



Own Our Own: Equipping Aspiring Entrepreneurs to Build Successful Businesses

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“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” Jeremiah 29:7

In this verse from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, God instructs His people to pray and work for the shalom—i.e., the peace and prosperity—of the city in which they were living, noting that their own wellbeing was intimately connected to its wellbeing. This passage inspired the founding of Own Our Own, an entrepreneurship-focused outreach of Bible Center Church, located in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh, PA.

WHAT'S INSIDE

**Beyond Desk Space:
How Shared Workspaces
Accelerate Entrepreneurial
Success (Pg 4)**

**The Challenge You Need: Why
Effective Business Coaches
Push Boundaries. (Pg 8)**

**Turning Food Dreams Into
Reality at Oasis Community
Kitchen: A Launchpad for Local
Food Entrepreneurs. (Pg 12)**

**Legacy Builders:
How Historically Excluded
Entrepreneurs Create
Wealth That Transcends
Finances (Pg 16)**

Although Homewood is rich in history, and in physical and human assets, it remains a racially segregated, predominantly African American, working-class neighborhood that has experienced decades of disinvestment, relatively high rates of youth crime and violence, limited employment opportunities, and few thriving businesses.

African American Business Ownership in Pittsburgh

Unfortunately, for much of our nation's history, African Americans were systematically denied ownership of assets, including businesses, real estate, and even their own bodies. As a result of historical and contemporary policies and practices, African Americans have significantly lower incomes, less wealth, and are underrepresented as entrepreneurs in America, and in Pittsburgh, in particular.

Relative to African Americans (and White people) in most other US cities, African Americans in Pittsburgh have higher mortality rates, lower incomes, less educational attainment, and lower rates of home and other asset ownership.[1] In fact, Pittsburgh consistently has one of the lowest proportions of African American-owned businesses of any major metropolitan area in the nation.[2][3][4] For example, although African Americans comprise roughly 23% of Pittsburgh's population[5], they only own 1% of the city's businesses.[3]

Birthing Owing Our Own

Consistent with God's admonition, in Jeremiah 29:7, to seek the peace and prosperity of the city, past research reveals that entrepreneurship leads to both. In terms of prosperity, according to the report, *The Tapestry of Black Business Ownership in America* [6], "the median net worth for Black business owners is 12 times higher than Black nonbusiness owners," and that Black business owners, "tend to hire from the community, creating jobs for neighborhood residents." (p.4). Regarding peace, in the article, *The African-American Entrepreneur-Crime Drop Relationship: Growing African-American Business Ownership and Declining Youth Violence* [7], the author concluded that, "[T]he presence of Black-owned businesses significantly reduced youth violence..." (p.21).

The facts that African American owned businesses promote the peace and prosperity inspired us to research how to promote African American



149
entrepreneurs
graduated from
17 cohorts.

entrepreneurship. Our research revealed that there are many aspiring African American entrepreneurs in Pittsburgh with excellent ideas, a strong work ethic, and a deep desire to start and scale impactful businesses. Unfortunately, despite their aspirations and strengths, these individuals often lack access to the knowledge, networks, capital, and confidence they need to realize their dreams.

It is in response to the empirical findings on the individual and community peace and prosperity benefits of entrepreneurship, and data on the limited number of African American owned businesses in Pittsburgh, we began to investigate existing entrepreneurship programs, in the region. Our investigation revealed that although Pittsburgh has a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem, most targeted existing businesses, with a demonstrated track record of financial success, and/or businesses in high-growth areas with significant potential for equity investment, and virtually none explicitly focused on African entrepreneurs with these characteristics.

As a result of all of our research, and inspired by the admonition of Jeremiah 29:7, Bible Center Church launched Own Our Own in January 2019. Own Our Own is a perspective—a way of thinking, a process—an intensive, hands-on, 12-week cohort-based entrepreneurship education program, and a place—a business development center, all explicitly focused on helping African American and other underestimated entrepreneurs to build successful businesses.

