

## **Fondation Espoir Développement Beachcomber**

### **Seed capital to support women entrepreneurs**

Fondation Espoir Développement Beachcomber (FED) launched the Women Empowerment Programme (WEP) in conjunction with the European Union (EU) in August 2023. The programme involved 18 women micro-entrepreneurs with the primary aim of helping them give their small enterprises a fresh start through training and access to seed capital. The beneficiaries received their certificates and seed capital on Wednesday 17 April 2024, during a ceremony at the Caudan Arts Centre in the presence of Stéphane Poupinel de Valencé, CEO of Beachcomber Resorts & Hotels and Cécile Tassin-Pelzer, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation. This marks the beginning of a new chapter in their entrepreneurial journey.

A total of 18 women have completed the seven-month training programme at Glamis Business School. Most of them are mothers and some cannot read or write. The project is designed for women who wish to develop their existing small enterprises and those embarking on their entrepreneurial journey. It has a threefold aim to train, support and encourage learners by equipping them with the essential skills to empower them as entrepreneurs and improve their living conditions.

The training provided by professional entrepreneurs is organised into five pillars: grooming, self-confidence, communication, business planning, budgeting, and marketing and sales. Each training day includes interactive presentations, group discussions, sharing and hands-on activities such as SWOT analysis, the 4Ps essential to a marketing campaign and computer training, including PowerPoint and Canva. Upon completion of the training, each participant had to create and deliver a PowerPoint presentation of her business plan to a jury.

*"It is an honour to be among you today. I am impressed by the journey each of you has undertaken. Over the past few months, you have embarked on a true, intense, and enriching life experience. You have stepped out of your comfort zone and embraced new challenges. We are proud of your success, which embodies the values of Beachcomber and the FED, including equal opportunities, social and economic inclusion, and talent promotion. I also want to extend my deepest thanks to the EU for its support in the making this project a reality,"* Stéphane Poupinel de Valencé said.

*"The European Union has placed women's empowerment at the forefront of its priorities, both within Europe and in its collaborations with partner countries. I am therefore delighted to be among you today to take part in the certificate award ceremony for 18 women who have successfully completed a 7-month entrepreneurship training. This is a clear indication of progress in terms of women's empowerment and their active participation in the economic sphere,"* Cécile Tassin-Pelzer stated.

An essential aspect of the WEP is access to Seed Capital. *"We understand that access to funding is one of the main barriers facing women who want to start their own small enterprises to earn a living and support their families. This is why we launched the WEP in partnership with the EU, prioritising guidance and support for these women entrepreneurs to help them grow their businesses. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the EU for supporting this project,"* says Karine Perrier Curé, Chief Brand & Communication Officer and Chairperson of FED at Beachcomber Resorts & Hotels. *"A total of 18 out of 25 women micro-entrepreneurs have completed the programme. It is amazing to see what they have achieved in just 7 months. We are so proud of their attendance, perseverance and the spirit of mutual support they have shown."*

Beachcomber Group's CSR Manager, Viren Vythelingum agrees. *"We designed this entrepreneurship training course to support women, mainly from vulnerable backgrounds, to build their self-confidence and empower them, while equipping them to improve their financial situation and contribute to the quality of life of their families,"* he says.

Cooperation and solidarity are meaningful words for the initial intake of the WEP. Syjane, Aurelie, Jenna, Emy, Charlotte and Marie Lysette from localities such as Résidence La Cure, La Gaulette, Camp Levieux, Plaisance and Trou d'Eau Douce are among the 18 participants who successfully completed the training. They have all been provided with seed capital by FED.

### **Syjane's panda cakes**

Syjane Victoire bakes different types of pastries, including birthday cakes, tarts, cupcakes, *napolitaines* (shortbread cookies), sponge cakes and *puits d'amour* (pastry cream tartlets). *"I make cakes to order to have time to bring up my two children and send them to school. I used to work in a pastry shop in Sainte Croix but had to give it all up after they were born,"* says the 26-year-old single mother from Résidence La Cure.

Syjane recently installed a small display case outside her door to sell her homemade cakes. Like several other beneficiaries, she learned about the WEP through the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF). *"The training taught me to use social media to gain a reputation, to innovate to stay competitive and to manage a budget. I now have a Facebook page and a WhatsApp Business account, where I share photos of my creations. I have also launched my panda-shaped pastries, which are very popular with customers. I am the only pastry cook in Résidence La Cure selling these cakes,"* she says with a smile. As part of the programme, Syjane also learned how to create and deliver a PowerPoint presentation. *"I am quite shy by nature and never dared to speak up in my school days, but I managed to present my business to a jury! Even better, I convinced them!"*

At the time, Syjane was going through difficult circumstances. *"My daughter was admitted to hospital, but I carried on and worked on my PowerPoint presentation without leaving her side. I am so happy to have succeeded,"* she says. She intends to use the seed capital to buy an oven, a mixer and basic ingredients to build up her stock. *"Soon, I will have my own pastry shop too."*

## Owning a hairdressing salon at Résidence La Cure

Syjane's neighbour at Résidence La Cure, Aurélie Pauline is a 27-year-old woman with a well-defined project. *"I dream of having my own hairdressing salon,"* says the young mother of five, who raises her children alone. She left school at the age of 9, without knowing how to read or write. *"I have nurtured a passion for hairdressing since childhood. Women in my neighbourhood often ask me to do their braids or hair extensions."* However, the income derived from this activity is largely insufficient, Aurélie also works as a stonemason on building sites to support her children.

