
Executive Summary

The *LeadSafe* Initiative, operated out of Central Vermont Community Action Agency, Inc. (CVCAC) in Barre, Vermont through the Micro Business Development Program (MBDP), provides self-employment strategies of micro-business development and expansion for income-qualified individuals with a focus on lead paint safety training and certification. In partnership with the Vermont Housing Conservation Board (VHCB) State Lead Abatement program, the *LeadSafe* Initiative provides a variety of lead paint safety training, from Essential Maintenance Practices to Lead Abatement Certification. The initiative offers supplemental and industry specific training in the areas of cleaning, consulting/inspecting, deconstructing, and lead abatement contracting. The project also offers core business and “soft skills” training, intensive case management, access to capital, linking clients with mentors, securing job contracts, and referring client to other community resources. The overall project goal of *LeadSafe* is to create 55 jobs for low-income people in Central Vermont, through self-employment, with an average wage of \$12.50 in the first year of operation and access to quality health care and childcare. For questions or more information about this study, please contact Michele Cranwell Schmidt, Evaluation Coordinator, at (802) 656-0256 or Michele.Schmidt@uvm.edu.

Evaluation Methodology

The Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont is the evaluator of the *LeadSafe* Initiative. The evaluation includes a process and outcome component, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods of staff focus groups and interviews, and client focus groups, in-depth interviews and follow-up telephone surveys. For the first client follow-up survey a total of 10 clients or 40% responded. A total of 52 clients completed the second round of surveys in FYII for a response rate of 25%. Finally, Table 1 shows that 63 clients completed the surveys conducted in FY III for a response rate of 25%. A total of 85 clients completed at least one survey, of which thirty persons completed more than on survey.

Table 1. Client Outcome for *LeadSafe* Six Month Follow-up Survey

Outcome	N	%
Total	250	100%
Completed	63	25%
No answer	34	14%
Refused	18	7%
Wrong Number/Disconnected	135	54%

Client Characteristics

- 100% (85) were at or below poverty level
- Range of annual household income at intake: \$0-\$27,000, average \$8,800
- 73% (60) have relied on some form of public assistance at one point in their life
- 51% (41) were receiving food stamps at intake
- Age range: 23-74, Average 43 years (at survey)
- 37% (30) male; 63% (52) female
- 80% (65) Caucasian, 20% (20) of ethnic background
- 62% (51) have children in household, range of 1 to 7 children and median of 3
- 40% (32) have a high school education/GED or less
- 65% (51) of clients were in the planning stage at intake and 35% (27) entered with an established business

Project Implementation

Participant Recruitment

The *LeadSafe* staff recruited JOLI eligible participants by working with other social service and state agencies, posting fliers and advertising through newspapers and brochures, event fliers, and word of mouth. Based on self-reported data, main sources of client referrals were from family members and friends, CVCAC staff, brochures or a flier, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Vermont Department of Employment and Training. Types of clients who participated in the lead safety training include: registered childcare providers, painters and contractors, consultants, and house cleaners. Other major types of client businesses are those in the service and retail sectors.

Main Issues Encountered in Recruiting and Retaining Clients

- Negative belief systems towards lead paint safety training and limited market for lead paint safety and abatement work
- Barriers related to federal and state changes to TANF regulations
- Barriers to recruitment relating to low-income persons starting business

Participant Assessment and Training

Once participants were recruited into the *LeadSafe* project, a staff member at CVCAC conducted an initial intake and orientation with them to discuss the project, their goals, objectives, and barriers, complete paperwork, and be referred to other service providers. *LeadSafe* clients were offered the Essential Maintenance Practice (EMP) training and the Basic Lead Abatement Contractor Training. Clients also participated in other related CVCAC classes, such as Business Readiness, Money Matters, and Tangible Assets. *LeadSafe* staff and CVCAC Business Counselors also provided one-on-one technical assistance and business counseling in addition to classes that participants could take. This provided individual assistance in developing a business plan, marketing skills, cash flow analysis, setting goals, and pricing.

Project Partners

The primary partner of the *LeadSafe* grant was the Vermont Housing Conservation Board (VHCB). VHCB played a role in training, advertising, and as a referral source. The VHCB was a very successful partner by providing the EMP and Basic Lead Abatement Contractor Training. Other project partners who provided a sources of referral include the Department of PATH and DET, Northern New England Tradeswomen, and Vocational Rehabilitation. Project staff communicated with project partners through emails, telephone, meetings, presentations, and by sending them fliers.

Client Accomplishments and Outcomes

Business Stage at Intake and Survey

At the time of the initial contact with the *LeadSafe* Program:

- 65% (51) were in the planning stage of their business
- 35% (27) had an existing business

At the time of the final follow-up survey for all clients who participated:

- 13% (10) had decided to not pursue a business
- 31% (24) remained in the planning stage
- **36% (28) had a start-up or stable business**
- 14% (11) were in the process of expanding or had expanded through additional financing
- 6% (5) had closed or sold their business

Business Start-up and Retention Rate

- Of the 52 businesses in the planning stage at intake, **31% (16) had started a business** by the time of the survey, 48% (25) were still planning their business and 21% (11) decided to not pursue their business.
- Of the 25 established businesses at intake, **100% (25) were retained** by the time of the survey.

Business Contracts

Sixteen percent (5) of clients indicated that MBDP helped them to secure business contracts. Three people indicated that they received one contract, one person received six contracts and one person received twenty contracts. Two people reported that the value of these contracts were \$1,200 and \$6,000.

Sources of Start-up Capital and Loans Received

The top sources of start-up business capital include personal savings (47%) and business revenue (14%). Many clients also used some form of loan or grant (31%). Twenty-five percent reported that they did not have any source of capital.

