverty level or receiving TANF benefits. Our original population was specific to clients wanting to start, expand, or enhance a business in the food sector. However, in the second year of the grant, this population was expanded to all business sectors in order to meet our desired outcomes and serve the income eligible population. Vermont Kitchens staff tracked participant activities on a quarterly basis using the JOLI forms. Participant outcomes were tracked on an annual basis by the CRS evaluation team. Specific methodologies to track clients and document project outcomes and processes is detailed in the above section. Tables 1 through 10 provide summary data on the characteristics of participants who were recruited, enrolled, trained, and placed in newly created jobs, either through self-employment or other employment.

**Table 1. Number of Participants Served in the Vermont Kitchens Project**

Area Served	% (n)
Participants recruited	100% (312)
Participants enrolled	100% (312)
Participants trained	73% (227)
Participants placed in newly created jobs	37% (116)

**Table 2. Participant Gender by Outcome**

	Recruited	Enrolled	Trained	New jobs
Male (% n)	39% (122)	39% (122)	39% (84)	38% (41)
Female (% n)	61% (190)	61% (190)	61% (134)	62% (68)

**Table 3. Participant Age by Outcome**

	Recruited	Enrolled	Trained	New jobs
Average age	40	40	40	40
Age range	20-67	20-67	20-67	21-67

**Table 4. Participant Ethnicity by Outcome**

	Recruited	Enrolled	Trained	New jobs
White, non Hispanic (% n)	82% (117)	82% (117)	81% (130)	79% (60)
Hispanic (% n)	2% (5)	2% (5)	2% (3)	1% (1)
African American (% n)	3% (6)	3% (6)	3% (4)	1% (1)
Native Indian (% n)	4% (8)	4% (8)	4% (7)	4% (3)
Asian, Pacific Islander	1% (2)	1% (2)	1% (2)	3% (2)
Other (% n)	8% (17)	8% (17)	9% (14)	13% (10)

**Table 5. Participant Marital Status by Outcome**

	<b>Recruited</b>	<b>Enrolled</b>	<b>Trained</b>	<b>New jobs</b>
Never Married	28% (72)	28% (72)	27% (48)	27% (23)
Married	31% (80)	31% (80)	31% (55)	36% (31)
Separated	5% (12)	5% (12)	5% (9)	6% (5)
Divorced or Widowed	36% (94)	36% (94)	37% (67)	31% (27)

**Table 6. Participant Educational Level Attained by New Jobs Created**

<b>Highest level of education achieved</b>	<b>New jobs (% n)</b>
Less than 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	1% (1)
Less than high school (no diploma)	9% (9)
High school graduate/GED	39% (41)
Some college/Vocational school	29% (30)
College/Vocational school graduate	23% (24)

**Table 7. Participant Years of Work Experience by New Jobs Created**

	<b>New jobs</b>
Average years of work experience	17.6
Range of work experience	1-40 years

**Table 8. Participant Months of Any form of Prior Public Assistance by New Jobs Created**

	<b>New jobs</b>
Average number of months	13.4 months
Range of months	0-288 months

**Table 9. Participant Estimated Annual Income at time of Enrollment by New Jobs Created**

	<b>New jobs</b>
Average estimated annual income at intake	\$10,019
Range annual income at intake	\$0.00-\$38,016

**Table 10. Participant Estimated Annual Income at End of Grant by New Jobs Created**

	<b>New jobs</b>
Average estimated annual income at end of grant	\$20,235
Range annual income at end of grant	\$5,040-\$60,000

## Community Characteristics

The Vermont Kitchens project offered training and technical assistance in Barre City and Morristown and recruited and enrolled participants living in these two towns as well as Eden and Bradford. Table 11 provides a summary and comparison of the percentage of the population below poverty level, households on public assistance, and unemployed for the United States, Vermont, and the four target area towns (data is from the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing). Since the inception of the grant, no major changes have occurred in these four areas. Vermont's poverty level is slightly under that of the United States. Relative to Vermont, the four target areas have a higher poverty rate, from 10% to 13% of the population below poverty level. Vermont has a higher percentage of it's households on public assistance (5%) compared to the U.S. (3%). Most of the towns, with the exception of Bradford (5%) have a higher percentage of their households on public assistance compared to the state. Looking at unemployment, Vermont (3%) is just below the U.S. (4%), with the four target areas ranging from 2% to 6%.

**Table 11. US, Vermont, and Target Areas Census 2000 Poverty and Employment Statistics**

	U.S.	Vermont	Morristown	Barre City	Eden	Bradford
<b>% Below poverty level</b>	12%	9%	10%	13%	11%	12%
<b>% Households on public assistance</b>	3%	5%	6%	11%	8%	5%
<b>% Unemployed</b>	4%	3%	2%	2%	6%	3%

The following provides the background characteristics of the four towns of the service area, including data on population, poverty, employment, industry, and occupation. All data is from the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing.

### **Morristown**

The total population in Morristown according to the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing is 5,139. Of the total population for which poverty status has been determined (5,003), 10% (515) are living below the poverty level. Three percent (148) of children under 18 years of age are living below the poverty level, as well as 6% (300) of persons eighteen to sixty-four years, and 1% (67) of persons 65 years or older. Of the total households (2,105), 6% (119) rely on public assistance, with a mean public assistance income of \$2,573.

A total of 2% (93) of the work force is unemployed. Thirty-three percent (1,340) are not in the labor force. Fourteen percent (373) are self-employed workers in own not incorporated business. The major industries in Morristown are education, health, and

social services (20%; 503), arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services (15; 379), retail trade (12%; 310), construction (11%; 280), and manufacturing (10%; 260). Major occupations include management, professional, and related occupations (29%; 760), service occupations (20%; 526), and sales and office occupations (24%; 624).

### **Barre City**

Barre City is the largest town served by the Vermont Kitchens Project with a total population of 9,291. Of the total population for which poverty status has been determined (9,022) 13% (1,175) are below the poverty level. Four percent (371) of children under 18 years of age are living below the poverty level, as well as 7% (622) of persons eighteen to sixty-four years, and 2% (182) of persons 65 years or older. Of the total number of households (4,229), 11% (443) are reliant on public assistance income, with a mean public assistance income of \$2,469.

Two percent (182) of the total work force (4727) is unemployed and 37% (2,721) are not in the labor force. Six percent (277) are self-employed workers in own not incorporated business. Major industries in Barre City are education, health, and social services (22%; 1,004), retail trade (14%; 618), manufacturing (12%; 558), and public administration (11%; 507). Major occupations include sales occupations (31%; 1,394), management, professional, and related occupations (30%; 1,335), and service occupations (17%; 743).

### **Eden**

The total population of Eden according to the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing is 1,152. Of the total population for which poverty status has been determined (1,141) 11% (122) are below the poverty level. Four percent (51) of children under 18 years of age are living below the poverty level, as well as 5% (61) of persons eighteen to sixty-four years, and 1% (10) of persons 65 years or older. Of the total number of households (414), 8% (32) are reliant on public assistance income, with a mean public assistance income of \$4,267.

Six percent (53) of the total work force (825) is unemployed and 30% (246) are not in the labor force. Thirteen percent (66) are self-employed workers in own not incorporated business. Major industries in Eden are education, health, and social services (23%; 117), manufacturing (15%; 79), and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services (12%; 65). Major occupations include management, professional, and related occupations (23%; 118), service occupations (21%; 108), construction, extraction, and maintenance operation (19%; 111).

### **Bradford**

The total population of Bradford (including both Bradford Town and Bradford Village) according to the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing is 3,434. Of the total population for which poverty status has been determined (3,242) 12% (404) are below the poverty level. Five percent (148) of children under 18 years of age are living below the poverty level, as well as 7% (218) of persons eighteen to sixty-four years, and 1% (38) of persons 65 years or older. Of the total number of households (1342), 5% (73) are reliant on public assistance income, with a mean public assistance income of \$4,528.

Three percent (72) of the total work force (2,652) is unemployed and 38% (995) are not in the labor force. Ten percent (156) are self-employed workers in own not incorporated business. Major industries in Bradford are education, health, and social services (30%; 483), retail trade (15%; 230), and manufacturing (14%; 226).