To date, Own Our Own has completed 17 cohorts and graduated 149 participants from the program and provides space and programming for fledgling entrepreneurs to access all the resources that they need to move their ideas to reality. Our evaluation data reveal that participants experience significant growth in the fundamentals of business creation (e.g., marketing, finances, customer discovery) and their confidence to move their ideas to actual enterprises. In the remainder of this report we share in greater detail the story, activities, and outcomes of Our Our Own.

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Beyond Desk Space: How Shared Workspaces Accelerate Entrepreneurial Success

By Dr. Lesli Talley for The Oasis Project Quarterly Report

Homewood, Pittsburgh – On any given morning at the Own Our Own Business Development Center, early-stage entrepreneurs trickle into the shared workspace, greeting peers over coffee before settling into the space. But they aren't just here for an affordable place to work. They've come to tap into something far more valuable: a community. For new business owners, especially those launching ventures in isolation, the Business Development Center has become a lifeline. In a world where building a company can feel lonely, shared workspaces like this are flipping the script, turning solo struggles into shared success.

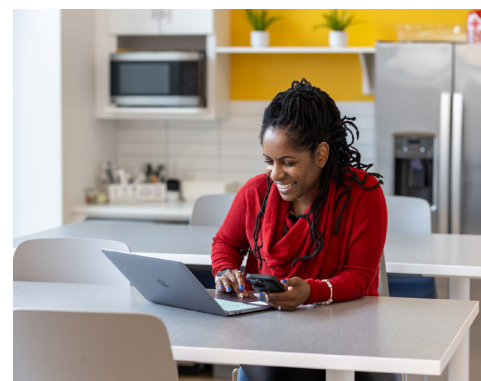
Overcoming the Isolation Trap

Launching a business can be exhilarating, but it's often an isolating journey. Long hours in a home office or garage can leave founders without sounding boards or support. Entrepreneurial isolation isn't just a soft problem; it can directly impact success. Research shows that entrepreneurs working from home often battle loneliness, which amplifies the emotional ups and downs of founding a business [1]. Without peers to brainstorm with or mentors to provide feedback, a founder's motivation and mental health can falter. In fact, lack of a supportive network is frequently cited as a reason startups stall out early.

This isolation gap is even wider for entrepreneurs from historically underestimated communities. Many African American, Latino, and other underestimated founders don't have built-in access to industry connections or mentors. An analysis from the McKinsey Institute for Economic Mobility noted that Black entrepreneurs are less likely than their white peers to have the networks and relationships that inform good business decisions [2]. Cut off from informal contacts and wary of institutions that haven't served them, these founders can find themselves siloed from crucial resources. It's a recipe for promising ideas to languish. In other words, no entrepreneur truly succeeds alone.

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less lonely*

79%
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networks*



Coworking Communities Fuel Growth

Shared workspaces are designed to break the isolation that often derails new businesses. Over the past decade, co-working has exploded in popularity, and with it comes data underscoring how community boosts entrepreneurial success. Inside a vibrant co-working hub, chance conversations turn into collaboration, and lone workers gain an instant “water cooler” network of supporters. It’s not just about the desk or the Wi-Fi – it’s about camaraderie. A Harvard Business Review report found that coworking isn’t a real estate industry so much as a “happiness industry,” noting that the key value is how it reduces loneliness and creates community [3].

The statistics are telling. Global surveys on coworking members reveal that:

- 83% felt less lonely after joining a co-working space
- 79% expanded their social and professional networks
- 80% turn to fellow co-workers for advice or guidance, and 64% have gained new work referrals through coworking connections
- 84% reported feeling more engaged and motivated in their work [4]

In short, the co-working model creates an environment where entrepreneurs both give and receive support. Peers become sounding boards; casual chats spark solutions to business problems. The boost to confidence and productivity is real, and it’s not only moral support being offered. Many shared work hubs provide on-site coaching or programming. This is a big deal, as a survey by the SBA found that 70% of small businesses that received mentoring survived past five years, double the survival rate of non-mentored businesses [5].

