Our Mission
Rising Tide Capital is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization headquartered in Jersey City, NJ whose mission is to assist struggling entrepreneurs and communities to build strong businesses that transform lives, strengthen families and create vibrant, sustainable neighborhoods.

Our Vision
To build a replicable model for high-quality entrepreneurial development services that can be adapted in other underserved communities and used as a catalyst for social and economic empowerment.

Our Approach
Rising Tide Capital provides business development services designed to:

- Transform lives by helping individuals create a viable means of economic self-sufficiency that can grow to create jobs and expand opportunities
- Leverage existing resources through collaboration and partnership with other non-profits, higher-education institutions, corporations, and public agencies
- Put the needs of our entrepreneurs first while remaining committed to building a scalable, replicable and efficient program model with measurable impact

On the cover:

“Through my business, I am able to serve as a positive role model for my children and young women in my community.”
Simeko Watkins-Hartley
Owner, Meko, New York

Read Simeko’s story on page 17
As Rising Tide Capital enters its 10th year, there are many reasons to celebrate. The growth of our organization over the years has enabled us to work with over 800 talented men and women whose businesses are creating jobs and economic opportunity for themselves and their neighbors—pouring life into even the most distressed of communities.

In just the last year, we saw the creation of 53 new businesses by Rising Tide Entrepreneurs, an average of one new business every seven days. Two years after graduating, our entrepreneurs see an average increase of 157% in their business sales and 26% in their household income.

This growth matters. It makes a difference...not just in terms of money, but also people’s lives and the trajectories of entire families and neighborhoods. We are thankful for these entrepreneurs and their hard work, and to our many generous philanthropic investors who share our deep belief in the power of entrepreneurship to transform lives and communities.

While we want to celebrate this success, there is much work left to do, and we recognize that success is not measured purely by growth. As we enter the next stage of our work, concepts of “depth” and “sustainability” are important parts of our vision—not just for our own organization, but also for the types of businesses and local economies we work with. If we are to be successful in our mission, we must begin to turn our attention to the role of the surrounding ecosystem.

What does a living local economy look like? How can local businesses contribute to building a society that is healthy and just? How can Rising Tide Capital leverage our work and the work of our entrepreneurs to pursue not just growth for growth’s sake, but the type of impact that produces deep community roots and produces fruit for generations to come?

The answers to these questions require discussions about redefining growth, and we would like to invite you—as investors, advisors, volunteers, entrepreneurs, and leaders—to join us in crafting a vision of what this should look like. Thank you in advance for your support and for your role in the journey ahead!

Sincerely,

Alfa Demmellash
Chief Executive Officer & Co-founder

Alex Forrester
Chief Operations Officer & Co-founder

REDEFINING GROWTH

“We put the needs of our patients first by providing services to help individuals not only with quality healthcare, but also with quality life care. We provide HIV and substance abuse testing and treatment with care and compassion aimed at allowing growth in our community. Our goal is to help individuals gain control over their lives, so they can set and reach goals that will support them in gaining acceptance and becoming working assets in their communities.”

Elaine Helms
Helms Medical Services
www.HelmsMedicalServices.com
WHO WE SERVE

OUR TYPICAL ENTREPRENEUR
is a 40-year-old mother of two children with an annual household income of less than $35,000. Local cost-of-living calculations indicate her income would need to be $50,000 to be considered financially self-sufficient.¹

$15,000
An extra $15,000 per year from a home business can help a Rising Tide Entrepreneur:
- become self-sufficient
- save for the future
- educate a child
- contribute to a healthy local economy

WHEN WE SERVE

An extra $15,000 per year from a home business can help a Rising Tide Entrepreneur:

- become self-sufficient
- save for the future
- educate a child
- contribute to a healthy local economy

WHO WE SERVE

"Change means a lot of things to me as a business owner—it means that I have the opportunity to utilize my gifts and talents to positively impact the lives of those around me and those around them; I like to call this the ripple effect. It means creating possibilities in places where they didn’t seem to exist before; being the bearer of hope. It means empowering people to make empowered choices, and that, changes everything."

