**Webinar Transcript: GHA Training: Building Your Team**

**Presented by NDI’s Small Business Team**

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Ciara Ladroma: Griffin-Hammis Associates has over 30 years of experience providing training, and technical assistance to support individuals across the spectrum of disabilities to become self-employed, and small business owners. We want to thank the U.S. Small Business Administration, and the National Disability Institute in leading The Community Navigator Pilot Program that creates the space for this webinar. While the webinar is funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration, all of the opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed here are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect to the views of the SBA.

Ciara Ladroma: At the end of today's session, we'll share upcoming events and the National Disability Institute team will share some exciting information with you about the small business hub and resources available to you.

Ciara Ladroma: I am thrilled to introduce you to today's guest speakers. First, please meet Andrea and Mona Freedman. Andrea is the founder and owner of Puppy Luv Dog Boutique. Andrea started her entrepreneurial journey at the age of 17 when she started her first business as a kiosk in a mall called Andy's Candies after completing an internship at a candy store. Andy's Candies grew into a shared retail space where Andrea really learned how to stock, record sales, pay rent, hire team members, and market her business. Andrea transitioned into a larger space, with that, came additional products and collectibles. This transition allowed Andrea to rent space out to other businesses, and due to property closures, Andrea transitioned her entrepreneurial spirit and opened a store called The Sport Nut, where she sold sports apparel and gear. And this happened to be perfect timing, which led to a large profit as the Baltimore Ravens won the Super Bowl in 2012.

Ciara Ladroma: Through this time, and a small decline in sales, Andrea combined her skills and interests to starting her current business called Puppy Luv Dog Boutique. She sells dog food, treats, gear, supplies, and gifts. Andrea has since become a professional dog groomer, and has become extremely reputable with her products and services. Puppy Luv Dog Boutique and Spa is thriving with grooming appointments being booked out three months in advance, adding an additional grooming assistant and turning profit.

Ciara Ladroma: Andrea is joined today by her mother, Mona Freedman. Entrepreneurship definitely runs in the family as Mona is a founder and operator, along with her husband, Jay, of Caring Communities, Milestone Media Group, and Limelight Music School. With Mona's Leadership, Caring Communities founded the World of Possibilities Disabilities Expos, which we'll hear more about later, in Rockville School programs in Charm City downtown.

Ciara Ladroma: Our other guest speaker today is Lorraine Woodward of Becoming Rentable. Lorraine, is the creative energy officer and founder of Becoming Rentable. As front person for Becoming Rentable, Lorraine guides the entire team with creative ideas that will positively impact the lives of people with disabilities, and their families. She maintains a hectic and busy schedule as a wife, mother, volunteer, artist, accessible rental property host, and an ultimate Duke basketball fan. She finds joy by hanging out with her family, rifting with her friends, staying at her beach house, listening to music, and being an unofficial ice cream connoisseur. Becoming Rentable strives to bring visibility to the need for accessible short-term rentals for people with mobility, vision, hearing, intellectual, and developmental disabilities. And for individuals on the autism spectrum through education about accessible design, construction, and renovation.

Ciara Ladroma: To Lorraine, Andrea, and Mona, thank you so much for being here today. I'm honored to share time, and energy, and space with the three of you. To learn more about how you created Puppy Luv Dog Boutique, and Becoming Rentable, how you knew it was a good fit for you? And how you've grown your team? And really being able to use the knowledge, and experience of your current business as well as your previous businesses? Lastly, I hope that this conversation serves to really inspire and guide those that are tuning in today.

Lorraine Woodward: Thank you.

Ciara Ladroma: All right. Do we have Lorraine and Andrea for Spotlight? Perfect. All right. So Andrea and Mona, do you want to share a little bit about Puppy Luv Dog Boutique, and just tell us how you started your business and why?

Andrea Freedman: I started my Puppy Luv Dog Boutique and Spa after the Sports Nut. I ended up getting into it because I have a Maltese, and a Beagle. So I started bathing my Beagle, but then I got interested in actually learning how to groom my Maltese. So I went to a grooming school, Endorse helped me out by giving me my grooming supplies, and actually put me through the school. And I learned how to groom one-on-one, so I learned how to groom a couple of different breeds, and learn how to groom her dogs, my teacher's dogs. And that's really how I became, and learn how to groom, and start my dog boutique and grooming.