An Oasis for Entrepreneurs in Homewood

At the Own Our Own Business Development Center in Homewood, the power of community is on full display. Housed in a converted building on North Homewood Avenue, this shared workspace was created specifically to support African American and other underestimated entrepreneurs in Pittsburgh’s East End. More than just affordable office space, it’s a one-stop shop for co-working, coaching, and connections.

**When more entrepreneurs succeed,
the entire community thrives.**

A quick tour of the facility shows how. Sunlight pours over rows of dedicated workstations where founders focus on their tasks. In the conference room, one of the coaches is advising a small business owner on her growth strategy. The center’s Full Workstation membership comes with a suite of resources deliberately built



to foster success. Members have secured access to quiet co-working areas and meeting rooms, so they can buckle down without the distractions of home. High-speed Wi-Fi, printers, and even a mailbox service are available.

But the real magic is in the extras: on-site resource staff and individualized coaching are also available. Seasoned advisors are on hand to help with everything from refining a business model to navigating LLC paperwork. Regular workshops and seminars fill the calendar, along with informal mixers over coffee nearby at the affiliated Everyday Café.

The impact of this supportive environment can be seen in the businesses blossoming out of Homewood. Since opening, Own Our Own's programs have graduated 17 cohorts of entrepreneurs, totaling nearly 150 people, launching ventures ranging from catering companies and boutiques to tech startups [6].

Creating an Inclusive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

What's happening in this Homewood co-working hub reflects a broader movement to build inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems. Historically, many minority and women entrepreneurs have been left to go it alone. Programs like Own Our Own are changing that by planting the seeds of community-based support in neighborhoods that need it most. The Oasis Project, the community outreach and economic development division of Bible Center Church, launched the Business Development Center as part of its mission to help level the playing field for those who don't traditionally have a seat in Pittsburgh's startup scene.

This approach is backed by research and results. A recent study of micro-entrepreneurs found that co-working space users reported significantly higher well-being and work-life balance than those going it alone [7].

Women and entrepreneurs with young children benefited especially from the supportive structure of shared spaces, reporting greater increases in satisfaction.

Another analysis by the Brookings Institution emphasized that Black business owners often lack access to mentors and capital, which impedes growth; building community networks is a key remedy [8]. In Homewood, we see this remedy in action: entrepreneurs once “left out” of the mainstream are now plugged into a vibrant network of coaches, peers, and champions invested in their success.

The significance of these inclusive hubs goes beyond individual businesses. When more entrepreneurs succeed, the entire community thrives. Small businesses not only create the majority of new jobs, they also generate wealth that stays local. Another McKinsey analysis estimated that if Black-owned businesses reached parity in revenue with white-owned businesses, it would add \$200 billion to the American economy [2]. Achieving that requires closing gaps in opportunity, exactly what community-driven incubators and co-working spaces aim to do. By nurturing underestimated entrepreneurs, places like Own Our Own's Business Development Center help unlock talent that might otherwise be overlooked. It turns out, an oasis of support might just be the secret weapon for the next great wave of entrepreneurs in Pittsburgh's neighborhoods and across the nation.

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The Challenge You Need: Why Effective Business Coaches Push Boundaries

By Dr. Lesli Talley for
The Oasis Project Quarterly Report



“Challenges happen every day when running a business; learning how to use these challenges to grow is crucial to success,” says Eric Ewell, one of the esteemed coaches at Own Our Own in Pittsburgh, which serves historically underestimated aspiring entrepreneurs. That philosophy lies at the heart of transformative coaching. The best business coaches aren’t just cheerleaders; they are strategic partners who push entrepreneurs out of their comfort zones when needed. By challenging assumptions and setting higher expectations, an effective coach can spark the kind of growth that complacency never will. And for entrepreneurs, especially those underestimated by traditional systems, this tough-love approach can be a game-changer in turning potential into sustainable success.

Pushing Past the Comfort Zone

Great coaches understand that real progress often begins at the edge of one’s comfort zone. Like a personal trainer pushing an athlete to do one more rep, a business coach may ask the hard questions or assign the bold challenge that a founder has been avoiding. It isn’t always easy for the entrepreneur in the moment, but this boundary-pushing is done with a purpose: to build resilience, accountability, and new capabilities.