Universe Konado
Universe Konado, LLC | www.UniverseKonadu.com

OUR PROGRAMS

THE COMMUNITY BUSINESS ACADEMY
A 12-week course offering hands-on training in business planning and management

• Covers business fundamentals like budgeting, marketing, bookkeeping and financing
• Taught by instructors with first-hand experience as small business owners
• Graduates are eligible for college credit from participating universities
• All students receive a tuition waiver, thanks to our generous donors

BUSINESS ACCELERATION SERVICES
A year-round suite of services for CBA graduates looking to take their business to the next level

• One-on-One Business Management Coaching
• Continuous Learning through Advanced Seminars & Master Classes
• Networking & Mentorship Opportunities
• Procurement & Sales Opportunities
• Business Incubator Placement Services

ACCESS TO FINANCING

• Loan Preparation: We connect entrepreneurs to our network of lending partners for credit-building, business start-up, and expansion.

• The Rising Tide Exchange: An innovative matchmaking platform that streamlines the connection between entrepreneurs and microlenders.

• Business Competitions: Pitch competitions like The Start Something Challenge and Plan & Pitch, combine coaching and mentorship with financial investment to help start & grow businesses.
Rising Tide Capital grew an average of 37% annually over the past 6 years.

Our Progress

Local Entrepreneurs Served Per Year: 2006-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Entrepreneurs served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>174</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rising Tide Capital has created 154 New Jobs in 2013.

Graduate Business Status

- 838 Graduates
- 397 In business
- 363 In planning stages
- 78 Different path

"My business has been growing fast for years but I now have a clear vision on where it's going and how it's getting there. RTC provided me the resources, tools, information, education and personal and professional ongoing support that my business needed, to push it to the next level. I've always been extremely organized and a go-getter but my business now runs more efficiently, just what I needed to get through this next transition of expanding my business."

Kendra Beelen
KGB Fitness | www.KGBFitness.com
OUR IMPACT

2013 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- **53 BUSINESSES STARTED**
- **129 BUSINESSES STRENGTHENED**
- **76 BUSINESSES EXPANDED**

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT

- **157%↑** CHANGE IN AVERAGE BUSINESS SALES (for people in business at intake)
- **26%↑** CHANGE IN AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME
- **33%↓** REDUCTION IN GRADUATE USE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Compiled from intake data provided by RTC Clients between 2006-2013

RTC generates $3.80 in economic impact for every $1 invested in its programs
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

1. Regional Expansion — Newark & Beyond
   We are currently operating programs in four cities—with major hubs in Newark and Jersey City—to expand our services to residents of all the major urban centers of Northern NJ.

2. Immigrants & Hispanic Entrepreneurs
   Newly launched Spanish-language versions of The Community Business Academy and Business Acceleration Services will enable us to vastly expand our impact within New Jersey’s large immigrant and Hispanic communities.

3. Women’s Economic Empowerment
   Enhanced services and support programs for the 70% of Rising Tide Entrepreneurs who are women will allow us to magnify our impact in their lives, creating entrepreneurial role models and community leaders who can challenge gender-based inequality.

4. Opportunity Markets: Veterans, Immigrants, Domestic Violence Survivors, the Formerly Incarcerated, and the Disabled
   Through five strategic partnerships, we will target enhanced services to individuals for whom entrepreneurship represents a particularly important opportunity for financial self-sufficiency.

5. College Credit for CBA Graduates
   Graduates of The Community Business Academy can receive up to six credits through prior learning experience, from Saint Peter’s University’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies, saving nearly $5,000 in tuition and bridging an important gap to higher education.

6. Microfinance 2.0
   The Rising Tide Exchange, an online match-making platform between entrepreneurs and microlenders, will enable entrepreneurs to simultaneously pursue financing from multiple sources—an innovation within the national microfinance industry.