Mona Freedman: The school was an hour and a half from the house, and she's not a driver. So a couple of times a week I was taking classes too, nursing, and she was driving her out to take her classes, and she really wasn't going to be able to do the college curriculum. So the woman took her back to her house, and taught her one-on-one at her grooming facility. And she actually got the Cecil County College certificate. So she's a certified dog groomer, and very few schools here in Maryland, I don't think there are any schools. So, she's one of very few certified groomers in the state.

Ciara Ladroma: That's incredible. And Andrea, I just want the chance for you to share why your grooming business is so unique. And probably the reason why it has so many advanced bookings, because you focus on one animal at a time. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Andrea Freedman: Yes. So I do one dog, one family at a time. So one family can even have more than one dog, but we do one dog at a time, and there is no crates or crate drying, so we don't put them in crates. I work on them at the time that they come in, and at the time they leave. I call them a half an hour before they're done, so that way can come back and pick them up. And then we do another dog, after that, another family comes in. So we do one family at a time, and that's why. And I get a lot of old dogs that has very bad anxiety, and I also get puppies that also has anxiety too. So they all love it because they don't have to keep them in the crate for six hours before they get groomed. They get groomed immediately, and then they come and pick it up, so they don't have to worry about that. They just go home afterward.

Ciara Ladroma: I love that customer focused attention. Perfect. Lorraine, can you please tell us about a little bit about your business, how you started it, and maybe the wire mission of Becoming Rentable?

Lorraine Woodward: Sure. I actually have been an entrepreneur the majority of my career, so I've been focused for the last, I hate to say 40 plus years in the area of disability and education. I have muscular dystrophy, and I have two young boys, well, they're young, but not young. They're at 26 and 27. So in my world, they're young. So there's three of us with muscular dystrophy in our family. And so I've always looked at opportunities because it's my passion about education and disability. So this is my fourth business venture in my career, and I was 59 going on 60, and one day I said, "I want to have one last hurrah in my business efforts." And I did what brings me joy, what brings me happiness, and found out I love being at our beach house, which has an accessible short-term rental.

Lorraine Woodward: We've had over 400 families stay at our property, and am just amazed that in the year 2023 now, how difficult it is to find an accessible short-term rental property. And for our family, it was really difficult in finding places that we could vacation that met our needs. But I thought, "We're just a unique family because there's three of us traveling with disabilities." But I found out we are unique, but we're not unique in the aspect of having a difficult time in finding an accessible short-term rental. So, when I turned 60 in 2022, I made a decision to start this business, and to really make a difference so that travel would not be as challenging to find if you had a disability.

Lorraine Woodward: So we started Becoming Rentable, and I could tell you hours about our business, I'll try to limit it. But we are a listing platform, if people are interested in looking and finding an accessible short-term rental property, you can visit Becoming Rentable.com, and good, somebody put it in the chat. Thank you. And that it's a free service. We have over 1200 accessible properties in our map, which makes us have more validated accessible properties than Airbnb and Vrbo combined. So we're really proud of that.

Lorraine Woodward: We also historically know that the short-term rental industry has focused on only on wheelchair. But through research, and surveys that we conducted, we realized that a lot of us in the disability community have that desire to travel. So our company has expanded what accessible travel looks like in the short-term rental industry, as you had said earlier, to include mobility. Which is walkers, and wheelchairs, and canes, and crutches, cognitive disabilities, which are intellectual disabilities, people on the autism spectrum, vision, sight, and aging.

Lorraine Woodward: We provide educational information. What we did realize is we were trying to come up with an idea of what are the 10 things that would make your property accessible? But what we found out is what is accessible to me may not be accessible to you. So we can't make that decision of what an accessible property looks like. Only you, the traveler, can make that decision. And we felt that the easiest way to do that was creating a set of filters, so that you could identify what your needs are. For me, I need a hard surface driveway. So when I bring my van to the property, I can set out my ramp, and get to the door, and then I need to get to the door, which means a ramp, no steps, a zero threshold entry. I want to get to the bedroom, the bathroom, the living room, the backyard, and I click those filters, and then we populate what is available.

Lorraine Woodward: So it's a very exciting venture, an opportunity to work with people in the disability community. It's an opportunity for my family that can benefit, and an opportunity for us to educate an industry that is not familiar about what it means to have a disability, and what it means to be accessible.