## **Collaborations and Leveraging of Resources**

The Vermont Kitchen's project required that staff from the core agency of Central Vermont Community Action Council, Inc. (CVCAC) work with various project partners, resources, and assistance programs to assist staff in working with clients to best meet their needs to be successful. Main project partners included:

### **Sources of Training and Education**

Vermont Food Venture Center  
VIP Computer Training Program

### **Lending institutions**

Vermont Economic Development Authority  
Job Start  
Community Capital  
Revolving Loan Fund  
Trickle Up  
Tangible Assets  
Individual Development Account  
Vermont Development Credit Union  
NCIC  
NVLP  
VCLF

### **Local and State Agencies**

Department of Prevention, Assistance, Transition, and Health Access (PATH)  
Reach-Up  
Department of Employment and Training  
Vocational Rehabilitation  
Office of Community Economic Development

### **Other Assistance Programs**

Small Business Association  
Women's Small Business Program  
Small Business Development Corporation  
Women's Business Center  
Good News Garage  
Vermont Adult Learning

## **Examples of Collaboration**

Throughout the past three years, the Vermont Kitchens project staff have been successful in collaborating with one another as well as project partners. Referrals to other staff members broaden the level of support for clients, based on their specific needs. External collaborators have provided a source of referral to the program as well as a resource for clients to address their needs. Staff cite several ways project partners have collaborated with the Vermont Kitchens project. Examples include:

### *Use of Facilities*

- The Food Bank allowed the project to use its facilities for classroom training;
- The Department of Employment and Training allowed the project to use their computer rooms for computer training during the evening hours.
- The PATH and Vocational Rehabilitation offices held a craft show, at which several clients had a booth;

### *Recruiting*

- The Vermont Department of Agriculture put information about the project on their newsletter and website to help recruit;

### *Materials*

- The Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship supplied training materials;
- The Vermont Department of Health provided information on health for farmer's markets;

### *Financial Resources*

- The Welfare to Work Department within CVCAC supported clients by providing cash assistance and other training supports;
- Vocational Rehabilitation has provided direct financing for clients;
- Trickle Up has provided seed grants for clients; and

### *Direct Service Providers for Low-Income Persons*

- The PATH office and Vermont Department of Employment and Training provided direct services to welfare recipients.
- The Food Shelf
- Fuel assistance
- Weatherization
- Community Action Motors
- Health insurance providers
- Emergency services (i.e. battered women's services, shelters)
- Childcare food program
- Head Start
- VHAP
- WIC
- Health and Wellness center.

## **Impact of the Vermont Kitchens Project on Participants**

The following highlights the results of the 2003 and 2004 in-depth client follow-up surveys. The complete report is available in Appendix D. Detailed account of activities by individual is available in the staff report.

### *Business Creation and Growth*

- In February 2004, the time of the final client follow-up survey, 39% of clients were in the planning stage of their business, and 40% had an existing business, 19% decided to not pursue their business, and 3% closed their business.
- Of the 27 clients with an existing business at the time of the survey, 30% started their business while working with the Vermont Kitchens project and 70% received assistance with an existing business.
- Those who started their business with the Vermont Kitchens project reported that it took them from 0 to 10 months to start their business while working with the program. Those who expanded their business with additional financing reported that they expanded in one year to one and a half years after having worked with the Vermont Kitchens project.
- Collectively, 65% of clients reported some level of growth in their business, with 53% reporting small growth and 12% reporting medium to large growth in their business.
  - 85% of those who reported having a business indicated that self-employment income provides *a source of income* for them.
  - 59% reported that their business is source from which they receive the *most* of their annual household income.
  - 2 clients indicated that their business provides them with medical and health benefits. One disclosed that they pay \$300/month for those benefits.

### *Other Employment*

- Of those respondents who decided to not start a business, 60% reported that they secured other employment and 40% are looking for other work.

### *Type of Businesses Served*

- Two clients surveyed in 2004 at the end of the grant reported having a food based business and five were planning to open a food-based business. Other business developed ranged from childcare to construction and manufacturing, retail, and arts and crafts.

### *Business Financing*

- 73% indicated that they learned about sources for financing their business through the Vermont Kitchens Project. The top three sources of business financing included: savings (49%), a loan from a friend or family member (11%), Vocational Rehabilitation (9%), and Job Start (9%). These sources were consistent as major sources of financing throughout the duration of the grant.
- The total dollar amount of loans received ranged from \$150 to \$17,000, with an average of \$5,700 and median of \$5,000.

### *Business Sales*

- Client business sales in 2003 ranged from \$50 to \$200,000, with an average of \$37,700, median of \$9,500 and mode of \$1,200. For the clients surveyed in both 2003 and 2004, there was an increase in the dollar amount of sales received in the previous year. In 2002, average sales were \$11,300 and in 2003, average sales were \$20,200.
- 54% of clients indicated that their business sales are growing, 27% indicated sales are stable, 12% indicated they are decreasing, and 8% said sales are within the projections of their business plan. Collectively, 72% of respondents reported that their Profit and Loss Statements showed a profit or breakeven.
- 63% of respondents reported that their sales are generated locally, defined as a 50-mile radius from their production site, followed by 15% within Vermont. A few clients reported selling their products regionally and nationally.
- More than half of respondents (56%) indicated that their business has expanded into other market areas while working with the Vermont Kitchens project.

### *Business Net Worth*

- Clients reported their business net worth to range from \$1,000 to \$500,000, with an average of \$55,700, a median of \$11,000 and mode of \$10,000. An increase was observed in the average net worth of clients' businesses that were surveyed in both 2003 and 2004. In 2003, clients reported an average net worth of \$11,300; in 2004, clients reported an average net worth of \$14,000.

### *Other Job Creation*

- 44% of Vermont Kitchens business owners surveyed created a total of **34 other part and full time jobs**. **28 part time jobs** were created with an average wage of \$7.87/hour for an average of 15 hours a week. **6 full time jobs** were created with an average wage of \$10.00/hour for an average of 40 hours a week.

### *Business Activity*

- 67% reported working full-time on their business (40 hours +), 19% reported working 20-39 hours on their business, and 15% reported working 20 hours or less on their business. On average, clients work 40 hours a week.

### *Owner's Draw*

- 81% take an owner's draw from their business, with a range of \$500-\$125,000, average of \$28,300, median of \$12,000, and mode of \$12,000. The computed average hourly wage for clients, excluding vacation and sick days, is \$12.41 per hour.

### *Change in Annual Household Income*

- 61% reported that their annual household income had increased because of business, 25% reported it to have decreased, and 14% reported that it stayed the same because of their business.
- Table 12 shows the changes in annual household income as reported by respondents from the intake of the Vermont Kitchens Project, to 2002 and 2003. There is an overall increase in income from intake to 2002 and 2003, based on the measures of central tendencies. The average income increased from \$15,500.00 to \$19,600.00 in both 2002 and 2003. The modal value (received the highest percentage of respondents) increased from \$0.00 at intake to \$12,000.00 in 2002 and \$24,000.00 in 2003. All figures are presented in real dollars.

**Table 12. Change in Annual Household (HH) Income from Intake to 2002 and 2003**

	<b>Annual HH income at intake</b>	<b>Annual HH income in 2003</b>	<b>Annual HH income in 2004</b>
<b>Range</b>	\$0.00- \$24,400	\$0.00-\$125,000	\$0.00-\$144,000
<b>Mean</b>	\$9,600	\$22,600	\$20,900
<b>Median</b>	\$9,600	\$16,000	\$13,800
<b>Mode</b>	\$0.00	\$12,000	\$12,000
<b>N</b>	69	52	60

- A paired sample t-test of the 2004 survey respondent annual household income at program intake (average \$9,700) to computed annual household income in 2004 (21,100) shows that there is a statistically significant increase in income from pre to post Vermont Kitchens services ( $t = -3.617$ ;  $p < .01$ ).
- Similarly, there is a significant increase in income from pre to post Vermont Kitchen services from intake (average \$9,400) to reported income in 2003 (average \$22,900) ( $t = 4.18$ ;  $p < .01$ ). These findings are consistent with results from the last survey that showed a significant increase in annual household income from intake to 2002 and 2003.

### *Sources of Client Income*

- The top sources of income of those surveyed in 2004 include self-employment (44%), other employment (40%), and TANF (19%).
- The top sources of income that provide the most income include other employment (35%), self-employment (31%), and SSDI (12%).

