

Streetwise MBA programme to launch

By Myra Virgil

In 2012, Natalie Africa, then senior relationship manager at HSBC responsible for Community Development, approached me to discuss an idea to set up development programmes for small businesses in Bermuda. She and her team believed there were unexplored opportunities to help aspiring and fledgling small to mid-size local businesses develop.

Her proposal was that we co-fund the Streetwise MBA, an award-winning, Boston University-accredited training programme for small business development. At the time, my job was to recommend philanthropic opportunities to my employer, a global grantmaking organisation with an interest in improving non-profit organisational capacities, including financial capacity.

As donors' representatives, we knew that most non-profit organisations rely on grants and donations to fund their programme execution and operational expenses. These grants are often short-term, irregular and insufficient to carry the programme.

Bermuda (pop 64,000) has a remarkable 350-plus registered charities. Obviously this creates considerable competition for funding resources. With that many non-profits operating in such a small arena, it also often means that community initiatives are fragmented, and run with inadequate collaboration and consolidation. In the business world, they'd call it operating in silos, and it's not considered to be the most effective way of working, for obvious reasons.

Many non-profit organisations lack the requisite financial capacity to optimally manage the funding they receive and to plan for long-term financial sustainability. The recent crisis-driven appeals for large-scale funding support tell us that our assessment in 2012 was to some degree correct.

As it turned out, approximately 200 of the registered charities were clients of HSBC Bank Bermuda and many of these had financing facilities with the Bank.

Given that non-profits are effectively small businesses themselves, the Bank was interested in assisting them to achieve financial sustainability and enhanced effectiveness — just as much as we were. The Bank and my then employer, The Atlantic Philanthropies, agreed to support the Streetwise MBA, so that we could help the non-profit organisations as well as the small for-profit businesses. In 2014, the Bermuda Community Foundation was launched, and is now managing the grant to the Streetwise programme, and sitting on the steering committee, along with the Bank of Bermuda Foundation and the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation. Jointly, we have made a tuition subsidy of almost \$20,000 possible for pilot participants. We hope to see more corporate donors support the programme for the long term.

The aim of the programme is to support small businesses and non-profit organisations to reach financial sustainability through building diversified revenue streams, and long-term funding sources. We hope that participants will gain financial and business management skills to ensure improved management capacity and enhanced business performance.

Launching through the Bermuda College in January 2015, applications are being accepted now at padmin@college.bm.

Dr Myra Virgil is the Managing Director of the Bermuda Community Foundation and former head of grantmaking for The Atlantic Philanthropies in Bermuda.