Ciara Ladroma: Incredible. Yeah, that's just one word for it. And someone had written down, "That is amazing," in the chat. Now, the next question I have for the group is, can you share what resources you used when you were in the beginning stages of your business? Maybe it was a small business development center, or working with an accountant. So what resources, and tools, did you use to really start your business? Andrea, do you want to go first?

Andrea Freedman: Sure. So, to start my business, I had my parents to help, and also Endorse to help. And they all helped me start the business by going to school, and starting a groom, and...

Mona Freedman: Business plan.

Andrea Freedman: And the business plan, and got me really how to really know how to do all of it.

Mona Freedman: We also had a best friend who was a CPA, he helped the family, start setting up some of the systems in place. It's a lot of mommy and daddy power, but she is entirely independent with it. Cash register, ordering supplies, hiring, firing. I know nothing about any of that. She can't say, "Oh, mommy, can you do the cash register for me?" I can't even do the things that she could do. So, she has really come a long, long way with learning, and once she had gotten on a role, she does really pick up, and can do these things independently.

Ciara Ladroma: That's wonderful. I love that you shared that you had a community to really lean on, and these natural supports to help you get started with your Puppy Luv Shop. Lorraine, what about you? What resources did you use to really get started in the beginning stages of Becoming Rentable?

Lorraine Woodward: I definitely have a different set of interest. I went to college with the idea of following my family's dreams, I didn't know really what I wanted to do, and what I felt like I could do growing up with a disability. And knowing that my physical abilities were not as strong as possibly my intellectual abilities. So after college, I had the opportunity to go work in D.C. for my congressman, and my mom had thought that I would come back, go to law school, and take care of her. And I realized that when I left home, that that wasn't my dream. And to really look at what I wanted to do, and have an opportunity to really reflect on my gifts, and talents, and look at what they were. I didn't have a lot of self-confidence in my abilities, so where my first business came from was from my boss from D.C. I went to head up the communications department for Easterseals, North Carolina.

Lorraine Woodward: It was a new position for the organization. I have excelled in communications, I felt fortunate for this opportunity. And I came on board about a year and a half later, my boss, Adele Fosha, for those of you who might have ever worked with Adele, an amazing woman. Came to me and said, "Lorraine, we are no longer in a financial position to keep you at full-time, we can keep you part-time. But I believe in your gifts, and talents, and would like to help you start a business." Now, never in a million years that I think that I would be an entrepreneur. I did not know what that meant, I didn't know the responsibilities, and I didn't understand how I could create a business.

Lorraine Woodward: So, in the beginning of my career, it really was being guided by somebody who believed in me. And I think that so many times as we're building our careers at different stages of our life, I was young. I was in my early twenties, and the idea of somebody else having faith in me, and wanting to hold my hand, and guide me through that experience, has helped me build my businesses throughout the year. And now I feel comfortable that I could come, and talk about building a team, which I never thought that that would be me. And so my sources, were leaning on leaders who believed in me, and helped guided me.

Ciara Ladroma: Thank you so much. Now, Andrea, when we last talked, you were thinking about hiring another groomer. Is that right?

Andrea Freedman: Yes.

Ciara Ladroma: Have you hired another person yet to join your team?

Andrea Freedman: No, I'm still looking. There is not that many groomers out there. I think once 2020 happened, a lot of groomers retired, or went out of business. Because I'm actually, unfortunately, the youngest groomer out there. So there's a lot of people who've been doing grooming for over 20 years. And I think around 2020, it made it where since the pandemic happened, it made a good time for them to retire. So now there's not too many groomers out there who's willing to groom. So no, I'm still looking for a groomer. We did put a groomer out there to advertise, but it's still doing it by myself with the grooming assistant.

Mona Freedman: And she's not keen on training someone, she likes to concentrate on what she's doing. It's very physical, it's kind of a dangerous job. You're cutting with very sharp scissors, and blades and so forth. So she's really not that thrilled about taking someone in with not a lot of experience in being a teacher. That's another concern. Even a grooming assistant is difficult, because you have to work in a small area, and train, and trust people that they'll show up. And around your cash register, when you're an entrepreneur around money, you're nervous.

