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FOCUS ON WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS DURING SMALL BUSINESS WEEK
Low-income women play a role in the development of the local economy

The 90,834 women-owned businesses in San Francisco generate more than \$36 billion in sales and employ 179,746 people. Women-owned businesses are a vital force in San Francisco's economy. [Women's Initiative for Self Employment](#) is an organization that helps turn the dream of business ownership into reality for many women. Graduates have started and grown all sorts of businesses in the Bay Area including event rentals, photography studios, bakeries and veterinary clinics.

Women's Initiative just received some microenterprise industry data that I'd like to share with you. According to FIELD (Fund for Innovation, Effectiveness, Learning and Dissemination), Women's Initiative served more clients than any other training-led microenterprise agency in the U.S. Using FIELD's definition of 'client' Women's Initiative served more clients in fiscal year 2004 than any other organization in the country through our culturally-competent, adult-learning curriculum. Our graduates receive 50-60 hours of quality training in the classroom alone, plus they get individualized additional service through matched savings accounts, loans, seminars and coaching. This means that in some cases, clients get more than 5 times the hours of service than at other agencies. Women's Initiative is also on track to offer more loans than any other training-led agency in the country, more than doubling the number of loans offered by the top ranking agency in 2004. Our advanced curriculum, culturally competent trainers, and programs in both Spanish and English, are helping women entrepreneurs meet the demands and challenges of today's business environment.

To kick-off the celebration of **San Francisco Small Business Week (May 15-19)** Women's Initiative has compiled a series of graduate spotlights. We thought you might be interested in some of the triumphs and stumbling blocks of starting a business as a low-income woman who has little access to the mainstream economy.

Our graduates have started some successful businesses in San Francisco Bay Area. Here are just a couple of examples:

- Bobbi Williams, co-owner of Maternity Xchange, just started in business last year, but their recycled maternity clothing business has already draw a number of repeat customers and dozens of new ones. New moms and expecting women share tips and resources, clothing and accessories designers share their products designed especially for expecting mothers and children, and women are able to find quality clothing for prices they can afford. Bobbi and her business partner Pilar also donate clothing to expecting mothers who may otherwise not be able to afford maternity clothing and by helping other local businesses get established.
- Kim Le, owner of Nurturing Salon and 2005 graduate, brings her values for natural treatments and her healing skills to every aspect of her salon. The space is designed to create a tranquil place for clients to relax and rejuvenate. In the early 1980s, Kim Le and her family emigrated from Vietnam to New York and ended up in San Francisco one year later. Kim went to a special school for healing sciences and specialized in energy healing. She worked in various locations in Marin, but wanted her own salon. After graduating from Women's Initiative in 2005 Nurturing Salon sales have steadily increased by 30%.

Here is background information on Julie Castro Abrams, CEO:

- Julie Abrams joined Women's Initiative in January 2002 as the chief executive director with a primary goal of helping the organization transition from a founder-led organization to a more mature institution. During her tenure the organization has more than doubled the number of women served and the number of business start ups. With 15 years of experience in the women's community and non-profit sector in Chicago, Julie is an exceptional leader with strong resource development and financial management skills. She most recently served as Deputy Director and Director of Development and Marketing at Chicago's Merit School of Music. Her accomplishments at Merit include increasing annual giving from \$300,000 to \$2,000,000 and leading a \$2.7 million endowment campaign that exceeded goal, raising \$3.5 million. Julie's previous positions include Director of Development at Community Christian Alternative Academy and principal at the Catalyst Group consulting firm. She has also held positions with the Illinois Pro-Choice Alliance, the Chicago Department of Health, and the Chicago Foundation for Women. Prior to relocating to San Francisco, she served on the Board of Directors of four organizations, including the Treasurer of Mujeres Latinas En Accion, and the Chair of Chicago's Neighborhood Cultural and Fine Arts Centers. Julie did her graduate work in business and Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago and did her undergraduate work in the school of Education in Human Development and Social Policy at Northwestern University. She is fluent in Spanish.

Additionally, Women's Initiative will have a table at the Small Business Expo on Wednesday, May 17. **If you would like to schedule an interview with Julie Abrams, CEO, or any of our graduates, please call (510) 287-3109.**

ABOUT WOMEN'S INITIATIVE:

Founded in 1988, Women's Initiative has been providing low-income women with the means to achieve economic empowerment through results oriented programs that address the cultural, social and economic barriers to self-sufficiency. An intensive 10-week course launches women into business with a business plan, resources to start or expand her business and most importantly the self-confidence to do it. Additionally, Women's Initiative clients can access much needed capital through the loan fund which administers relationship-based loans up to \$25,000. After graduation, women can access ongoing business support and expansion services through SuccessLink, which connects graduates with influential women in business, provides seminars tailored to women business owners and one-on-one coaching sessions.

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