

GJDC provides loan to improve child care

BY NICK BROWN

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As part of its ongoing attempt to strengthen small business in Queens, the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation (GJDC) has announced that it will provide a \$200,000 loan to Sandra's Sunflower Childcare, Inc.

Sandra's, located at 117-42 143rd Street in South Ozone Park, will use the funding to effectively double its capacity to provide childcare. The loan will fund the renovation of 935 square feet of space, as well as the purchase of computers and furniture.

Richard Werber, Director of the Business Services Group at GJDC, said the loan provides an example

of the organization's mission to revitalize Greater Jamaica through small business growth.

"Our goal is to retain jobs and create new ones," said Werber. The new-and-improved Sandra's, he said, will retain five jobs and create two more. That number may seem small, but "every increment counts," said Werber.

"If you look at national or state figures, the greatest job growth comes from the cumulative effect of small businesses growing, not big companies," he explained. "Small businesses are the real engines."

Plus, added GJDC President Carlisle Towery, the indirect job growth associated with small business should not be overlooked.

"For example, expanding a childcare facility like Sandra's allows many more women to work who would otherwise be at home with their kids," said Towery.

Sandra's was created in 2001 by Glendora Mason-Kennedy, who named the business after her late sister. When Mason-Kennedy reached out to the Jamaica Business Resource Center (JBRC) to seek assistance with her dream of expansion, she was referred to GJDC.

"JBRC helps small businesses with technical aspects, like business plans, whereas [GJDC's] job is to help out financially," said Towery. "So they sent her over to us."

Specifically, they sent Mason-Kennedy to John L. Scott, GJDC's

Director of Financial Services.

"I saw a lot of desire in Glendora," said Scott. "It was clear she had a real plan and just needed someone to walk her through it."

"It took experience and determination," added Mason-Kennedy, "but we wanted to make a difference for the children of the community."

Sandra's, said Werber, represents a true small business – as opposed to the definition recognized by worldwide organizations like the International Finance Corporation.

"Small businesses are considered to be those with less than 500 employees and less than \$10 million in budget," said Werber. "The ones we do business with usually have less than \$1 million, and they

have less than five employees."

Werber said such companies, referred to as microbusinesses, are key to the revitalization of Greater Jamaica, which includes virtually the entire southern half of Queens, from the Nassau county line to the Brooklyn border.

As deeply invested in small business growth as it is, GJDC can "afford to take risks" when it comes to providing loans, said Towery.

Added Scott, "A lot of small business owners don't have great credit scores, but we can't hold that against them, as long as they're trying to do something about it...Our job is to revitalize the community, so we have to take those kinds of risks."