

## Rebecca Buck

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**From:** Kathryn Baudreau <kbaudreau@cvoeo.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 13, 2020 6:36 PM  
**To:** Theresa Utton-Jerman; Rebecca Buck  
**Subject:** Written testimonies re: Proposed State Budgets  
**Attachments:** Written testimonies for Micro Business Development Program and Vermont Matched Savings Program.pdf

Hello Theresa and Rebecca,

Please find attached written testimonies from residents throughout Chittenden, Franklin, and Addison Counties re: the proposed budget for 2021. These testimonies focus on reinstating funding in the budget for the Micro Business Development Program and the Vermont Matched Savings Program.

Thank you,  
Kathryn

Kathryn Baudreau  
(Pronouns: she/her/hers)  
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## Written Testimony

### Micro Business Development Program

The Micro Business Development Program (MBDP) of the Vermont Community Action Agencies provides training, coaching, and access to financing for low-to-moderate-income Vermonters who are planning to start or expand a microenterprise. Since 1988, MBDP has helped to strengthen the economic self-sufficiency of more than 10,000 Vermonters. We have launched or expanded more than 2,100 Vermont businesses, created thousands of jobs, and helped entrepreneurs leverage more than \$15 million in financing. We also provide the skillful, individualized support that our clients need. The proposed budget for 2021 completely cuts out the Office of Economic Opportunity's funding for the Micro Business Development Program.

We surveyed our recent Micro Business Development Program clients. 15 responded to the question: "What types of support have you received from the Micro Business Development Program, both from your coach and from workshops":

Found out about resources I did not know about (grants, shared working spaces, loans, etc.)	73.33%
Built my confidence	73.33%
Took steps I would not have taken on my own	66.67%
Applied for funding	40.00%
Launched my business	33.33%
Grew my client base	33.33%
Expanded my business	26.67%

We also asked them to describe their business successes related to MBDP, how they feel about working with their business coach, and why they would recommend the program to other entrepreneurs. They responded:

I am proud of developing my business and marketing plans for my business and of the help with the IDA program that **really got my business off the ground** later after it was getting established. Without the microbusiness program I would not have been able to start my own business.

**Simeon has the most amazing insight into helping people grow their businesses and brainstorm ideas** that really made a difference in my business. He also helped me think outside of the box when making business connections and looking for contracts.

I would say that the Micro Business program helps people develop ideas into businesses and **turn dreams into reality by helping you develop sound business and marketing plans** and goals to grow your business. ... It is an invaluable support system that allows small businesses to grow and thrive. **This is what Vermont is based upon: the small business that is driven by sound economic practices and**

**ideas to create amazing products and services while building Vermont's economy.** This is a win win for both new businesses and Vermont.

JEC

Essex Town, VT

I saved enough money to receive a matching grant that helped me develop an emergency fund...and I've kept that up for many years now. I've worked with a number of business coaches there and have learned skills from each one. **Many lower-income entrepreneurs don't have the same opportunities as those with more money. The Micro Business Development Program allows us to gain skills so that we can implement business ideas and become more independent and, therefore, financially self-sufficient.** Thank you for that!

Megan J. Humphrey, Sweet Basil Cards

Burlington, VT

I am most proud of planning my business and working toward reaching my goal of opening my own business. **The MBDP has helped me throughout every aspect of planning my business,** from working on budgets and writing a business plan to navigating the lending process.

I am so grateful to be working with John Gergely. I feel that his experience in business has helped to guide me in planning my own business. John is a great listener and has made himself available to meet my needs in the business planning process. John also asks all the right questions to help prompt me throughout planning my business. **He has helped me to get organized and complete the tasks necessary on the path toward opening my business. Most of all, I have gained the confidence to embark on every aspect of planning and opening my business.**

I would refer the MBDP to others because I believe that it helps others to be so much more successful in achieving their goals. Planning a business and taking the steps to open a business are not easy. **The (free) guidance, knowledge, and expertise from CVOEO is an excellent way to set yourself up for success.**

Chelsea Brochu

Duxbury, VT

I am getting help with designing a spreadsheet to manage my accounts receivable. Could not do this without MBDP. **John is very down to earth and practical. Love that.** The counselors have a variety of skills and perspectives that can address any situation or problem.