Evidence backs up the power of stepping outside that safe zone with a mentor’s guidance. In fact, research shows that entrepreneurs who engage with mentors or coaches dramatically improve their odds of success. One study by the SBA found that 70% of small businesses that received mentoring survived past five years, double the survival rate of non-mentored businesses [1]. It’s no wonder 88% of business owners with a mentor say that having one was invaluable to their success [2]. There’s a clear pattern: the founders willing to be challenged and guided are far more likely to thrive. A report by Xero notes that about 33% of successful entrepreneurs have had a mentor or support network, while only 14% of entrepreneurs with failed businesses had the same [3]. The difference in those numbers underscores the mentorship edge—an outside perspective pushing you forward can make the difference between floundering and flourishing.

Bridging the Gap for Underestimated Founders

The impact of boundary-pushing coaches is especially profound for “underestimated” entrepreneurs, a term often used to describe business owners from communities that have historically lacked access to resources and support. These include entrepreneurs of color, women, immigrants, and others who don’t fit the typical mold of what some perceive as successful business owners. They may be full of talent and drive, but they face additional hurdles in the business world.

A recent Pittsburgh study by Riverside Center for Innovation noted that Black founders, for example, often lack access to what one report calls the “soft tissue” infrastructure of entrepreneurship—things like networks, mentors, training, and capital [4]. Without these supports, even a brilliant business idea can struggle to get off the ground. The study found that top challenges for BIPOC founders include a lack of business connections and mentors, insufficient business training, and difficulties accessing capital [4]. In other words, many underestimated entrepreneurs are navigating the game of business in hard mode, often without the playbook or safety nets that others take for granted.

That’s where effective coaching and programs level the playing field. In Pittsburgh’s Homewood neighborhood, for instance, the Own Our Own entrepreneurship academy was created specifically to help African American and other underestimated entrepreneurs grow successful businesses [5]. Coaches like Eric Ewell serve as the “strategic minds” guiding these entrepreneurs, connecting them to resources and pushing them to refine their business models. The program fulfills its mission by “connecting entrepreneurs to the larger Pittsburgh ecosystem” and providing hands-on business assistance and workshops [5]. This kind of intentional support directly addresses the gaps—it gives underestimated founders a chance to hone their skills, develop networks, and gain the confidence to pursue bigger opportunities.

“Helping smaller businesses scale by linking them with the contacts and contracts they need” is essential, notes Saleem Ghubril of The Pittsburgh Promise, emphasizing that talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not [6].

Real-life success stories are emerging from these efforts. Graduates of programs like Own Our Own have gone on to launch catering companies, tech startups, and consulting firms, crediting the tough coaching for much of their growth. Their coaches didn’t hand out easy praise; they insisted on polished business plans, drilled them on pitching to investors, and held them accountable for weekly financial targets. The result is a new wave of minority and women entrepreneurs in Pittsburgh who are more prepared and connected than the generation before. It’s a local example of a national trend: when underestimated founders are given access to high-quality coaching and mentorship, they don’t stay “underestimated” for long—they become high achievers, closing opportunity gaps as they succeed.

Financial Literacy: The Hidden Challenge

One area where boundary-pushing coaches often make a decisive difference is in financial literacy. Many new entrepreneurs discover that being the boss also means being the bookkeeper, financial analyst, and chief budget officer—roles they may have little experience with. A caring coach will force a founder to confront these fiscal realities early and often. That can mean unflinching reviews of the cash flow, frank discussions about pricing and margins, and homework assignments to get intimate with balance sheets.

It's not always the most glamorous or exciting part of building a business, but it is absolutely vital. The European Center for Investment and Knowledge Strategy (ECIKS) suggests that 82% of business failures are due to poor cash flow management, essentially a failure of financial literacy [7]. Knowing that, a good coach will push an entrepreneur to develop solid financial habits just as strongly as they push them to innovate or market themselves.