### *Reliance on Public Assistance*

- 74% of clients surveyed reported that they have relied on public assistance at one point in their life.
- The number of months they have received public assistance prior to starting with MBDP ranged from 0 to 204 months (17 years) with an average of 36 months (3 years), median of 21 (1.75 years), and mode of 24 months (2 years).
- Since their involvement with the Vermont Kitchens project, 59% reported a decrease in their reliance on public assistance, 35% reported that it stayed the same, and 6% reported that it increased.
- 46% of those who reported a decrease in reliance attributed this decrease to their increase in income from self-employment, making them no longer eligible for public assistance; 27% reported that income from a job or other employment made them no longer eligible; 12% indicated a change in eligibility, without specifying a reason; 8% decided to no longer receive it; and 3% each reported that their children being out of the house, and an improvement in health made them no longer eligible for public assistance.
- The three people who reported an increase in their reliance on public assistance provided reasons for this increase. These reasons include: poor health, change in eligibility, and not able to start business.
- For 2004 survey respondents, a cross tabulation and McNemar test shows that 76% of clients who reported receiving TANF at intake were significantly no longer receiving TANF at the time of the survey ( $p \leq .05$ ).

### *Health Benefits, Savings, and Assets*

- 88% have access to medical and health benefits and 12% do not have access to these benefits. 2 of the 58 respondents who receive these benefits access them through their self-employment.
- 55% reported that they have access to affordable childcare, 30% do not have access, and 15% do not have children. The cost of childcare per month ranged from \$0.00 to \$700, with an average of \$130 and median of \$25. The majority of people (50%) reported that they did not pay anything for childcare.
- 24% reported that they saved money in 2003. The amount saved ranged from \$100 to \$25,000, with an average of \$5,000 and median and mode of \$2,000.

- 21% of respondents indicated that they acquired the assets of purchasing a home, completing post-secondary education, or both.

#### *Skills and Knowledge Gains*

- The top three categories in 2003, as indicated in gray, were writing a business plan (53%), strategic planning (23%), and problem solving (23%).
- In 2004, the top three categories were writing business plan (47%), steps to start a business (24%), and financial management (20%).
- Overall, the skill of writing a business plan has consistently been the top skill gained through the Vermont Kitchens project.

#### *Changes in Attitude Because of Vermont Kitchens Services*

- The top three changes that respondents reported experiencing in 2003 included: being more motivated and encouraged (57%), increased self-esteem (37%), and broadened scope of possibilities (22%).
- The top three responses in 2004 included: more motivated and encouraged (30%), increased self-confidence (29%), and increased self-esteem (24%).
- Overall, being more motivated and encouraged, and having more self-esteem and confidence are positive attitude changes that clients consistently report experiencing from participating in the Vermont Kitchens project.
- 79% (54) of Vermont Kitchens respondents reported that they are better off today because of Vermont Kitchens services. These high remarks are consistent with findings from the 2003 survey.

#### *Reason for Initial Contact with the Vermont Kitchens Project*

- In 2003, the top two reasons for contacting the Vermont Kitchens project were to get help with starting a business (21%, 12) and gain access to capital or learn about financing resources (18%, 10).
- These reasons continued to be the main reasons why participants surveyed only in 2004 initially contacted the Vermont Kitchens project.

#### *Services Received and Satisfaction*

- The two courses that received the highest utilization and completion rates were the NxLevel Business Plan Basics and the Recipe for Success.
- Recipe for Success received the highest satisfaction rating with 100% indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied.
- NxLevel and Business Readiness received the next highest ratings with 88% each indicating being satisfied or very satisfied.

### *Number of Classes and Services Received*

- Respondents to the 2004 survey participated in a range of 0 to 3 classes, with an average and median of 1 class (some clients only completed one-on-one technical assistance and did not take any classes). Overall, respondents had a course completion rate of 70%, which is consistent with the overall completion rate of the first group surveyed in 2003 of 67%.
- The total number of services clients received ranged from 1 to 6 services, with an average of 2 services, which included classes (completed only), technical assistance, seminars, Round Tables, and referrals to other services.

### *Length of Time in Contact with the Vermont Kitchens Project*

- Clients reported having worked with the Vermont Kitchens project from 2 months to 3.5 years, with an average of 1.8 years and median of 1.7 years.

### *Satisfaction with the Vermont Kitchens Services*

- 84% strongly agreed or agreed that the Vermont Kitchens Project services met their expectations. An average satisfaction rating of 8 (scale of 0 to 10 with 10 being most satisfied) was received in both 2003 and 2004.
- 60% strongly agreed or agreed that the Vermont Kitchens Project aided in the success of their business.

### *Satisfaction with the Vermont Kitchens Project Business Counselors*

- 83% strongly agreed or agreed that working with the Vermont Kitchens Project business counselors aided in their business development.
- 75% strongly agreed or agreed that the Vermont Kitchens Project counselors provided the necessary and on-going support for their business development. An average satisfaction rating of 9 (scale of 0 to 10 with 10 being most satisfied) was received in 2004 and 8.5 in 2003.

### *Areas that Worked Well for Clients*

- The three most common responses given in 2003 included: knowledgeable staff (38%; 23), individual attention (35%; 21), and supportive staff (33%; 20). These three areas remain in the top five responses given by participants surveyed in 2004. Over the past two rounds of surveying, responses concerning positive aspects of the program focus primarily on the positive, supportive, and knowledgeable staff, as well as providing directions to take and skills gained.

### *Areas that Did Not Work Well for Clients*

- In both 2003 and 2004, half of respondents surveyed indicated that “nothing” about the Vermont Kitchens project did not work well for them. The second and third top responses given by clients in 2004 included that personal issues hampered their participation and that the program was not for them.

## Process Evaluation Results

The evaluators held a total of four focus groups with staff of the Vermont Kitchens project, in June 2001 and 2002, October 2001, and February 2004 for the process evaluation component, to document the methods of project implementation. The focus group covered the topics of marketing, recruitment, and enrollment strategies, assessment, training, technical assistance and support, collaboration, and impact. Throughout the three years of grant funding, the evaluators asked staff to identify how the project built upon the previous year's experiences, what changes occurred, what strategies were effective or successful and not effective, and ways for improving. The following highlights the major themes discussed throughout these focus groups.

### Recruitment and Advertising Strategies

Focus groups with CVCAC staff over the past three years indicated the most effective marketing and recruiting strategies to attract JOLI eligible clients to enroll in the program. A major source of referral throughout the project were project partners. These area service providers and agencies refer many clients to the program. These partners include the Department of Employment and Training, the Department of Prevention, Assistance, Transition, and Health Access (PATH), Vocational Rehabilitation, and area lenders such as Job Start and Community Capital.

Staff would also attend and advertise at a variety of conferences, shows, and resource fairs, including the Northeast Organic Food Association Conference, the Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, Vermont Farm Shows and Expositions, and community resource and craft fairs and career days at the PATH office and local malls. Staff would host a booth at these events and pass out pamphlets, information, and stickers about the Vermont Kitchens Project and related Micro Business Development services. Staff would also advertise services through newspaper advertisements, articles, public radio talks and public service announcements, and press releases highlighting successful participant experiences and promoting upcoming classes. Several participants would also submit a press release and photograph to local newspaper highlighting their experiences in the program. Other methods of recruiting clients include flyers on bulletin boards at service provider offices, mailings to people who have previously used services of CVCAC and to area social service providers, and word of mouth.

#### **Recruitment and Advertising Strategies**

- ◆ Referrals from project partners
- ◆ Press releases
- ◆ Public service announcements
- ◆ Fliers
- ◆ Advertising in newspapers
- ◆ Word of mouth
- ◆ Site visits and networking with area service providers

### *Issues with referrals*

A common issue that arisen in recruiting clients to the program is the lack of direct access to the JOLI eligible population. First off, staff of the Vermont Kitchens project cannot send JOLI eligible clients (i.e. TANF recipients) direct mailings because of client confidentiality issues. Furthermore, the Vermont Kitchens project has relied on case

managers at the TANF and Employment and Training offices, who serve these populations on a regular basis, to refer appropriate clients to the program. However, several staff indicated that case managers, who do not believe that self-employment is a viable option for welfare recipients to work towards sustainability, might often be hesitant to refer a client to the Vermont Kitchens project. For instance, in the serve area of Morrisville, Vermont, many of the caseworkers are self-employed, thus they readily refer clients to the program. However, other areas that have a strong factory based employment sector do not readily refer clients to the program. To overcome this impediment to recruitment, Vermont Kitchen staff have worked hard to establish a good relationship with their project partners who work directly with their target population. Staff and successful clients have also presented their story to these individuals to convey that self-employment is a viable option for many to achieve self-sufficiency.