Heather Skilling

Richford, VT

MBDP allowed me to understand how to utilize my business income. **He was supportive and non-judgmental, which I greatly appreciated.** I was able to voice my confusion about some aspects of my business, without feeling judged. The resources are amazing. **I could never have afforded the help I received.** You can learn quick books, talk to an accountant and a multitude of other resources.

CG

South Hero, VT

*What business success are you most proud of?*

2009 received loan and payed off loan 6 months. **2013 SBA Micro-Enterprise of the year award.** One on one counseling was given during the planning states and post start of the business. Simeon, is a great councilor to with. Over the past 11 years and counting we have had many meeting on what has worked and not work for my business. He help plan the business and lots unexpected curves thrown at me just before signing my loan. **I hit the rock bottom of the recession in 2008 fall. Had I not had the guidance of Simeon, my business would not have survived at all.**

The personality and the experienced staff of John, Gillian and Simeon of the MBDP are reason why I would recommend any business owner or someone looking to start their own business to MBDP.

Michael Patch

St. George, VT

*What business or financial accomplishments are you most proud of? How did the Micro Business Development Program help you reach these goals?*

That I own my own business! Teach yoga to person at the Turning Point Center if Chittenden County, people is Recovery, the senior population, LUND, persons with trauma, persons still in active addiction, I have my own apt. pay my bills and have a savings account!! ALL due to this program & John!!

John was FANTASTIC!! **The staff is knowledgeable, caring, willing to help me achieve my dream & believe in myself again.**

Krista Marzewski

Burlington, VT

**With the help of Micro-Business I have been able to position myself as a leader in what I do** with no advertising costs. Just Website and social media marketing at very little cost.

*How do you feel about working with your business coach at CVOEO?*

Incredible, never thought my business idea would have been more than a hobby.

GLP

Monkton, VT

**The creation of Switchback Brewing Co. was aided by consultation with Micro Business Development** over the original business plan and the original funding of the brewery. Gillian became a trusted confidant and sounding board. **Their third party viewpoint often finds potentially fatal issues that can't be seen by the passionate owner.** This helps to fine tune the business plan and set realistic goals. Their connections with the business world help to explain how to get financing, how financing works, and where best to make your pitch for financing. For instance, Micro Business alerted me to the fact that Chittenden Bank had released funds for start-ups to increase their loan base so it was a good time to approach them. That meeting led to an SBA loan for Switchback.

William Cherry  
Richmond, VT

Working with Simeon, my business coach, helped me grow my confidence in expanding my business moving forward. They **assisted me expand my business through growing my client base, working with me on my marketing plan, and helping me grow my network.** The work I did with Simeon was extremely helpful and has been instrumental to my success as a business owner.

If someone was thinking of starting or expanding their business, I would tell them to come to the Micro Business Development Program because of the information and resources it provides. My business coach, Simeon, helped me in focusing and clarifying my ideas for my business, problem solving any business problems that arose, and building my skills in hiring and managing employees. These factors were extremely helpful in the expansion of my business and are important for anyone looking to start/expand their own business.

Erin Ostreicher  
Winooski, VT

**Without the help of the micro business development program, I probably would have given up on my business because the logistics were complicated and overwhelming.** I am most proud of continuing to work on my business and that I'm able to enjoy the work I'm doing while making a small profit, I wouldn't have been able to do it without the help of this program. I still have work to do, but with the support of this program I am not as worried about the future of my business.

I feel great working with my coach because it's really invaluable to have someone who is supportive and knowledgeable about business practice ready to help. I tried to figure out setting up my business on my own but I found I kept having questions or difficulty reading the legal documents to set myself up. There are a lot of steps to starting your own business and **I was really nervous about messing it up or not being taken seriously, but with this program everyone was so friendly and supportive,** I immediately felt more confident and like my goals were achievable and realistic.

I recommend the program to anyone looking to start their own business **because the way the program is structured, everything you do is based off of your own situation and goals.** Any type of business is

welcome and they have helped so many different people that it makes it easier to get specialized help with the exact things you need to do. It is truly an invaluable resource for our community.