For underestimated entrepreneurs, mastering finance can be an even bigger hurdle, often due to disparities in access to education and banking. ECIKS's study also suggests that women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs of color often start out with lower levels of formal financial education and less exposure to business finance tools [7]. This contributes to inequities in who gets funding and who does not.

Coaches working with these founders frequently find themselves part business consultant, part financial tutor. They might run a session on understanding credit or bring in an expert to teach bookkeeping basics, whatever it takes to ensure that the talented baker who opened a cupcake shop can also read a profit-and-loss statement by quarter's end.

The enthusiasm for financial knowledge in these communities is unmistakable. When Pittsburgh's Neighborhood Allies launched a new "Money Talks" program to help Black women build investing and personal finance skills, the response was overwhelming. They offered 50 slots, and 670 women signed up [8]. This outsized demand highlights how hungry underestimated groups are for financial empowerment.

The finance facet of coaching may not be flashy, but it saves businesses. Every time a coach forces a founder to create a proper budget or dissect their pricing, they are potentially averting a disaster and setting that business up for longevity.

From Challenge to Transformation

When a coach pushes an entrepreneur, it's not about being harsh for the sake of it, it's about believing the entrepreneur can rise to the challenge. That underlying belief, paired with guidance and expertise, is deeply

82% of business failures come down to cash flow. Coaching fixes that.

empowering.

Over time, today's tough coaching sessions turn into tomorrow's personal breakthroughs. The once-timid founder is now delivering confident sales pitches because her coach made her practice ten times. The tech startup CEO who used to shudder at financial statements now steers weekly cash flow meetings and keeps his business in the black. The formerly "underestimated" entrepreneur who doubted whether they even belonged in the room is now mentoring others, expanding the circle of opportunity.

Effective business coaches push boundaries in order to expand them. They help entrepreneurs rewrite the limits they've set for themselves. The payoff is not just individual success stories, but a broader economic and social impact.

When more entrepreneurs from underestimated groups thrive, communities thrive too—new jobs are created, services and products better reflect diverse needs, and long-standing wealth gaps begin to narrow. It's a ripple effect that starts with one person daring to do more than they thought they could, thanks to a mentor who insisted they could.

All of this suggests a simple truth: A coach's challenge, delivered at the right moment, can unlock an entrepreneur's potential and alter their trajectory. In the world of business, that is the challenge we all need—and the best coaches make sure we get it.

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Turning Food Dreams Into Reality at Oasis Community Kitchen: A Launchpad for Local Food Entrepreneurs

By Dr. Lesli Talley for The Oasis Project Quarterly Report



In Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood, Oasis Community Kitchen serves as a springboard for food entrepreneurs chasing their culinary dreams. This certified, shared-use commercial kitchen was intentionally designed and priced to help small food businesses launch or scale without breaking the bank. At 685 square feet, it's fully stocked with restaurant-grade equipment and approved by the Allegheny County Health Department, so even first-time “foodpreneurs” can meet all food safety requirements from day one [1].



Oasis Community Kitchen is a social enterprise of The Oasis Project (the community outreach and economic development division of Bible Center Church) and reflects a broader trend: shared kitchens are booming nationwide. In fact, a recent survey done by Wisconsin Economic Development found more than 600 shared-use kitchen facilities operating across 48 states, with half of them opened in just the last five years [2]. These communal kitchens bridge a crucial gap for aspiring chefs by providing affordable, licensed space and equipment—a “valuable resource” that lowers traditional barriers like lack of facilities and capital [3]. By eliminating the need for each entrepreneur to invest in their own commercial kitchen, spaces like Oasis Community Kitchen make it possible to turn a passion for cooking into

a viable business.

Side Bar to go with photo: A chef uses a professional deep fryer in the Oasis Community Kitchen's shared facility. Food entrepreneurs benefit from commercial-grade equipment (like fryers, convection ovens, and mixers) without the huge upfront investment of buying their own.