7. National Replication
   By packaging the Rising Tide Model for replication into other communities, we will scale our impact across a network of organizations who license our curriculum and back-end infrastructure as a catalyst for social and economic empowerment in their own neighborhoods.

8. Living Local Economies
   Through a focus on the role that entrepreneurship plays as a transformative force within the larger community ecosystem, we will map and combine pathways of opportunity to support the emergence of local living economies.

“Many of the people I employ have very low skills and possess GED’s rather than high school diplomas. Providing them with jobs allows them to earn consistently, so they can purchase goods and services from local merchants in the community. This creates a domino effect—more revenue means that other business owners can hire people, who, in turn, are able to provide for themselves. This means more dollars circulating in the community.”

Dennis Thomas
Fish Window Cleaning
“My business was founded on helping others. Most of what we do is based on the parenting pitfalls that I had fallen into. I know that my family’s struggles are common, and others in our community are facing similar challenges. I have learned a great deal and have come up with many solutions to help my kids and family through obstacles, and when I find a good solution I want to share it. That’s what Metropolis COACH is about, sharing solutions that work to help families in Hudson County.”

Gabby Creery
Metropolis COACH | www.MetropolisCoach.com
Jersey City, NJ

On average, every 7 Days a new Rising Tide Business opens

Business Financing
Clients have access to a network of 5 microlenders who provide loans from $500 to $50,000 for business startup or expansion

Mentors, Coaches & Professional Services
A network of corporate volunteers and small business consultants who provide mentoring, coaching, or discounted professional services

Incubation Space
Local incubators provide long-term residencies to Rising Tide Entrepreneurs; including free office/co-working space, utilities, office equipment and use of a conference room.

Classroom Space
A network of 10 corporate and community partners provide free or discounted classroom space

Referrals & Marketing
Over 150 community partners market our programs and refer aspiring entrepreneurs to RTC

Market Opportunities
Special “RTC Zones” designated at farmer’s markets and craft fairs give discounts and visibility to RTC entrepreneurs

Rising Tide Capital Media Recognition

CNN Heroes
Inc.com
The Huffington Post
The Jersey Journal
Jersey City Independent
Forbes
womenetics
BusinessWeek.com
12 New Jersey
NJ BIZ
Entrepreneur.com
Star-Ledger
I know firsthand how hard it is to build a business, especially when you don’t feel like you have the support. You can have the best idea and resources in the world but a lack of confidence can sometimes hold you back. Rising Tide Capital serves as a mentor and support system to entrepreneurs in New Jersey and beyond, allowing aspiring entrepreneurs to confidently start their businesses.

Shazi Vishram
Founder & CEO
HappyFamily
OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Who we are, what we believe, and what we do to achieve our vision

Rising Tide Entrepreneur Impact

Local Economy Stimulation
(stronger tax base)

Increased Economic Mobility

Self-Sufficiency

Increased Financial Assets

Knowledge Capital

Business Management Skills

Social Capital

Mentors & Sales Opportunities

Financial Capital

Increased Income from Business

The Community Business Academy (CBA)

Business Acceleration Services (BAS)

Accredited Curriculum

Expert Consultants & Mentors

Lending Partners

Proven Model & Systems

Innovative Team

Increased Income & Job Creation Through Entrepreneurship

Working Poverty & Unemployment

2013 ANNUAL REPORT   |  11
I always had an entrepreneurial spirit. Since I was a little girl, I knew that I wanted the freedom to be creative without restrictions.

When I was ready to start my business, I first turned to the on-campus small business resource center at a local college. However, I still felt like I needed additional help. I decided to just begin my business and fill in the missing pieces along the way.

On October 10, 2012 I formed Noggin Seeds, LLC. Once I was up and running I was absolutely positive that I needed serious help. A recent graduate told me about Rising Tide Capital’s Community Business Academy (CBA), and after attending an information session I knew the class would be the hands-on experience I needed to get my company where I wanted it to be.

I started the CBA in February of 2013.

My business may have eventually become successful based on my determination alone. However, it would not be the profitable entity it is today without the information and resources I gained through the CBA. In the class I learned how to set business goals, about competition, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the importance of an elevator pitch.