Micro Business Development Client  
Burlington, VT

**I am so proud of the fact that I finished the Micro Business Development Program. I have a chronic illness and get so exhausted so easily just by day to day things.** It took me one year to complete the program, but I accomplished so much. I have a better understanding of the financial piece of the business process. I worked with John and I completed a huge spreadsheet. It helped me look over my costs and where I could save. He had me write out how much everything I sold cost to make sure I was earning enough and in some cases, I was not. When I started I always questioned and felt uncomfortable talking about how much I charge for prints or services, but now I'm so much more confident. **I have come so far!**

You need a cheerleader when you're starting a business. It's terrifying for most people. John was a great coach. He was honest and didn't give me false hope. It was fun to see him get excited to see how far my business had progressed since first meeting him. **I am someone who needs a 1 on 1 coach. I don't feel comfortable in classrooms to ask for help. This set up is ideal.** You can take a few classes, but you get a 1 on 1 coach who you can get to know and trust. I could email him whenever with any questions. I would like to continue to be able to do so!

If you're starting any kind of business, **it is so important to have these resources available for people.** For me, this is what I feel is best, and anyone would benefit from this program as long as they took it seriously. I'd truly would have been lost without it.

Katie Paquette  
Essex, VT

**I have two recent accomplishments that I am proud of. One is working through the painful process of restructuring both my personal and business finances. My business coach, John Gergely, was instrumental in guiding me through that.** I could not have done it without him. The other is having my first solo art show. I want to have a business that will involve creating and selling art. It's been very scary to put myself out there. There is that fear of failure. Workshops that I have taken through the Micro Business Development Program have given me more confidence and information on how to make good financial choices. It's also been encouraging to meet others in the workshops and hear their business stories.

**I love working with my business coach John Gergely. He is supportive, encouraging, forthright, and a wealth of knowledge.** In addition to giving me guidance in starting a business using my artistic skills, one of the biggest impacts he has had on my life was **helping me to save my home.** He had the insight and wisdom to keep me from making the mistake of selling our home when we exhausted our financial resources and thought it was our only option left. John suggested we refinance and worked diligently

with me through the five months it took to complete the process. **My family and I are so very grateful to him for helping us keep our home and for me to be able to move forward with my dream.**

The Micro Business Development Program can prepare you in ways to start or expand your business that you may not have think of. They have excellent Business Counselors that support and encourage you along the way. **They are a wealth of knowledge, work tirelessly and make you feel valued.**

Ceili Seipke  
South Burlington, VT

**These testimonies were compiled by Kathryn Baudreau, Director of the Financial Futures Program at the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity.**

Kathryn Baudreau  
Signature

2/10/20  
Date

## MBDP/CVOEO testimony

To Whom It May Concern:

As a former employee an AmeriCorps/TechCorps and the current client of MBDP, I would like to testify and advocate for their mission and continuation of all the services that they offer. The impact that MBDP has on its clients' businesses and personal life is and was extremely huge, and it needs to be acknowledged and supported by the State of Vermont.

The administrative and technical services that MBDP provides to their clients on macro and micro level are and were often overseen. Those clients who came to seek help for starting a business do not have a business degree or are technologically savvy, which is very much required these days.

During my employment time, fifteen years ago, as a computer lab coordinator and computer mentor, I served many clientele who came to seek help for various reasons in addition to starting a business. Together with my MBDP team, we helped them, beside creating a simple business plan, become financially literate, create a simple budget in an Excel sheet and sometimes in Access. MBDP clients had to learn not just how to create a budget but also how to use a software too. In some cases, I helped them install their own software on their machines. Some clients asked for help with creating marketing material for their business, again using a software that they were not skilled for. I taught many grateful clients how to use computer and create their own business logo, first brochures, create first email account and contact their first clients. There were many instructions on security measures and protecting their own business data, but also basic instruction on how to create an email account and communicate with their clients.

There were also many clients from refugee community whom we helped from language literacy to business terminology. Years later, I was stopped on the street by some former refugee clients, who were thankful for all help with the computer literacy, which helped them later start their own business and/or find jobs, connect with their lost family members and friends in their native countries.