*Evidence of enhanced awareness of the Vermont Kitchens project*

As the project has grown and matured over the past three years, staff have recognized that clients are more aware about Vermont Kitchens services, which have presented through self-referrals. Staff state that the main evidence of enhanced awareness of services is the increase in word-of-mouth referrals. Even with certain classes no longer being offered because of the end of the grant, clients continue to call and inquire about taking the classes.

**Strategies to Improve Participant Retention**

High client attrition rates are a major issue that service providers face when working with low-income individuals who often face multiple barriers to successful participation. Staff of the Vermont Kitchens project have identified several strategies to improve participant retention in the program.

Vermont Kitchens staff stressed that personal attention and individualized follow up with clients was crucial to improving participant retention in the program. Staff said that they have maintained consistent contact with participants in the program through follow up or "check in" telephone calls to answer questions, inform of upcoming events, or to offer support. They also regularly send participants mailings about upcoming events, resources, and agency newsletters.

**Strategies to Improve Participant Retention**

- ◆ Personal attention
- ◆ Consistent follow-up
- ◆ Regular mailings
- ◆ Open use of facilities and resources
- ◆ Focused and specialized classes beyond basic instruction
- ◆ Continuous program improvement through participant feedback

However because the Vermont Kitchens population is rather mobile, follow up via mail or telephone is sometimes difficult. Overall staff felt that the strategy of continuous contact and feedback with clients let them know that the staff care and are there to support and assist them. Furthermore, staff felt that the "open door" use of the resource room and computer was an incentive for people to come into the office and maintain in contact with the program.

Furthermore staff would hold additional classes that focused on specific issues of need for more in-depth exploration. Some areas included: a Credit Clinic, Math to Success, and Selling Strategies. These extra courses, which went beyond the initial Vermont Kitchens offerings, helped to keep people involved in the program and provided technical assistance beyond basic the services. Feedback from clients on ways to improve services and other services to offer came from class evaluations, participant focus groups, follow-up surveys, individual communication, and networking events.

Based on interviews and focus groups with clients, staff support and follow up and resources are major strengths of the program and some of the main reasons why participants reach goals and experience success. As evidence of improved client retention, one staff cited that 100% of those who started the spring 2002 *Recipe for Success* program completed, with 100% receiving Serve Safe Certification.

### **Intake and Assessment Strategies**

Client intake into the Vermont Kitchens project is a crucial part of assessment and orientation. This is the first level of contact clients have with the program and first opportunity for staff to understand their needs and goals, refer them to needed resources, and most importantly, develop a rapport and level of trust with clients. At focus groups, staff discussed several important intake and assessment strategies to set the foundation for clients work with the project. These include reviewing what the client can expect from the project, providing clients with a list of resources based on needs, and making appropriate referrals, both internal and external to other service providing agencies.

#### *Program overview and resources at intake*

Prior to clients initial meeting with the intake counselor, the Vermont Kitchens project staff mail out the intake forms to be completed by the participant ahead of time. Staff indicate that most of the time, people bring it in partially completed, which may provide an indicator of a person's literacy skills. The initial stage of enrollment is to determine if a client is eligible for services. Once eligibility is determined, clients set up a one-on-one orientation session with a counselor to discuss professional goals and any barriers that need to be addressed before these goals can be met. Staff reinforce that a crucial part of the intake process is to present clients with a clear picture of what to expect from the program and let people know of the resources available based on their needs.

At the intake meeting, clients complete the intake form and receive a Community Resource Guide of all service providing organizations in the community that may be helpful based on their needs. Clients also complete the survey of Perceptions and

#### **Intake and Assessment Strategies**

- ◆ Mail intake forms mailed prior to initial visit
- ◆ Determine eligibility
- ◆ Complete intake form
- ◆ Review barriers and refer clients to needed services to support barriers (external referrals)
- ◆ Provide clients with Community Resource Guide
- ◆ Complete Survey of Perceptions and Circumstances
- ◆ Determine client goals
- ◆ Determine next steps and develop action plan to achieve them
- ◆ Refer clients to Vermont Kitchens training/courses (internal referrals)

Circumstances as a self-reflection tool. At this time, clients, with the assistance from their intake counselor, decide on their next steps to take and make a plan to carry these out. Some clients decide that they only wish to receive the resource guide and that they are not in the position in life to start a business. Clients who are ready to continue are then referred to counselors for classroom training, Trickle-up, one-on-one technical assistance, and other services. Oftentimes, clients that were once in a "crisis situation" return to the project after that situation has resolved to continue their business development process.

### *Overcoming barriers*

Many clients face multiple barriers upon enrollment, with which the intake counselor works with them to try and mitigate through referrals and other services available. Major barriers faced include: lack of transportation and childcare, homelessness, substance abuse, being in a crisis situation, and insufficient income or poor credit. Furthermore, managing public assistance benefits from a variety of sources can be take the time of a full time job. When a client is facing one or more major life barriers, it is difficult for them to move beyond this stage and start their business until they have some stability. Business counselors try to work with clients so they may move out of crisis mode and into a planning and action mode. Overall, the Vermont Kitchens project assists clients with long term planning and development. The project gives people the chance to develop their business skills while managing their crisis.

### *External referrals*

A main referral strategy of the Vermont Kitchens project is to refer clients to other social service providers at their intake to the program and as needed, to work to overcome barriers in their life. Referrals commonly made include: the food shelf, fuel assistance, weatherization, Community Action Motors, health insurance to address medical needs, emergency services, the childcare food program, Head Start, VHAP, and WIC. Clients are given the Community Resource Guide so they seek out assistance on their own. Staff noted that most clients are pleased to learn about resources that they previously did not know where available, such as the Health and Wellness center.

Clients are also referred to other business related resources, such as the Women's Business Center and the Small Business Development Center, as well as lending programs such as Job Start, Revolving Loan Funds, Vermont Economic Development Authority, and Individual Development Accounts (IDA). Business counselors often get positive feedback about referrals made and get thanked for providing the assistance or making the referral.

### *Internal Referrals*

Once people are enrolled in the program, staff continue to promote courses through internal networking with people who are already participating in a Vermont Kitchens training. For instance, the business counselor and workshop leader for *Business Readiness* also promoted this classroom training at the *Recipe for Success* training, in order to develop a personal with people who have or are working on a business plan and recruit them to that program.

## Training

The Vermont Kitchens project offered clients a variety of courses to take to start, enhance, and/or expand their business. The basic trainings offered include: Recipe for Success, Business Readiness (formerly Dream to Reality), NxLevel Business Plan Basics, and VIP computer classes. Many classes with specific focuses, such as Selling Skills or those related to developing math skills or credit repair, were developed as a result of client feedback from the basic trainings.

Class curricula are also tailored to meet each student's needs. At the start of each class, students introduce themselves and state what they would like to get out of the class. For instance, in the Recipe for Success class, many students wanted to learn about sales and marketing. Because the Serve Safe Certification, a major component of the Recipe for Success class, takes a lot of time, the teacher developed a second course called Selling Skills to supplement this course. This teacher recommended that if Recipe for Success is offered again, the course should keep the Serve Safe portion of the curriculum, or have it be a separate course all together.

### *Changes in project and course curricula*

Based on participant needs and recommendations over the course of the project, the Vermont Kitchens project changed several aspects of the program and course offerings. They are not pursuing the use of community based kitchens, have revised their *Recipe for Success* and *Dream to Realty* training, changed the text books for the Serve Safe Certification, and added a computer training course.