Driven by the desire to move forward and succeed, she entered the programme to learn the basics of setting up a business. However, the young woman faced what seemed to be a daunting obstacle. *"I couldn't read or write and I thought I would never be able to present my business plan to the jury,"* she recalls with emotion.

She experienced moments of doubt and fear, which were dispelled through the support of the project supervisors and the solidarity of her fellow learners. *"They all supported me. I am especially grateful to Syjane, who made an audio recording that I listened to over and over again in order to deliver my presentation to the jury. My project was ultimately accepted,"* she says with relief and happiness.

She will use the seed capital to fund her hairdressing salon project. *"For the very first time, I really feel like I am making progress!"* Aurélie, who is both a mother and father to her children, is determined to overcome illiteracy.

## Marie Lisette sets her sights on exports

Marie Lisette Sansquartier is driven by the same determination. Married with three children, this 45-year-old resident of La Gaulette is a crafts enthusiast. She is involved in the Beautiful LocalHands programme run by FED, working mainly with coconut shells. She turns them into sugar bowls, candle holders, soap dishes and gift boxes. Her products are available in the Beautiful LocalHands shop and she also has a small stall on Ile aux Bénitiers. She learned about the WEP programme through FED.

*"I was very shy during the first few days of training. I sat in the back rows and was terrified at the thought of having to speak,"* she says. Over the course of the programme, and with the encouragement of her trainers, Marie Lisette developed her self-confidence, became more assertive and started setting herself goals to move forward. *"I do not speak much English and in the past, when English tourists approached my stall on Ile aux Bénitiers, I used to hide at the back so they wouldn't see me and would move away. Now, I greet them with a 'Good morning' and show them my products. I manage to make myself understood and present my creations."* Marie Lisette is proud of having secured seed capital and plans to expand her collection and start exporting her products.

## **Emy's scented candles**

With smiling eyes and a youthful appearance, 24-year-old Emy Milate launched her small business last year. After six years in administration and customer relations in the financial sector, she decided to set up Lalimyer, specialising in creating handmade scented candles.

This creative entrepreneur makes her candles at her family home in Plaisance. *"The idea emerged after the two lockdowns. I wanted to offer products that would have a relaxing effect on people, and there is nothing like scented candles to create a warm, comforting atmosphere. This led to the setting up of my small enterprise in 2023,"* she says. Emy watched a series of tutorials on YouTube to hone her skills. *"After each unsuccessful attempt, I kept trying until I was satisfied with the result."*

She heard about the WEP through a friend. *"I applied on the eve of the closing date and it was a really nice surprise when FED contacted me to inform me that my application had been successful."*

Her life as a young entrepreneur has been transformed since then. *"The training gave me the essential skills to manage and keep a small business afloat."* Emy now sells a range of candles made from soy-based wax, which can be ordered from her Facebook page. She plans to use her seed capital to set up and fully focus on her candle factory very soon.

## **Jenna, an at-home hairdresser**

Jenna Soiris is a 37-year-old at-home hairdresser. She travels by foot, bus or taxi every day from her village of Trou d'Eau Douce to her clients' homes in the East of the island, offering services such as haircuts, blow-drying, colouring, highlighting and hair treatments. *"I inherited my passion for the trade from my sister, who owns a hairdressing salon in Rose Hill,"* she says.

The young woman worked for several years in beauty and nail salons before launching Elegancia, her small at-home hairdressing business, last year. *"My first customer was a friend of mine. She couldn't come to my salon and asked me to give her a haircut at her place. I knew straight away that this was what I wanted to do,"* she says. This mother of four girls has built up a loyal customer base through word of mouth.

The entrepreneur now thinks bigger and wants to scale up her business. *"I sometimes have to turn away customers because I don't have some products in stock, such as hair colour or hair care products. That will no longer be the case with the seed capital. I can now invest in accessories and essential products to meet my customers' expectations."*

## Charlotte's career change

Charlotte Simathree Appegadoo decided to switch careers in May 2023 after 15 years in call centres. She became an entrepreneur and started making delicious homemade cakes. *"I have always had a passion for pastry-making. Even when I was working in a call centre, I would spend my weekends trying out new recipes, and I would often make my colleagues try my cakes on Mondays."* The cake boxes were very quick to empty.

Encouraged by her colleagues, Charlotte began receiving orders for her cakes. With the increasing number of orders, *"I was spending weekends, evenings and sometimes even entire nights cooking to meet the demand."* It soon became clear for this mother of two young children that she had to choose between her call centre job and her burgeoning small business.

Charlotte Sweet and Treats was officially launched on 31 May 2023. The business quickly expanded to include not only cakes, but also breakfast packs. *"My only constraint was production capacity as I was working from my kitchen, with my own utensils and equipment."* A relative brought a FED Facebook post about WEP to Charlotte's attention. *"This project has changed my life,"* she laughs. *"Fuelled by my passion for pastry-making, I launched my small enterprise without knowing anything about the basics of entrepreneurship. I had no business plan, marketing plan or budget. The WEP taught me the basics of managing and developing my business. I am now both a pastry cook and an entrepreneur,"* she says proudly. Charlotte will use her seed capital to buy an industrial oven and a mixer.

FED plans to offer entrepreneurship training to 50 women as part of the WEP.

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