Recently, I went back to MBDP to seek help with starting my own business. I knew that MBDP is the best place where I will get a first-hand support for my business plan, financial literacy and budget management. I am still in the startup process and losing their assistance would create a huge burden on my progress. I believe that all their clients would experience huge loss too, not to mention all amazing and supportive employees whose lives will be very much impacted with closing the MBDP.

Throughout my experience with MBDP, I found that their work guided their clientele in order to reduce stress levels during a time when they were occupied with many of the logistics involved with starting a business. The VT economy has benefited tremendously from those who have been able to start their own business. Those who did not choose to start a business were helped in additional ways such as becoming aware of the path and learned how to collect documentation for their business ideas.

I truly hope that MBDP will be fully funded and given the opportunity to continue their great mission.

Sincerely,

Mediha Goretic, M.Ed. IT Specialist (*she/her/hers pronouns*),  
460 So Prospect St. Burlington, VT 05401 Phone (802) 656-5808



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## Testimony for Micro Business Development Program

February 10, 2020

Dear Governor Scott, Senators, and Representatives,

Please do not cut the funding for CVOEO's Micro Business Development Program. It is an essential program that provides opportunity to better your circumstances. I live in South Burlington and am just one of the many people who have benefited from its existence. The program offers workshops, such as Keys to Credit and Creating a Financial Future, which teach financial responsibility. It also has a Vermont Matched Savings account to help you save toward your goal. The matching savings is an important piece for me. Having the account teaches goal setting, patience, consistency and accountability. It is showing me that despite our financial circumstances, I am able to save each month for two years towards my goal. The increase in savings with the match will help provide a good base to launch my dream goal. For me, that is to start my own business using my artistic skills.

With the help of my Business Counselor, John Gergely I have taken steps to develop a budget for myself as well as my business. He has been a valuable resource of knowledge as well as a source of encouragement. Three months ago I had my first solo art show. Afterwards, John discussed ways for me to continue to show my work in other venues and how to increase sales. One of the biggest impacts John has made in my life was his guidance eight months ago when my husband and I feared we had exhausted our financial resources and needed to sell our home. John helped me to look at other options and worked diligently with me for the five months it took us to refinance our home. The refinancing came through the credit union that CVOEO uses for their matching funds. Without being part of the Micro Business Development Program, I believe we would've lost our home and I would've lost the chance to move forward with chasing a dream that I put on hold while raising a family and supporting them in their goals. I am so grateful to have an organization and a counselor who believe in me and for this new start. There are many others who also deserve the opportunity to improve their life. Please give them the chance by continuing to fund CVOEO's Micro Business Development Program.

Thank you,

Ceili Seipke

February 7, 2020

## Testimonial to State for Micro Business Program of CVOEO

My name is Robert Gold and I am a 74 year old accomplished Burlington artist with traumatic brain injury. About eight years ago while living in Middlebury, Vocational Rehabilitation recommended CVOEO to me when I wanted to start an art business. I met my business coach Simeon Giegel through CVOEO. Without Simeon and CVOEO's Micro Business Program, I wouldn't be where I am today.

I used to drive to Burlington to meet with Simeon but when it became too much because of mobility issues, Simeon and I would talk over the phone once a month. He has given me guidance in each of my steps to create an art business and has given me ideas that I didn't think of before talking with him. With his guidance I have been able to do things such as create a website of my artwork, run a successful kickstarter for an extreme printmaking project with master printmaker Jon Cone, attend residencies at Vermont Studio Center as well as become a known and established artist in the art community. Some of the many honors I have received in recent years include being selected as Artist of Distinction by the Chaffee Arts Center in Rutland in 2012, being named as one of the Artists to Watch 2018 by Vermont Artist Guide in 2017, and having several images chosen to be in the Digital Display in The 34th Annual Chelsea International Fine Art Competition at The Agora Gallery in New York City in 2019. When I ran into hard times, Simeon guided me to people or organizations that could help me through it. He has a wealth of knowledge of resources.

Without the help of Simeon and CVOEO's Micro Business Program, I don't know if I would even be an artist today, yet alone so prolific and established. The program is so important to help people with low income have a chance to make something productive of their life. Please continue to fund this essential program.

Thank you,  
Robert Gold