Affordable, Accessible Kitchen Space for Foodpreneurs

One of Oasis Community Kitchen's greatest strengths is its affordability and accessibility. Renting a private commercial kitchen can be prohibitively expensive, from costly appliances and utilities to long-term leases. Oasis flips that script with a flexible, pay-as-you-go model: members pay a modest \$75 monthly membership fee and then only about \$18–\$20 per hour for the kitchen time they actually need [1]. Compare that to the tens of thousands of dollars it would cost to outfit and maintain a personal commercial kitchen. By sharing resources, Oasis members access top-notch equipment and facilities at a fraction of the cost. They don't have to purchase their own ovens, walk-in coolers, or prep tables—everything is provided on-site. This not only slashes startup expenses but also streamlines regulatory compliance. Because the kitchen is already inspected and certified, users can hit the ground running with proper health and safety standards [1].

"Shared kitchens act as economic clusters where food entrepreneurs benefit from co-location and cooperation," a 2021 USDA report notes, fostering knowledge-sharing and accelerating paths to market [3]. In other words, Oasis offers more than just a kitchen workspace, it creates a supportive environment where chefs, bakers, and caterers can learn from each other, network, and collectively thrive. The atmosphere is deliberately welcoming; as one local baker put it, "The cleanliness is top-notch, with shiny, spotless surfaces. The super-friendly atmosphere made networking easy, and the high-quality, brand-name equipment was a game-changer." Such testimonials underscore how community and collaboration are baked into the Oasis kitchen experience, alongside the stainless-steel counters and commercial ovens.

Success Stories on the Menu: Local Food Dreams Realized

Nothing illustrates Oasis Community Kitchen's impact better than the success stories of the entrepreneurs who have walked through its doors. Diverse culinary talents, from a New Orleans-style caterer to a fermentation artisan and a gluten-free baker, have all used Oasis's shared space as a stepping stone. These foodpreneurs each came with a unique vision and left with growing businesses, thanks to affordable kitchen access, professional mentorship, and a supportive community. Here, we feature a few of the inspiring chefs and makers turning their food dreams into reality at Oasis.

"The cleanliness is top-notch, with shiny, spotless surfaces. The super-friendly atmosphere made networking easy, and the high-quality, brand-name equipment was a game-changer."

Roux Orleans: Bringing a Taste of New Orleans to Pittsburgh

When Chef Michael “Mike” Barnes moved from New Orleans to Pittsburgh, he was determined to add his own Creole flavor to the ‘Burgh. He founded Roux Orleans in 2017 as a catering company specializing in authentic Cajun and Creole cuisine, the kind he learned cooking alongside his grandmother in Louisiana. But translating Southern recipes into a northern business came with challenges, chief among them finding an affordable, health-inspected kitchen to cook in. Oasis Community Kitchen provided the perfect solution. As a former renter at Oasis, Roux Orleans was able to prepare large orders and perfect its recipes using commercial-grade stoves, fryers, and ample prep space, all without the enormous overhead of building out a kitchen. This allowed Chef Mike to focus on growing his brand and his team rather than worrying about utility bills or equipment repairs. It paid off: Roux Orleans’s business flourished from its humble beginnings in Homewood. What started as a one-man operation out of a shared kitchen grew into a sought-after catering service and restaurant known across Pittsburgh for its bold flavors. With Oasis’s support in the early days, Roux Orleans turned Mike’s culinary dream into a thriving enterprise that now caters events of all sizes with true New Orleans hospitality. *Laissez les bon temps roulez!* Let the good times roll, indeed [4].

Community Cultures: Fermenting a Vision with Trevor Ring

Not all food startups need ovens and fryers, some need room to ferment. Trevor Ring, founder of Community Cultures, is a fermentation educator and maker who has been transforming local ingredients into probiotic-rich creations for nearly a decade. His passion project-turned-business centers on small-batch fermented sodas—think kombucha-like craft beverages flavored with herbs, fruits, and roots. Trevor’s mission goes beyond quenching thirst; it’s about bringing flavor, wellness, and sustainability to the table for the community. To brew these innovative sodas commercially, Trevor needed a licensed kitchen for sanitizing equipment, prepping ingredients, and bottling, a space far more specialized than a home setup. Oasis Community Kitchen became the brewing ground for his ideas [5].