### *Not pursuing use of community based kitchens.*

One of the major changes in the Vermont Kitchens project is that the project is no longer pursuing the use of community based kitchens, as initially planned. Carol Flint, Project Director, discussed two main reasons for this change in plan. First, Flint noted that the participants who have entered the program since the grant has been awarded have been mainly interested in creating service based businesses (catering, small restaurants, deli's, etc.) and not food production based businesses (food production based businesses were more common prior to receiving the grant and thus the reason community based kitchens were written into the grant). Thus the project has shifted its focus to meeting the needs of service based businesses through course work and technical assistance, rather than

### **Highlights of Project and Course Curricula Changes**

- ◆ *Not pursuing use of community based kitchens -*  
Project will not pursue the use of community-based kitchens. Most participants are creating service-based businesses and not food production based businesses. Those in food production are able to lease better kitchens to suit their needs than a community-based kitchen could afford.
- ◆ *Recipe for Success -*  
Curriculum continues to focus on the basics of the food industry and Serve Safe certification, but has been tailored to assess and meet student individual business needs.
- ◆ *Dream to Realty -*  
Changed name to *Business Basics* and uses NxLevel training manual, providing a more in depth course and resources.
- ◆ *Computer Training -*  
A computer-training course was added this year, with the curriculum focusing on practical application of skills based on student business needs, such as web site development or business cards.

providing community based kitchens. Second, when participants who own a production based food business needed access to a kitchen they have been able to lease better space to meet their needs than a community-based kitchen could afford to provide. Flint noted that community based kitchens do not seem to have enough storage to be a workable solution for entrepreneurs who have the same needs of a larger scale food business but spend less time in the kitchen than their larger counterparts. The funds that were earmarked for community-based kitchens have been transferred to evaluation to provide a more systematic follow up outcomes based evaluation.

*Changes to Recipe for Success.* Based on recommendations made last year to revise the Recipe for Success curriculum, changes have been made that allow the program to cover the basics of the food industry, Serve Safe Certification, as well as student's individual questions and needs. Brian Norder, instructor for the Recipe for Success course, stated that initially, the curriculum was geared towards specialty foods, however the majority of clientele are interested in catering or restaurant/service options within the food industry. Thus, at the initial meeting, Norder talked with students to determine their interest areas and set up the curriculum to be flexible to their interests. The first and second session of the curriculum provides an introduction to the food industry and marketing. The third session covers the Serve Safe curriculum to prepare students for certification. This year, Norder used the Serve Safe Essentials book, rather than the larger manual, to facilitate instruction and accommodate the time allocated to this portion of the curriculum. The rest of the course is tailored to meet student's individual needs. Norder has received positive feedback based on these changes and has changed the program to meet the needs of all students.

*Dream to Reality becomes Business Basics.* The Vermont Kitchens project changed the name, curriculum, and resource manual of the Dream to Realty course. It is now called Business Basics and utilizes the NxLevel training manual, which has more complete references, resources, and a website to download additional material. This course is now a more in depth course, providing students with more resources. Students have also provided positive feedback to the changes in this course curriculum.

*Addition of a computer-training course.* The program hired a computer trainer to teach a computer course that compliments other business development work. Currently, the computer course is structured with a flexible curriculum, so that students may bring in "real world" stories and examples on which to base their work. The trainer states that this strategy inspires students to network with one another and work specifically on their goals. The trainer recognizes that learning skills is about practicing them and applying them to their business situation. This has been a successful strategy and has also received positive feedback. This course is run in multiple locations through satellite offices; however, it has been limited by lack of access to a computer facility in some towns. However, the trainer notes that this opens the door to collaboration and strengthens services in the Community Action offices in Morrisville, Bradford, and Randolph.

### *Location diversification*

The Vermont Kitchens project initially offered training in the Barre and Morrisville, Vermont areas, the locations where they currently have Micro Business Development Program and Community Action offices. The project was successful in working in both of these areas. In the next year, the project attempted to expand their service area to hold classes in the Bradford and Eden, Vermont areas. However it was not successful in recruiting clients to attend classes in either of these locations (Eden clients were served through the Morrisville location though). In several focus groups with staff, they noted that these two locations are particularly difficult areas from which to recruit. They are more rural and isolated areas where there is more individualism and communities do not support efforts to assist low-income people. The result is two-fold in that residents of those areas are hesitant to participate in a community-based class and if they started a business, they would have a limited market base because of the rural and isolated nature of the area. Staff also noted that the timing of the course is more important than the location, as residents from Morrisville traveled to the Barre classes and vice versa because of the timing, rather than attending the one closer to their location.

### *Overcoming barriers to recruiting and retaining students*

The main issue that staff noted they have encountered in training is recruiting and retaining participants. The Vermont Kitchens project built stipends into the grant for mileage and childcare reimbursement, as a means of overcoming these major obstacles to consistent attendance. The project also used the incentive of the Serve Safe Certification as an incentive to enroll in Recipe for Success and stay with the program.

### **Technical Assistance and Support**

Technical assistance and one-on-one business counseling is another major aspect of Vermont Kitchens project services. This aspect offers clients individualized consultation with business counselors on an on going and as needed basis. Technical assistance and support occurred other the telephone, via email, and/or in person. Often, clients will meet with business counselors before or after their class and continue to follow up even after the class has ended. Post training follow is very specific and driven by client problems, issues, and needs. Types of technical assistance offered includes, but is not limited to: development of business plan, access to capital, selection and methods to set up a booth at craft fairs and retail and trade shows, packaging, UPC coding, pricing, development of business cards, letterhead, labels and websites.

## Staff Perspective of Strategies for Participant Success

Clients face many barriers and challenges that often make it difficult for them to attend class and complete their work. Barriers such as ill health, disabilities, depression, and lack of transportation can hinder a person from realizing their full potential. From the past three years of experience, Vermont Kitchens staff and clients have identified several crucial strategies of the project that encourage clients to participate and facilitate success. These strategies include: establishing client trust, providing a supportive program and classroom environment, holding community gatherings, and diversifying course topics. These strategies enable clients to be open with counselors about their ideas, goals, and issues, validate their work, and provide clients with a supportive and nurturing environment to recognize and work to their capacity. They also meet clients individualized needs.

### Strategies for Participant Success

- ◆ Establish participant trust at intake
- ◆ Provide a supportive and affirming program environment
- ◆ Provide a supportive classroom environment enabling all student's to feel comfortable to interact, contribute, and learn
- ◆ Hold Vermont Kitchens community gatherings to discuss successes, needs, and network
- ◆ Diversify course offerings

### *Establish participant trust*

An important aspect of the project that leads to client success is the building of trust with clients, which begins as the intake process. Based on some client's circumstances, whether they have had poor family relations or have felt let down by other agencies in the past, it is crucial for the program to gain client trust so they feel relaxed to speak freely about their ideas, goals, and concerns, and choose to continue working with the project. The establishment trust also facilitates technical assistance, one-on-one counseling, and course work, as counselors may focus on the business issues rather than spending time building rapport.

### *Provide a supportive program environment*

Supported by findings from client focus groups and interviews, staff indicate that one of the most successful aspect of the Vermont Kitchens project training is the supportive and validating environment created for client growth. Through all types of interaction with staff, from one-on-one counseling to a team approach of working with multiple counselors on various tasks, the program provides positive and supportive assistance that

*The Vermont Kitchens project works to be a self-empowerment program, assisting people to recognize, mobilize, and utilize their full capacity.*

validates the clients work. Furthermore, the positive classroom environment lend to validation from their peers. Many clients come to the program with low self-esteem. This type of interaction helps to build clients human capital, enabling them to move forward with their goals. One business counselor stated that many people

have been judged their whole life and consistently were told they cannot do something. The project focuses on people's strengths and continually reinforces this. This allows people to identify their own strengths and develop their abilities. The Vermont Kitchens project works to be a self-empowerment program, assisting people to recognize, mobilize, and utilize their full capacity.

### *Provide a supportive classroom environment*

The staff discussed several strategies to keep people active in the project. Based on experience, it is important for the course to have good group dynamics. The instructor must set the stage for this by greeting people, making them feel welcome, and having introductions and an icebreaker at the beginning of the session. It is also helpful if the instructor of students bring food to the class to keep people's energy levels high. The staff who provide instruction state that it is important to establish an atmosphere where each person feels valued so the group may bond. This is especially important because oftentimes the group is made up of many different types of people with different backgrounds and education levels.

### *Hold Vermont Kitchens community gatherings*

Starting in the second year of the grant, one of the business counselors began holding networking "pot luck" dinners for participants. Both have been extremely successful. Attendees are invited to stand up and tell the group something they have accomplished and/or are proud of and something they need. This event is consistently well-received by clients. Clients state that it brings them out isolation (reduced isolation) to talk about their achievements (self-esteem building) and try to help one another (networking). Several of the attendees were able to help others obtain resources for their business because of this meeting. These events, as well as other frequent gatherings that focus on socialization rather than sales, help build a supportive community.

