

# Valley CDC Helps Small Businesses Succeed

By Elena Sharnoff

Along with almost all businesses, COVID took a toll on mine. I launched my website strategy and design shop in 2019, and have spent more time working during COVID conditions than normal ones. So, I jumped at the chance to enroll in the Valley Community Development (Valley CDC)'s Small Business Fundamentals workshop listed in the Greater Northampton Chamber of Commerce's newsletter.

I received an email from Sarah Sargent, Valley CDC's Small Business Program Manager. She felt that the workshop wasn't a good fit and proposed a one-on-one meeting to assess my three-year-old business situation and needs. How could I refuse this free opportunity to evaluate and troubleshoot what my business needed most?

Sarah welcomed me warmly at the Valley offices off Pleasant Street in Northampton. Not sure what to expect, I had prepared basic questions regarding billing and expanding my client base. I was about to discover that Sarah would offer me far more insights and resources than I could have anticipated.

Sarah explained that Valley offers a range of services to assist small businesses, from how-to-get-started workshops to one-on-one sessions like mine, and offers a range of resources that promote business development and business sustainability.

Immediately, Sarah offered guidance I didn't even know I needed. She took my very specific question about billing and transformed it into an improved work strategy. Learning that I wasn't clear how much time and resources I spent on administrative tasks, she advised me to start tracking them. The aha moment came when she explained, "Understanding the full picture is key to determining how you use your time, evaluating where you want to put your effort – and, how much you need to charge for your work." She also helped me identify ways that I could streamline some of the administrative parts of my work (hello, free Calendly and Wave billing apps!).

Regarding expanding my client base, she asked me if I were willing to provide a free workshop (me: absolutely!), then mentioned several organizations unknown to me to contact, giving me a new direction for business opportunities.

I left our meeting delighted by the new game plan, insights and resources Sarah had given me. I had attended Valley's extremely helpful First Time Homebuyer's workshops 17 years ago, but hadn't realized its capacity to provide small business guidance.

Do you have a small business? Run, don't walk to the Valley CDC. I look forward to hearing about your *aha moments!*

**About Valley Community Development: 256 Pleasant Street, Suite A, Northampton. Phone: (413) 586-5855. Website: <https://www.valleycdc.org>.**

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