

In their past, they were battered women. Drug addicts. Alcohol abusers. But a local entrepreneurial program is giving these women a chance ... **a chance to start over and a chance to contribute.**



PAT SHANNAHAN/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Vanessa Martin, who has lived at the SEEDS house for about four months, hopes to one day counsel youths on the dangers of substance abuse. Martin began drinking and using drugs at a young age.

## Skills. Jobs. Self-respect.

By Andrew Johnson  
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

**Y**ears spent fighting with an abusive husband and battling drug addiction left Candace Glenn feeling worthless.

"I was convinced that my opinion did not matter, (that) I really did not have much right to speak," Glenn said.

Now Glenn, 44, and other women like her are getting the chance to start a new life and a new business under a partnership between a battered-women's shelter and a non-profit entrepreneurship group.

In working with the shelter, the Phoenix-

based Opportunity Through Entrepreneurship Foundation is helping build practical job skills for women who previously have not been significant contributors to the workforce.

"These women absolutely need more education around employment opportunities and skills," said MonaLou Callery, founder of the Support, Education, Empowerment & Directions program.

SEEDS, as the program is known, was started in 2003 to provide shelter and counseling to women who have experienced physical and emotional abuse and have dealt with drug and alcohol addiction.

See **PARTNERSHIP** Page D3

**Inside:** Women involved in Opportunity Through Entrepreneurship Foundation share their stories. **D3.**

# BUSINESS

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SECTION D

## Business plan gives women hope

### PARTNERSHIP

*Continued from D1*

The program is run under the auspices of the Phoenix-based National Advocacy & Training Network, which Callery formed in 2001, and has a home in Mesa and one in Phoenix.

During the past two months, the SEEDS women have been learning business principles and doing market research for a cafe and thrift store they plan to open with the foundation's help.

### Custom-fit jeans

The project has inspired resident Vanessa Martin to start a custom-fit jeans business for women of all sizes and shapes that would be housed in the store, tentatively to be called Passionate Pursuits Cafe & Resale Galleria.

Martin, 35, said the foundation has expanded her view of career possibilities.

"I was kind of skeptical because I'm thinking, 'One, I'm a felon (and) who's going to give me capital,'" said Martin, who has lived in the SEEDS home in Phoenix about four months.

The Opportunity Through Entrepreneurship Foundation was started

### Support network

The Support, Education, Empowerment & Directions program caters to women who would not be eligible for traditional battered-women's shelters because of their drug and alcohol addictions. Founder MonaLou Callery said she started the first SEEDS home in Mesa in 2003 because she saw a need for such place.

The program can accommodate up to 16 women. The residents each pay rent to live in the homes, which is based on their individual income. Some of the women have jobs outside the home. The

last year to help at-risk youths and adults develop entrepreneurial skills and encourage them to start new businesses.

"We want to be the provider of entrepreneurship skills to any organization who wants them," said founder Francine Hardaway, a local business consultant.

The foundation is partly funded through local entrepreneurship conferences that Hardaway helps organize. SEEDS is its first major client.

program provides counseling and educational services for the women.

"A lot of these women's drug use is a result of being with their batterer," Callery said. "Some women use alcohol or drugs to cope with all of the stuff they've lived through."

The program is overseen by the National Advocacy & Training Network, a non-profit organization Callery started to help give opportunities to social services providers working with at-risk populations. [www.natn-az.com](http://www.natn-az.com)

—Andrew Johnson

The SEEDS women have similar backstories.

They are survivors of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Many are recovering drug addicts and alcoholics.

Some have served prison or jail time stemming from their past addictions.

Each says the experience trying to start a business has ignited a passion that was lacking in their previous lives.

"It's given me hope," said Gwen Passey, 44, a resident of one the SEEDS homes in Mesa.

"It's let me know that my dreams are going to come true."

The idea to start a cafe and thrift store came about like this: Hardaway and partners Ed Nusbaum and Phillip Blackerby began meeting with the women every Sunday afternoon about two months ago.

Initially, the idea was for each woman to come up with her own business idea, but when one of the participants suggested opening a place where customers could get coffee and shop for gently used clothing and furniture, the other women all wanted in.

### A place of support

Kathy Hess, 37, suggested the idea. She said she wanted to start a business that would financially support SEEDS while providing meeting space and information for women seeking support.

Now, every Sunday afternoon the three business consultants assemble in the living room of SEEDS' Phoenix home to pour over their research on possible competitors, potential store locations and other details.

Once it is open, Hardaway said, she envisions the store as an incubator of sorts to support other businesses the women want to start.

# SKILLS, JOBS, SELF-RESPECT: THEIR STORIES

## Vanessa Martin

**Age:** 35.

**Length of time in SEEDS:** Four months.

**Background:** Martin said she began drinking and using drugs at a young age.

She has served two prison sentences for non-violent crimes. Like many of the SEEDS women, she found the program after bouncing around different halfway



houses. SEEDS has given her hope. "It's the place where it helps me understand that I'm not in this alone," she said.

**Business impact:** She wants to start a jeans-fitting business that would be run out of the café and thrift store. She says if her program mates are successful in starting the business, it could be a source of inspiration for others in their position.

— Andrew Johnson

## Gwyn Passey

**Age:** 44.

**Length of time in SEEDS:** She has been a resident off and on for the past three and a half years.

**Background:** Passey says she started using drugs and alcohol as a teenager. She moved to Arizona from California and got married to man who was



emotionally and physically abusive. She heard about SEEDS while serving jail time. She is now manager of the SEEDS house in Mesa. She attributes the program with helping get her life back on track and reestablishing relationships with her adult son and daughter.

**Business impact:** "It's given me hope," she said. "It's let me know that my dreams are going to come true."

— Andrew Johnson

## Kathy Hess

**Age:** 37.

**Length of time in SEEDS:** She has been a resident for nearly a year and is assistant manager of the Mesa house.

**Background:**

Hess, a victim of domestic abuse, said she turned to SEEDS instead of a traditional domestic violence shelter after developing an alcohol addiction and becoming homeless. "I had never really had that self-confidence until I found the strength in other women," she said. The mother of three said she is also building healthy relationships with her children.



**Business impact:** She wants the store to be a place for people to shop and get information about resources for victims of violence and drug and alcohol abuse.

— Andrew Johnson

## Sarah Creech

**Age:** 26.

**Length of time in SEEDS:** She has been a resident for a little more than a month.

**Background:** The mother of one turned to SEEDS after ending a seven-year relationship filled with domestic violence. She said the abuse caused her to turn to alcohol. She said that in her short time as a SEEDS resident, the program has given her a "sense of well-being" that she did not feel in her previous relationship.



**Business impact:** Although she wasn't anticipating there to be an entrepreneurship aspect to SEEDS, she said she enjoys being involved in the project. "It makes me feel like I have a purpose," she said.

— Andrew Johnson