Since graduating from the CBA my business has tripled in production, gained repeat business, broke even, and has begun to see profits.

As my company grew I realized I needed legal advice, I attended a seminar and learned about RTC’s pro bono legal partnership with Lowenstein Sandler and NYU Law. I applied for the program and was paired with a legal team that included Kimberly Diamond of Lowenstein Sandler and students from NYU Law. They revised the legal structure of my contracts.

This was extremely helpful! It opened my eyes to a ton of pitfalls in my business model, which allowed me to avoid recurring issues in my business, and negotiate more effectively.

Stabilizing my business growth allows me to be more available to my husband and my new baby girl. We have started saving for her education, and the other needs that will arise throughout her life. Having additional funds means that I can continue to grow my company by upgrading my equipment to raise the quality of our services for our clientele. More importantly, I can contract more staff to have more free time with my daughter and husband.

I am very passionate about what I do so being able to do it while raising a family means the world to me.

Rising Tide Capital has been the support system I needed. RTC has consistently reached out to offer programs and assistance with immaculate timing. They have also helped tremendously in building my client base by recommending Noggin Seeds’ services to other Community Business Academy graduates through the Rising Tide Help Desk.

The opportunities placed before me have not only benefited my company, but also my family and the lives of those around me.
### STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

**Independent Audit Report 2012-2013**

**Year Ended December 31, 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program fees</td>
<td>$34,970</td>
<td>$34,970</td>
<td>$34,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants &amp; fees from governmental agencies</td>
<td>402,589</td>
<td>402,589</td>
<td>402,589</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
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<td>2,318,107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donated services</td>
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<td>239,768</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special events income</td>
<td>63,074</td>
<td>63,074</td>
<td>63,074</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest income</td>
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<td>1,539</td>
<td>1,539</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other revenue</td>
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<td>2,696</td>
<td>2,696</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net assets released from donor and grantor restrictions</td>
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<td>(974,137)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Public Support &amp; Revenue</strong></td>
<td>$1,880,091</td>
<td>$1,179,956</td>
<td>$3,060,047</td>
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</table>

**Year Ended December 31, 2012**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program fees</td>
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<td>$31,816</td>
<td>$31,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants &amp; fees from governmental agencies</td>
<td>406,063</td>
<td>406,063</td>
<td>406,063</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>328,233</td>
<td>1,179,000</td>
<td>1,507,233</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donated services</td>
<td>114,217</td>
<td>114,217</td>
<td>114,217</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special events income</td>
<td>242,865</td>
<td>242,865</td>
<td>242,865</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest income</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other revenue</td>
<td>2,696</td>
<td>2,696</td>
<td>2,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets released from donor and grantor restrictions</td>
<td>481,346</td>
<td>(481,346)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Public Support &amp; Revenue</strong></td>
<td>$1,808,084</td>
<td>$697,654</td>
<td>$2,305,718</td>
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</table>

**EXPENSES**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Services</td>
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<td>1,468,109</td>
<td>1,468,109</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
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<td>218,222</td>
<td>218,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management and general</td>
<td>189,174</td>
<td>189,174</td>
<td>189,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>1,875,505</td>
<td>1,875,505</td>
<td>1,875,505</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHANGE IN NET ASSETS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$4,586</td>
<td>$1,179,956</td>
<td>$1,184,542</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2013 Expenses**

- 78% Program Services
- 10% Mgmt & General
- 12% Fundraising

**2013 Sources of Funding**

- 34% Corporate
- 12% Earned Income
- 21% Government
- 19% Foundations
- 13% In-kind
- 1% Individuals

“I started my salon in Newark 10 years ago because, like every entrepreneur, I wanted to have my own business. Being in the Community Business Academy was exciting for me because it changed my mindset. I learned all the things that go into running a business—a business plan, financial goals, learning about my competitors and having a marketing strategy. Now, I am working towards buying my own property instead of renting space.”