As a current Oasis Community Kitchen renter, Trevor can schedule kitchen time to simmer herbal syrups, steep teas, and bottle his fizzy concoctions in a clean, food safety-certified environment. Access to features like large sinks, ample refrigeration, and proper sanitation means he meets all health codes (critical when working with live cultures) while maintaining the integrity of his craft. With Oasis’s affordable kitchen space, he’s been able to experiment, refine his flavors, and steadily grow Community Cultures from a passion project into a revenue-generating business. The ability to scale up production on his own terms has been key. As Trevor brings ancient preservation techniques into modern drinks, Oasis’s support ensures he has the infrastructure to innovate safely. His story shows that even a niche food idea can blossom into a viable venture when given the right environment to ferment, both literally and figuratively.

Wild Rise Bakery: Gluten-Free Baking Rises in Homewood

For Oliver Pinder, founder of Wild Rise Bakery, the quest was personal: to bake gluten-free breads and pastries so good that no one would ever call them “sawdust.” A gluten-intolerant baker who trained in culinary

school and food studies, Oliver was frustrated by the dry, flavorless gluten-free options on the market. He started Wild Rise to prove that gluten-free could be truly delicious, from artisan sourdough loaves to cookies and bagels. Early on, Oliver operated out of Oasis Community Kitchen, which gave him access to commercial ovens, mixers, and ample workspace to knead and shape his dough. Each morning, he and his team would arrive to find shiny, spotless surfaces and an organized kitchen where they could churn out dozens of turner-ic-tinged bagels and golden-brown hand pies.

The professional setting wasn't just about equipment, it also lent credibility. Being able to tell customers that Wild Rise's breads were baked in a Health Department-certified facility in Homewood helped build trust. Meanwhile, the camaraderie of the shared kitchen kept the team motivated. "The super-friendly atmosphere made networking easy," one Wild Rise member noted, emphasizing how Oasis felt as much like a community as a kitchen. Oliver's creations gained a following at local cafes and farmers markets, and the business eventually expanded beyond the Oasis kitchen. Wild Rise is a shining example of how Oasis's affordable space empowered a young entrepreneur to rise up (pun intended) and turn a once-sidelined dietary need into a beloved bakery business [6].

The Recipe for Success: How Shared Kitchens Empower Entrepreneurs

Stories like these underscore why shared commercial kitchens are so vital for underestimated entrepreneurs. Traditional food business ownership has high hurdles: expensive real estate, pricey equipment, and strict regulations. These challenges often shut out talented cooks who lack deep pockets or institutional support. Shared kitchens lower those barriers, making the path more inclusive. A survey of kitchen incubators nationwide found that 80% are mission-focused on nurturing food entrepreneurs, and many specifically serve women, minority, and immigrant-owned businesses [3]. This holds true in Pittsburgh as well. By providing an affordable licensed space, Oasis Community Kitchen allows local talent from all backgrounds to cook professionally without shouldering massive debt or risking non-compliance.

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Legacy Builders: How Historically Excluded Entrepreneurs Create Wealth That Transcends Finances

By Patti Phillips-Best for The Oasis Project Quarterly Report

Own Our Own exists to help aspiring entrepreneurs to rewrite their family stories by giving them the tools they need to build successful businesses—businesses that can provide income now, and that have the potential to change the financial fortune of their families for generations.

This work is more than challenging, as the wealth disparity is stark. In the U.S., Black families achieve considerably less wealth than white families, with a median net worth of \$24,100 compared to \$188,200. [1] Additionally, unlike typical white families where financial support flows from older to younger generations, many Black entrepreneurs are simultaneously supporting older family members while trying to build their own wealth. [2]

Own Our Own is vital to these aspiring entrepreneurs as it creates pathways to wealth generation that intend to overcome the impact from structural and systemic impediments rooted in socio-economic and racial inequality, offering targeted training, coaching, and networking opportunities that connect African American and other underestimated entrepreneurs with mentors and organizations that can connect them to capital and markets.