### *Diversity of course offerings*

Staff also stated that the diversity of course offerings allows the program to meet the individual needs of each client. One-on-one instruction helps to supplement training and meet answer specific technical questions. Business courses provide students with an introduction to business and marketing, with a focus on student's specific needs. *Recipe for Success* provides students with an overview of the food industry, Serve Safe Certification, and individual responds to student's needs and questions. Advanced classroom training offers appropriate follow up to introductory courses.

### **Client Perspective on Program Attributes**

Vermont Kitchens clients who have participated in biannual focus groups have consistently reported that various attributes of the Vermont Kitchens Project have had a positive impact on their business and personal life. Vermont Kitchens services and staff have impacted clients through referrals to other community agencies, providing business and funding resources, networking opportunities and resources, knowledgeable and supportive staff, and social interaction and networking opportunities. These main ingredients have enabled participants to achieve various outcomes and experience success beyond business start-up or expansion.

### *Referrals to other community agencies*

Clients reported that the Vermont Kitchens project referred them to many agencies including:

- Micro Business Development Community Resource Guide
- The Women’s Business Association
- Tangible Assets saving program
- Trickle up grant program
- The Vermont Development Credit Union and other lending agencies
- Other Micro Business Development seminars and workshops
- Other VKP course offerings
- Prevention, Transition, and Healthcare Access office
- Local Family Center
- A local weatherization program
- Good New Garage

### *Business and funding resources*

Participants also benefit from learning about resources available in the community, other class offerings through the Vermont Kitchens project, and grant or funding opportunities. Several noted that they participated in the Tangible Assets saving program in order to purchase a home or materials to start or expand their business. Several also received

*“I would not have gone into business without the Vermont Kitchens Project. I learned to persevere and accept the obstacles that life presents. I learned to work around and move beyond them with the support of the Vermont Kitchens Project.”*

grant funding such as the Trickle Up program or loans through the Vermont Development Credit Union. One participant noted that it is important for lower income people with poor or no credit to have access to alternative funding sources in order to start business.

Participants also reported learning about legal issues relating to their business, tax information and record keeping, and saving and investing money for the future. One client noted, “I would not have gone into business without the Vermont Kitchens Project. I learned to persevere and accept the obstacles that life presents. I learned to work around and move beyond them with the support of the Vermont Kitchens project.” All of the clients interviewed expressed a similar sentiment of how crucial Vermont Kitchens project services were for the start-up and/or expansion of their business.

### *Networking opportunities*

The Vermont Kitchens project provides clients with the opportunity to network with other entrepreneurs through a group learning environment and one on one technical assistance and business counseling. Many clients talked about the importance of information sharing and networking with peer business owners in classes and to see and experience the progress and success they achieve in starting or expanding their business. One participant noted that “I came into the class with a small idea and the group gave me the opportunity to bounce ideas about my business off other students and the teacher. It was essential to have this input from others with

*“I came into the class with a small idea and the group gave me the opportunity to bounce ideas about my business off other students and the teacher. It was essential to have this input from others with experience in self-employment.”*

experience in self-employment.” Others noted that a new business owner can save a lot of time, money, and effort to learn from the mistakes that others have made. One can also come to the realization that their business idea will not work before investing a lot of time into it.

#### *Knowledgeable and supportive staff*

Participants noted that Vermont Kitchens project business counselors have experience in self-employment and are well connected in the community. They provide referrals and help open doors for clients by connecting them to individuals, community organizations,

*Participants noted that the Vermont Kitchens project business counselors have experience in self-employment and are well connected in the community. They provide referrals and help open doors for clients by connecting them to individuals, community organizations, other entrepreneurs, and funding sources, in order to start their business.*

other entrepreneurs, and funding sources, in order to start their business. All participants noted that, overall, they had very positive experiences in working with the project. The Vermont Kitchens project has created a welcoming atmosphere that is not

intimidating for a person to ask for assistance in starting their business or dealing with life issues before they can go into business. They noted that business counselors are extremely supportive and go above and beyond to help participants get on their feet to start their business. They regularly follow up with clients to see how their business is going and provide resources, support, and positive reinforcement.

#### *Social interaction and building social networks*

One on one assistance and courses through the Vermont Kitchens project also provide social interaction and enable participants to build a support system. All participants live in rural Vermont and noted that living and working out of ones home can be very isolating. Center-based activity through courses and assistance provide necessary social interaction and support to maintain motivation and stay involved in the community.

*All participants live in rural Vermont and noted that living and working out of ones home can be very isolating. Center-based activity through courses and assistance provide necessary social interaction and support to maintain motivation and stay involved in the community.*

One client remarked, “The class is my social life. I enjoy making new friends. We all have different goals but are on the same journey, and we go through that journey together.” Many of the participants noted that they continue to keep in touch with other entrepreneurs they met through classes and continue to help one another with business ideas and questions.

## **Observations and Discussion**

From the perspective of the evaluation team at the Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont, the Vermont Kitchens project has been a successful JOLI funded project. Clients have consistently spoken highly of the positive and supportive role that staff play to assist them in their endeavors. They also consistently report high levels of satisfaction with all services received. Many individuals who have attended focus groups have indicated that this project is not like other social service providers because of the highly individualized assistance provided and on-going support and follow-up. Survey results also demonstrate that all clients have achieved some level of success in the project. For some, success is defined as gaining the courage to attend a class and experiencing an increase in their self-esteem and confidence. While others, success is defined as an increase in sales generated, business net worth, and the creation of other jobs. Overall, because of the Vermont Kitchens project, many low-income persons in the central Vermont region are self-employed or employed by micro or small business owners and earning a decent living. Furthermore, many have decreased their reliance on TANF and other forms of public assistance because of their business.

The success of the Vermont Kitchens project is in part due to the excellence of the Vermont Kitchens staff. Staff members have expressed passion and enthusiasm and genuine care towards helping low-income individuals succeed in their pursuit of self-employment. They firmly believe that self-employment is a viable option for poverty alleviation, as many of them have extensive experience in owning their own businesses and sustaining themselves and their families through this income. Staff have also effectively collaborated with one another and maintained the "team approach" in working with clients. They are frequently in contact with one another and project partners through email, telephone, and personal communication. As many of the staff share space in the Barre office, informal networking takes place to inform one another that they have referred a client to them. Staff also meet on a regular basis to discuss the project. All staff have participated in at least three of the four focus groups held, which provided them with an opportunity to share with one another, reflect on their successes, and brainstorm areas to change in the future.

### **Problems encountered in the evaluation**

A few problems were encountered in conducting the Vermont Kitchens evaluation, which were overcome through specific measures. Based on these issues, CRS has generated suggestions for future programs to prevent or overcome these issues. Overall, staff of the Vermont Kitchens project have been a pleasure to work with to conduct this evaluation. They were eager to cooperate with the evaluation methodologies used for the evaluation, such as participating in staff focus groups, inviting clients to attend participant focus groups, preparing for food and paperwork for these focus groups, and providing client information as needed. They also assisted in the revision of survey instruments and reviewed and provided feedback on evaluation materials prior to their submission. CRS has been included as part of the Vermont Kitchens team, which has allowed the evaluation and materials to evolve as the course of the project changed.

### *Client follow-up data collection*

The main problem encountered in the evaluation of this grant was that client follow-up surveys were initially carried out by project staff and not the evaluators. As stated earlier in this report, because of limited staff time and availability, client follow-up during the first year of the grant was sparse. However, in the second year of the grant, Vermont kitchens staff contracted CRS to revise the follow-up survey instrument and carry out the interviews. CRS recommends that future JOLI funded projects contract with their evaluators in the beginning of the grant to carry out all aspects of client follow-up, with assistance from project staff. With the exception of client intake data, which should be collected by a trained intake counselor. Given that the evaluators must generate the reports from data collected, they should review all reporting instruments and databases to ensure that data is collected in the most appropriate form and format for reporting.