Henyer Angeles
Valy Beauty Salon

Audit provided by Sobel & Co., LLC
## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

**Independent Audit Report 2012-2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>December 31,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSETS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURRENT ASSETS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>$1,354,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants and contributions receivable</td>
<td>1,273,897</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepaid insurance</td>
<td>15,917</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Current Assets</td>
<td>2,644,037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT NET</td>
<td>10,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER ASSETS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Deposit</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL ASSETS</strong></td>
<td>$2,656,694</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                     |      |      |
| **LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS** |      |      |
| **LIABILITIES**        |      |      |
| Accounts payable and accrued expenses | $83,293 | $71,374 |
| Deferred Revenue       | 7,500 | 25,000 |
| Total Current Liabilities | 90,793 | 96,374 |
| **COMMITMENTS AND CONTINGENCIES** | | |
| **NET ASSETS**         |      |      |
| Unrestricted           | 401,945 | 397,359 |
| Temporarily Restricted | 2,163,956 | 984,000 |
| Total Net Assets       | $2,565,901 | $1,381,359 |
| **TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS** | $2,656,694 | $1,477,733 |

“I struggled for many years in an economy that often made my dreams feel like a far-fetched reality. I owned a studio for two years but could not sustain it—I had the creative vision, and 12 years of experience in photo labs, but lacked the business acumen to make a profit. Rising Tide Capital’s CBA was instrumental in helping me structure my business, assess my brand, create a marketing strategy, and finally understand how to financially support myself with my business.”

Jackie Robles
www.JackieRobles.com

Audit provided by Sobel & Co., LLC
"Attending the Community Business Academy played a great role in my journey as it made me aware of areas of my business that needed more attention. These included having a better process in place for the way we execute job orders, and marketing ourselves more efficiently with community agencies. Addressing these two areas is helping me save time, better promote my business, and generate more sales."

Gustavo Estrada
Supreme Consultants
www.SupremeConsultants.com

OUR TEAM

Board of Trustees
Chairman
Doug Forrester
President & CEO, Integrity Health
Vice Chairman/Chair of the
Finance & Audit Committee
John Mahoney
President, 1st Worldwide Financial Partners;
Adjunct Professor of Management at NYU Stern
Treasurer
Ron Gravino – Chief Financial Officer,
VP Finance and HR – Invidi Technologies Corporation
Commissioner/Vice Chairman – NJ Turnpike Authority
Secretary/Chair of the
Development Committee
Ariadne Papagapitos
Program Officer, Peace and Security Program,
Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Chair of Board Governance & Nominations Committee
Anand Devendran
Vice President, Global Payments, TJX Companies
Chair of the Strategic Advisory Board
Matthew Barnes
Partner, ASG Advisors
RTC Client & Entrepreneur
Alex Ros,
Principal, Open Sky Expeditions

Staff
Administration
Afia Demmellash, CEO/Co-founder
Alex Forrester, COO/Co-founder
Carlee Catena, Executive Assistant
Finance & Development
Michael Caslin III, Managing Director, Strategy & Development.
Tawanda Taylor, Finance & Administration Manager
Bryan Franklin, Development & Special Projects Coordinator
Seedra Enver, Development & Fundraising Assistant
Avery Zuvic, Development & Evaluation Assistant
Programs
Jay Savulich, Managing Director, Programs
Keith Dent, Assistant Director
Fred Dominguez, Trainer/Business Coach
Mitch Greene, Trainer/Business Coach
Winston Trumpet, Trainer/Business Coach
Kene Turner, Trainer/Business Coach
Roger Cervantes, Program Manager–BAS
Mary Sansait, Program Manager–CBA
Milaury Herrera, Program Assistant
Russell Borenstein–Burd Program Assistant–CBA
Alfreda Rogers, Program Assistant–BAS
Miles Roman, Volunteer Coordinator
Program Evaluation
Louisa Cousins, Program Evaluation Manager
Communications
Esther Fraser, Director of Communications
Justyna Krygowska, Communications Coordinator
Shanea Phillips, Public Relations Assistant