- 34% (24) reported that they needed to apply for a loan for their business.
 - Of those who needed to apply for a loan, 29% (7) received a loan that ranged from \$1,500 to \$42,500, with an average of \$17,400 and median of \$15,000.

Business Activity

- **56% (22) of clients reported working full time** for their business or 40+ hours
 - 31% reported working half time or 20-39 hours
 - 13% reported working less than half time or 1-19 hours
 - Hours worked per week ranged from 3 to 85 hours with an average of 52 hours per week for full time businesses and 25 hours per week for part time businesses.
- **40% (29) of those with a business reported not needing another job** than their self-employment, 37% (27) patch their income with other wage work, and 23% (17) are looking for a job in addition to being self-employed.
- **45% (21) of those with a business reported that it is their primary source of income**, 30% (14) reported it as a secondary source of income, and 26% (12) do not yet have income from their business.

Owner's Draw, Business Revenue, and Net Worth

- **72% (28) reported taking an owner's draw from their business** with a monthly range of \$50-\$4,000; Average: \$1,250; Median: \$1,000
- 56% (20) reported their business revenue to be growing, 39% (14) reported their revenue to be stable, and 6% (2) stated that their revenue had decreased.
- Gross average monthly revenue from business ranged from \$0-\$50,000; Average: \$3,115; Median: \$1,200
- Business net worth ranged from \$0-2,000,000; Average: \$126,875; Median: \$22,500

Income Changes

- **43% (19) of clients reported that their annual household income has increased** because of their business with 12 clients reporting a range from \$50-\$12,000, an average increase of \$2,200 and median increase of \$1,350.
 - 18% (8) reported that their annual household income has decreased because of their business with five persons reporting an average decrease of \$6,280 and a median decrease of \$1,500.
 - 34% (15) reported that their annual household income had stayed the same and 5% (2) stated that it was too early in their business to determine.
- A paired-sample t-test showed a significant increase in annual household income from intake (average \$9,200) to the time of the survey (average \$19,262) ($t=5.42$, $p<.01$). Figures are in real dollars. This finding is consistent with the results of this test when it was run with data collected and presented in the FY II report.

Public Assistance

- 73% (60) have relied on public assistance at some point in their lives.
- The number of months of public assistance prior to starting the *LeadSafe* training ranged from 0 to 300 months (25 years), with an average of 28 months and median of 12 months.
- **61% (35) reported having decreased their reliance on public assistance since they started working with MBDP**, 30% (17) reported their reliance stayed the same, and 9% (5) increased reliance.

Sources of Personal Income at Survey

- 33% (28) self-employment business
- 27% (23) wage employment other than self-employment
- 11% (9) SSDI
- 10% (8) child support
- 8% (7) another self-employment business
- 7% (6) unemployment
- 5% (4) SSI
- 4% (3) Reach-Up
- 14% (12) other sources
- 31% (25) of clients reported that the majority of their personal income comes from their current business and 25% (20) reported the majority coming from other wage employment.

Savings, Assets, and Health Benefits

- **50% (15) of clients reported saving money** regularly on a monthly basis over the course of the grant, with an average of \$162 and median of \$100.
- 10% (8) are working with a savings program such as an Individual Development Account.
- 14% (11) completed post-secondary education and one person purchased a home.
- **84% (68) reported that they have access to medical and health benefits.**

Job Creation

- **23% (9) of clients reported hiring employees to work for their business.**
- **29 part time jobs were created that pay an average of \$12.19/hr** (range \$7.50-\$25.00) at an average of 17 hours per week (range 8-25). All 29 employees were hired after the owner participated in MBDP. Four of the part time jobs employed persons receiving some form of public assistance. None of the part time employees receive benefits from their job.
- **6 full time jobs** were created by three businesses, with two being hired after MBDP and the others being hired before MBDP. These jobs pay an hourly rate of \$12.50 per hour (range \$10.00-\$14.00), for an average of 53 hours per week (range 40-85). None of the employers reported hiring persons who were receiving some form of public assistance and none provide employees with benefits.

- Using the assumption that 1 full time job is equivalent to 40 hours a week, a total of 37 FTE self-employed jobs were created by respondents and 18 FTE employees were hired. This is a total of **55 FTE jobs created overall.**

Main skills and knowledge gained

- 49% (33) writing a business plan
- 21% (14) steps to start a business
- 15% (10) problem solving skills
- 13% (9) financial management
- 13% (9) marketing and sales

Main changes in attitude because of services

- 40% (27) were more motivated and encouraged
- 30% (20) reported an increase in self-esteem

Client Feedback

Main areas that worked well for clients

- 34% (23) supportive staff
- 28% (19) knowledgeable staff
- 27% (18) positive and affirming staff
- 22% (15) gave direction/steps to take
- 21% (14) one-on-one attention

Main areas that did not work well for clients

- 48% (32) indicated “nothing”
- 8% (5) of clients did not access funding/needed more funding
- 6% (4) reported that personal life/issues got in the way
- 6% (4) felt the training was too general/basic

Overall satisfaction with services

- Scale 0-10 with 0 being 0% satisfied and 10 being 100% satisfied: Range: 0-10; Average: 7
- 84% reported that MBDP services met their expectations

Overall satisfaction with one-on-one counseling and technical assistance

- Scale 0-10 with 0 being 0% satisfied and 10 being 100% satisfied: Range:0-10; Average: 8
- 76% reported that working with MBDP business counselors aided in the success of their business
- 74% reported working with MBDP business counselors aided in their business development
- 68% reported that MBDP business counselors provided the necessary on-going support for their business development.