### *Difficulty tracking clients*

Another problem encountered in this evaluation was the difficulty in tracking clients over the three-year period. Several factors, including the mobility of low-income populations, lack of a telephone or a telephone being disconnected, make it difficult to keep track of participants and contact them for the appropriate follow-up. This is the main reason for the lower response rate for both the 2003 and 2004 follow-up surveys, as 32% and 37% of each survey population respectively had either moved, their number was disconnected, or was the wrong number. CRS remedied the situation as much as possible by using online and hard copy telephone directories and making up to eight attempts on each number.

Client follow-up was also difficult because clients were not tracked consistently on an annual basis at a minimum and every six months at a maximum. This was because follow-up data collection was initially carried out by staff and then transferred over to the evaluation team. CRS has found in other studies that by following up with clients on a consistent basis, the evaluators are able to maintain a better relationship with clients and keep in touch with them, rather than calling two to three years into the program. Both scenarios are common issues in conducting long-term evaluation, particularly with low-income populations. CRS would recommend that future JOLI projects contract an external evaluator to carry out all follow-ups on a consistent basis, with a minimum length of one year between follow-ups. The evaluation team may find that six months is too short of a time period to document any change and may serve to aggravate clients.

### *Database Development*

A minor problem encountered in this evaluation was the transfer and conversion of client databases from program staff to the evaluators.

- At the beginning of the grant, database conversion was an issue as staff and evaluators were not using the same version of software for the data. This was a minor issue, remedied by converting the file to the newer version. CRS recommends that future JOLI projects ensure that both staff and evaluators have the most up to date version of the software of choice.

- As staff house client intake data on their server, the evaluators were dependent on staff to send this information through electronic mail in a timely fashion in order to complete reports in the JOLI proscribed format. A few times receipt of this data was delayed, because of limited time and complexity of data and forms required. This was remedied by establishing a timeline of activities when staff and evaluators were expected to submit information to one another. If data or information could not be sent in this timeframe, the appropriate party would ask for an extension on the due date to ensure quality of work. CRS recommends that this strategy of developing a timeline of activities and deadlines be implemented at the onset of future grants and revised as needed, to ensure a common understanding of needs for reporting.
- A final issue encountered was that of converting the client database into a format suitable for advanced statistical analysis. As staff developed and housed the client database in their own format, the information sent to the evaluators needed to be converted from this format to the format for data analysis. Specifically the file needed to be converted from an Access or Excel file to a SPSS file. Further, the evaluators needed to recode the data so that SPSS could read the file to conduct the analysis. This was a simple process, but rather time consuming. Again, CRS recommends that the evaluation team work with project staff to develop the client database and fields of data to be collected at the onset of the project to ensure that it is in the appropriate form and format for analysis.

### *Reporting Deadlines*

A final issue encountered in conducting this JOLI evaluation was the reporting deadlines proscribed by JOLI. JOLI required that annual evaluation reports were to be submitted within 30 days of the end of the fiscal year. CRS recommends that this reporting period be extended to 60 days to ensure adequate time for complete data collection that would commence at the beginning of the new fiscal year and quality reporting of this data.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Evaluation Goals and Objectives**

The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont has been the evaluator of the Vermont Kitchens project, for the past three years from September 1, 2000 through August 30, 2003. A no cost extension was received to extend the project through February 29, 2004. The Vermont Kitchens project focused on self-employment strategies of micro-business development and expansion for income-qualified individuals. Through JOLI funding, the project offered core business training with industry-specific training; linked participants with marketing resources; and provided intensive case management that continued beyond start-up for the duration of the project. A major outcome of the Vermont Kitchens project was that participants who completed the program would have earned decent incomes, have access to benefits such as health care and childcare, and have experienced growth in their businesses. This final evaluation report on the Vermont Kitchens project is cumulative over the past three years, and serves to measure the cause and effect relationship identified in our hypothesis to determine which elements of Vermont Kitchens have been successful.

#### **Evaluation Goals and Objectives**

This evaluation employed both process and outcome methods to meet the overarching evaluation goals of the project: 1) to provide the quantitative results which indicate the significant and beneficial impact of CVCAC" Vermont Kitchens project to the Office of Community Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2) to add a qualitative dimension to the quantitative "what happened"; and 3) to provide ongoing feedback to Vermont Kitchens' Project Director and staff for the purposes of correction, learning, and development.

Specifically, the evaluation serves to answer the following objectives:

- Measure the cause and effect relationships identified in our hypotheses to determine which elements of Vermont Kitchens are successful:
  1. Identify the kinds of services that participants used.
  2. Track the business development and personal development of participants.
  3. Identify the support our Partners contribute to the growth and development of participant's businesses.
  4. Gauge and describe how access to markets affords greater sales opportunities.
  5. Gauge and describe the benefits of the flexible incubator.
  6. Determine and describe how access to a licensed kitchen helped participants.
  
- Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of Vermont Kitchens' activities towards overall project goals by measuring the following:
  1. How many jobs were created by each business? What kind of jobs and at what pay rate?
  2. How many participants started businesses?
  3. How many participants expanded businesses?

4. What services did they use and to what extent?
5. Who provided capital for start-up and expansion? How much?
6. Does the business provide a decent wage for the participant? Has their income increased? By how much?
7. Does the participant have access to health care and childcare? How and at what cost?
8. What career opportunities were acted upon by participants? Why and when?
9. Have participants decreased their reliance on public assistance?
10. Have participants increased their assets? By how much?

## **Appendix B**

### **Evaluation Methods**

The evaluation for the three-year Vermont Kitchens project collected both process and outcome data. Process data was collected to document how activities and training are carried out, what worked, what did not work, and ways the program can improve services. Outcome data was collected to measure the effect of JOLI funded training on participants, based on the evaluation goals and objectives. The following highlights the evaluation activities conducted over the past three years to collect outcome and process data.

#### **Participant Outcomes**

##### *Intake form at enrollment*

This intake form was administered upon enrollment to generate baseline data of participants including wage, income, health care, childcare, reliance on public assistance, and assets. This form also helped participants identify their goals for being in the program.

##### *Follow-up telephone surveys*

At the beginning of the grant, CVCAC agreed to collect client follow-up information using an internal survey instrument. A total of 29 people who completed a minimum of six months of services were followed up with during this time frame because of time constraints. The results of this survey are available in the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 annual evaluation reports. In 2003, the Vermont Kitchens project staff contracted with CRS to revise the survey instrument and carry out the remainder of the client follow-ups, to be collected annually in 2003 and 2004 for the duration of the grant.

Two client follow-up surveys were conducted by the Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont. The Vermont Kitchens first client follow-up survey was conducted in June and July 2003. The second client follow up survey was conducted in January and February 2004 by CRS. CRS attempted to reach all Vermont Kitchens clients who had received services during the JOLI funding period of September 1, 2000 to September 31, 2003. Clients were surveyed about services received and satisfaction, business financing, business development, job creation, income changes, skill development, social and human capital development, and program feedback. The survey instrument was developed in collaboration with the Vermont Kitchens project coordinator and key staff, using the models of previous surveys conducted by CRS (Cranwell and Kolodinsky, 2003) and the Aspen Institute in the area of micro enterprise development (Clark and Kays, 1999; Klein, Alisultanov, and Blair, 2003). This study uses a reflexive control design, similar to that of other researchers (Clark and Kays, 1995 and 1999; Klein, Alisultanov, and Blair, 2003; Rugg, 2002), where participant outcomes after microenterprise training are compared to the baseline collected before they received program services.

Both of the surveys were administered at the University of Vermont using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI). Trained interviewers at the University of Vermont

conducted the survey during the daytime and evening hours from 8:00am to 9:00pm. Up to eight attempts were made on each telephone number and call callbacks were conducted as needed. Surveyors used local, state, and national telephone directories in attempts to track clients down when phone numbers were not current or not in service. Univariate and bi-variate analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and Microsoft Excel.

*Survey Population and Sample.* Table 13 depicts the outcomes of the 2003 and 2004 client follow-up surveys. In 2003, 231 Vermont Kitchens clients were called 60 people responded to the survey for a response rate of 26%. 25% of clients refused to answer the survey, 16% did not answer the telephone but were confirmed to be living at the residence, and 32% have moved or the number was wrong or not in service. In 2004, 262 clients were called and 70 responded to the survey for a response rate of 27%, which is consistent with the 2003 follow-up survey. IN 2004, 19% refused to answer the survey, 17% did not answer the phone, and 37% had moved or the number was wrong or not in service. These figures are consistent with 2003. Both 2003 and 2004 response rates are lower than anticipated by the researchers, however 32% (in 2003) and 37% (in 2004) of clients did not have a correct number where they could be reached, despite researcher efforts to track them down. Similar research shows that a lower response rate is common when surveying lower income persons because of the transient nature of the population (Clark and Kays, 1999; Klein, Alisultanov, and Blair, 2003; Servon, 1998).