“For many Black families, there hasn’t been wealth to inherit or successful business mentors to learn from,” explains John M. Wallace, Ph.D., founder of Own Our Own Business Development and Senior Pastor of Bible Center Church in Homewood. “Our goal is not just to launch businesses; we want ‘evidence-based’ entrepreneurship and the best built practices in entrepreneurship education to become part of the culture.”

Own Our Own aspires to help people to start businesses that perhaps can one day sold, or transferred across generations. These businesses represent turning points where financial self-determination, experiential wisdom, and entrepreneurial mindsets converge to create new possibilities. Children will grow up seeing business ownership as an achievable path rather than an exception. Each successful venture doesn’t just employ people today; it reimagines what’s possible for families tomorrow. This establishes new baselines of possibility from which future generations can launch even greater achievements.

“One of the biggest impacts Own Our Own had on me as an entrepreneur was looking at things as an African American woman. And, realizing that a lot of the messages I had received about entrepreneurship, about owning a business, were not rooted in my own cultural heritage.

Through conversations in Own Our Own that often times led back to, --where do some of these ideas come from-- when it comes to being able to think of an idea, have it sustain us, have it be something that we use to forge our own way, to make sure our families are good, to make sure that we have a way to eat, a way to meet our needs. I began to see it as not just about the money, but about something more spiritual, something maybe even more about what my ancestors would have wanted for me. That had a big impact on me.”

— Tahirah Walker, Walker Learning Group, Own Our Own Academy graduate

Walker’s experience highlights how Own Our Own addresses deeper cultural dimensions of entrepreneurship. In many Black households, money has traditionally been an almost taboo topic.[3] Own Our Own helps entrepreneurs break this pattern by facilitating open discussions about finances and business strategies that can be shared with family members. This transparency is crucial for building multi-generational business knowledge. The emotional inheritance proves just as valuable as financial assets. Children of entrepreneurs develop grit, creativity, and confidence by watching parents navigate business challenges.

As part of Bible Center Church’s community outreach and economic development division, The Oasis Project, Own Our Own is integral to the two-generation intervention initiatives aimed at improving the economic mobility of the people in and near Homewood. Own Our Own’s learning courses (including Bootcamp, Academy, and Academy 2.0) help entrepreneurs ideate, consider, and plan their business’s existence by providing

expert, measured, and accessible training tailored to the participants' specific learning needs. The coaching and seminars offer the alumni and others in the local entrepreneurship ecosystem the opportunity to expand their network, knowledge, and business management skills. Additionally, the professional and affordable shared workspace at Own Our Own's Business Development Center and commercial kitchen at the fellow Oasis Project program, Oasis Community Kitchen, are designed to support the graduates' enhanced business models.

Through these programs, entrepreneurs gain access to experienced business mentors - a critical resource that has been systematically unavailable to many in underestimated communities, limiting the intergenerational transfers of business knowledge that build family legacies.[4] This mentorship complements the technical training and creates a more complete foundation for launching successful businesses.

“We’re not just changing lives,” says Wallace. “We’re changing what’s possible for generations to come.”

This multi-dimensional approach to entrepreneurship—combining financial assets, emotional resilience, and cultural pride—represents a holistic model for building true generational wealth. While Own Our Own recognizes the specific historical barriers faced by Black entrepreneurs, its programs welcome participants from all backgrounds, especially those who lack access to traditional business resources. Single parents, Veterans, young adults from low-income households, migrants seeking economic opportunity, former foster youth, retirees seeking encore careers, and anyone facing systemic barriers to business ownership can find support within this inclusive community. Own Our Own participants are addressing historical inequities while gaining the skills to build legacies. They’re reshaping what entrepreneurship means in Pittsburgh’s underserved neighborhoods and beyond.

Bible Center’s mission is, “We love God, We love people, We live like Jesus,” which is lived by effecting change according to God’s will and to make earth more like heaven. The vision is that all people have the opportunity to flourish as God intended.

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