Strategic Advisory Board
Co-Chairs
Aaron Kurt Regush, Barclays
Joe Masterson, Nichols Advisory
David Dwek, MorganStanley
Michael Fazio, Saint Peter’s University
Regina Gwynn, The Apparel Group
William Hitchcock
Binna Kim, Cognito
Glenn Macdonald, Wealth & Giving Forum
Leslie—Ann O’Brien, Newgrange Technology Consulting
Joel Ruffin, Goldman Sachs & Co.
Scott Scher, Goldman Sachs & Co.
Robert Weiss, JPMorgan Chase & Co.

Interns 2013
Mario Costa
Nicole Cassara
Jong Lim
Tyrell McKoy
Hemawaytie Persaud
Meko, New York, LLC is a thriving salon located in the Valley Arts District in Orange, NJ serving more than 800 clients with quality skincare, chemical process-free hair care and natural hair education.

But twenty years ago, owner and Harlem native Simeko Watkins-Hartley couldn’t imagine this level of success. Simeko’s father died when she was very young, and her mother was addicted to drugs. She was forced to grow up quickly and provide food, clothing and shelter for her four younger brothers. Eventually, Social Services intervened, and sent her to live with her aunt until she graduated from high school.

“I skipped college to take care of my little brother who I can proudly say is now married with a great job,” she said.

After high school, she found a position at a supermarket. “I knew I didn’t want to spend my whole life working unhappily at a dead-end job,” Simeko said. “I didn’t want to be/another statistic and become a product of my environment.”

In 1994, Simeko married her lifelong friend and became manager of a well-known natural hair salon in Brooklyn, NY. After 9/11, she was inspired to take hold of her destiny and open her own salon and spa.

Although she had seven years of salon management experience, she went to beauty school to obtain her license, and worked at Supercuts to learn more about the corporate structure for running a bigger salon.

She moved to Irvington, NJ in 2010 for a better quality of life for her family, and because the lower cost of living would make it easier to start her business. Meko, New York was born later that year.

“I transformed my entire basement into a salon with beautiful marble floors! My clients were amazed by the professional appearance and as word spread I began serving 150 women from places as far away as Delaware and Virginia.”

Within a year her business outgrew her basement, and she rented her current commercial space in Orange. There, her clientele expanded to over 300 customers, and Simeko knew that she needed help to manage her growth.

After learning about the Community Business Academy from Rising Tide Entrepreneur LaShonda Tyree, she decided to take the class to gain business training to help her move her business forward. “Taking the Community Business Academy helped me understand the fundamentals of running and sustaining a small business,” said Simeko, who graduated from the CBA in 2013.

Not only did she learn business skills such as budgeting, marketing and negotiating prices, but she also made valuable connections with other socially-minded entrepreneurs.

Her network of Rising Tide Entrepreneurs became invaluable when Simeko launched her Born-to-Be A Natural Leader Teen Workshop and Gala.

Now in its second year, Simeko fully funds this program with the profits from her business, sponsoring a 12-week program for 12 Essex County young women annually.

In 2014, she received in-kind sponsorships from seven fellow Rising Tide Entrepreneurs, including food and gala décor, as well as free self-esteem, college preparation, and nutrition workshops.

“I know what it’s like to live in an urban community where drugs, teen pregnancy and violence are rampant. I understand what it’s like to grow up without someone to take personal interest in me or my future. I started Born-to-Be A Natural Leader to provide young women in similar situations with a network of individuals who care,” said Simeko.

Within the next three years Simeko plans to expand her business to include a retail space, offering quality natural hair care products and expert advice on how to use them. She also wants to increase her educational outreach, with in-person and online consulting, training and workshops for individuals and small groups.

“When I walk into my salon, I can say this is mine and all of my hard work benefits the growth of my business! I took the chance to bring my dream into fruition and now I have the freedom to live my life the way I want to, while providing for my family.”
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- President Barack Obama, 2009