Of the 262 client follow up with in 2004, 211 were followed up with for the first time, which included both new clients and those who could not be reached for the June and July 2003 initial follow-up. Further, 51 clients, who agreed to be contacted again after completing the first survey in June and July 2003, were followed up with for the second time in 2004.

**Table 13. Survey Population and Calling Outcomes, 2003 and 2004**

	<b>2003 Respondents</b>	<b>2003 and 2004 Respondents</b>	<b>2004 New Respondents</b>	<b>Total 2004</b>
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>Completed surveys</b>	<b>60 (26%)</b>	<b>33 (65%)</b>	<b>37 (18%)</b>	<b>70 (27%)</b>
Refused	58 (25%)	6 (12%)	43 (20%)	49 (19%)
No answer	38 (16%)	7 (14%)	38 (18%)	45 (17%)
Moved/wrong number/number not in service	75 (32%)	5 (9%)	93 (44%)	98 (37%)

*Participant focus groups*

Throughout the three-year grant period, eight client focus groups were held, with 2 in January 2002, 2 in July 2002, 2 in January 2003 and 2 in July 2003. A total of 52 clients participated in focus groups, with several participating in more than one. Clients were invited to participate in the discussion by Vermont Kitchens Business Counselors, based on their duration in the project (enrolled for at least six months) activity level (moderate to high level of activity), and interest and availability to attend the session. Sessions were held during the early and late evening based on client availability, with sessions being held for two hours during the time frames of 3:00-5:00pm and 6:00-8:00pm. Dinner was

served in the beginning with clients, the facilitator, and Vermont Kitchens staff, to introduce the group to one another. Staff were then asked to leave for the duration of the focus group. Staff were invited back in to discuss suggestions for improving the program with participants. Clients were asked questions about their business, feedback on services received, and program impact, specifically on their social, human, and financial capital.

#### *Record of Participant Activities*

Utilizing the form in the JOLI Evaluation handbook, project staff provided an update on participants in JOLI funded projects for quantitative data. This also provides a baseline for comparison over the course of the participant's involvement in the project.

### **Project Process**

#### *Staff focus groups*

A total of four staff focus groups were held over the three-year period, in June 2001 and 2002, October 2001, and February 2004. Most if not all of the Vermont Kitchens staff were present during these focus groups to document and determine how activities were carried out, changed based on project evolution, and/or improved based on feedback, areas of success and in need of improvement, and ways to improve services. These focus groups concentrated on changes in marketing, recruitment, and enrollment strategies, assessment and selection, training, technical assistance and support, successfulness of collaboration with project partners, and anecdotal evidence of outcomes.

#### *Follow-up telephone surveys*

The follow-up client telephone surveys conducted from 2000 to 2004 also gathered participant feedback on services received to inform project process and recommendations for improvements.

#### *Participant focus groups*

The client focus groups held throughout the duration of the grant also collected data on project process through questions relating to feedback of services received.

## **Appendix C**

### **Client Business Success Stories**

The following highlights several participant business stories and the Vermont Kitchens Project services and resources they used to start and expand their business.

One man moved to Vermont from Africa as a refugee and decided to start a small business making a cultural food item that is common in his country yet relatively unknown to the United States. This man took the Recipe for Success course through the Vermont Kitchens project and received his Serve Safe Certification. He also participated in the Tangible Assets savings program, NxLevel Business Plan Basics, various seminars and business roundtable events, and received one-on-one training and technical assistance. These services helped him to start and expand his business within months of starting with the program. His business counselor also referred him to a local restaurant owner to share a kitchen, as he did not have the space for production in his home. He began selling his product at local Farmer's Markets. His business counselor suggested that he begin to take samples of his products to stores. His business has since expanded by word of mouth to many of the natural food stores, grocery cooperatives, and specialty food stores, and coffee shops. He business currently generates \$70,000 a year in sales and has an estimated net worth of \$100,000. He has also hired 11 part time and 3 full time employees, who are paid an average of \$10.00 per hour. TANF recipients filled all of these positions. Types of jobs created include delivery drivers, sales people for farmer's markets, and cooking assistants. He also now has health insurance for himself and his family, which is provided by this business.

One woman came to the Vermont Kitchens project as a TANF recipient and homeless. She had fibromyalgia, which prevented her from working in a mainstream work environment. After taking the Business Readiness and NxLevel courses through the Vermont Kitchens project she opened an environmentally friendly home cleaning business. She also participated in seminars, round table events, and one-on-one technical assistance and received a loan for \$1,500. Her business continues to grow through advertising and word of mouth, has stable sales, and has hired three part time employees from her community paying them \$7.00 per hour. TANF recipients filled several of these positions. She also recently started a dog care and grooming business, providing overnight and day car for dogs. Through her work with the Vermont Kitchens project, she was referred to the Tangible Assets saving program and now owns a home, where she runs her businesses. Her business counselors also referred her to the Women's Business Association where she utilized the library and resource materials for her business. She noted that the most important aspect about the Vermont Kitchens project is the social interaction, networking, and moral support the program provides through group learning and one-on-one technical assistance with business counselors.

One woman runs a food business out of her home, making jams and jellies and selling them with wood cutting boards. She started her business in June 2002 and is working to expand it, possibly by using a shared use kitchen. She was able to improve her product quality, labeling, and packaging through the Recipe for Success course. She is also now Serve Safe Certified through this course and has taken many steps to increase her food safety precautions.

Another woman is in the business of hand-painting children's clothes. Her business is twenty years old and she is in the expansion phase, looking to expand into other product types. She enrolled in the Business Basics course to refine her business plan. Through this course, she built friendships and networked with other business owners. She also worked with Vermont Kitchens project business counselors at least once a week to work on aspects of her business. Vermont Kitchens project staff also referred her to the Trickle Up grant foundation and she received a \$700 grant for materials and supplies. This woman also emphasized the importance of networking, support and social interaction, as a self-employed person living in a rural and isolated location of Vermont.

One man owns a small marketing company as a consultant. He currently works with a local juice company to develop radio announcements. He has taken the Business Readiness course as well as the Recipe for Success course and is now Serve Safe Certified. He also noted that the group-learning environment offered a place for networking and information sharing. His work with the Vermont Kitchens project has enabled him to begin to expand his business. Vermont Kitchens project staff also referred him to the Tangible Assets saving program and now owns a home. He works closely with Vermont Kitchens project business counselors on a regular basis, whom he states are excellent sources of advice and information.

One woman designs and creates craft items with pressed flowers, specifically photography mats. She has been in business for twelve years and her business is stable, yet beginning to grow. Through the Vermont Kitchens project, she took the Business Basics course, worked one on one with business counselors, and participated in the Tangible Assets savings program. She noted that before she began working with the Vermont Kitchens project, she felt very isolated and uncomfortable with social interaction. She is now comfortable to sell her products at craft fairs because of the social support and interaction she got through the small group learning environment. She recently has designed a website through the Vermont Kitchens project VIP computer course and continues to use her skills to update it. She noted that the Vermont Kitchens project courses and staff have provided her with the motivation to continue with her business.

One man is in the planning stage of his business, running a small bakery out of his home. He is currently working on his business plan and is looking for retail space to have a restaurant and bakery. He also took the Recipe for Success course, which enabled him to bring his kitchen up to code to meet state standards. This course also helped him develop his product packaging and marketing strategy. Further, he benefited from learning about cash flow and business financing. Overall, he noted that all of the Vermont Kitchens project course work and one-on-one technical assistance was very helpful for starting his business.

One woman is a writer and owns a small publishing company. She is the author of a book that recently has had an increase in sales through online book distributors. Through the VKP, she took the Business Readiness course. During this course, she met a lecturer from the Vermont Development Credit Union, whom she now works with as her banker and lending institution. She noted that she used the business plan she developed in this course to apply and receive loans for her business as well as public relations material. She may possibly expand her book idea to a series through Lifetime Television.

**Appendix D**  
**Vermont Kitchens Complete Client Outcome Report**

For more information or additional copies of this report,  
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