Andrea Freedman: Yeah. It's hard to trust people, and be a team player. See, in grooming, you also have to be a team player, and also know how to groom. But also we have to listen to the clients because if you don't, they'll get mad at you because you're not listening. And a lot of groomers also do that. They also don't listen to the customers, and they get all mad. So you also have to be a team player. And it's also hard to get a groomer, but also be a team player, and listen to the customers as well.

Mona Freedman: Is it okay if I show the audience some pictures? This is the trailer. She had a grooming van, and that was very, very old. And this is a brand-new trailer that is completely paid off, very proud mother. This is the inside of her store, which has got a lot of unique items, and food, and supplies. And this is dad up on a ladder putting the sign to the store up. So we are her parents, and we are downstairs in the same building. We're in the basement of her store right now, which is next to our music school. So we have a little family operation here, where if something really does go wrong with the trailer physically, or the lights go out, or something like that, we're there to support her. But oftentimes she's here alone.

Ciara Ladroma: Yeah. And I know that you have hired past team members from previous businesses, and then you are now looking for that second groomer. But what would you say you prioritize in when you hire someone to join your team? What do you really look for in someone? And how does it feel to shift into that leader and boss position?

Andrea Freedman: I look for someone that I can trust. I also look for someone who can do a really good grooming job, and also look for someone who doesn't steal, and also be a person that is going to pay attention to what the customers want. Good personality, friendly with the customer service. My company and business always had good customer service. And that's another reason why a lot of my clients like me, is because I have good customer service. I groom really well, and I love their dogs, and we do one, and pay attention to them as well.

Ciara Ladroma: I think a powerful part in growing your team is knowing that every single person on that team is going to represent you and your business. And it sounds like you are in that position to really find that person who can do that. Lorraine, what about you? As you have grown your team, what are those important factors that you really prioritize as you've shifted into that leader and that boss? And what do you look for in potential team members?

Lorraine Woodward: My first company was Woodward Communications. It was a full service communications firm specializing in marketing communications for nonprofits, and people in the healthcare industry. So when I started, Adele was holding my hand, and I thought, "Oh, I can do it all." And I realized very quickly that no, I couldn't do it all. So I had to do a lot of self-analysis. What, honestly to myself, was I good at? What were my talents? What wasn't I good at? Where did I need help? And that took a while to recognize and learn. So in the beginning at Woodward Communications, I used contractors. I didn't feel that I was in a financial position, and nor did I understand what it would take to hire an employee. So I chose to go with contractors.

Lorraine Woodward: And in Woodward Communications, we looked at skill sets. I might have a client that needs a writer that's a technical writer versus a creative writer. So I looked very in the beginning at very specific skills, and I looked at those skills to be implemented per project of what my needs were. And that really helped me grow my business, so that I did not have revenue going out, that wasn't generating revenue to come in. So with that analysis of what I knew I was good at, helped me with Becoming Rentable. Now, Becoming Rentable we're in our second year, I own a stock photography company called Realistic Reflections. I still paint canes called Lorraine's Canes.

Lorraine Woodward: And Becoming Rentable, I knew I would need a team. One, I recognized early on I didn't want to work by myself, that I wanted to work with a team. And I think as people are looking at being entrepreneurs, to really look at that, identifying if you want to be a team player, or if you're more comfortable working by yourself. And for me, I did not want to work by myself. I love working with the team. I believe together we can do anything, but single-handedly tough. And what's interesting about our approach at Becoming Rentable is we have 21 volunteers. We have no employees or contractors.

Lorraine Woodward: We've established our first year and three quarters as a company based on their belief in what we're doing, which is called sweat equity. So our team is comprised of individuals with disabilities, or have a family member of a disability, or are in the industry of disability. So for me, having that personal practical experience, and understanding disability, was something that I wanted in everybody that was a part of our team. We're now into what we call the monetization stage, which is a stage I don't really like, and that's called how do you bring in the money? And so we've identified that, and now it's time to bring in the money, and time to hire.

Lorraine Woodward: So we are now in the process of hiring contractors. I have business advisors while I'm still at 61 years old, nervous about hiring employees. I congratulate you, Andrea, that you're willing to take that leap of faith. It's a little harder for me, I get the nervous Nellies thinking about that responsibility. So I'm taking for me the easy road out, and going to contractors. But it also, again, lets me look at skill sets of what skills, and abilities are missing in our business so that we can be successful.

Ciara Ladroma: Absolutely. Oh, go ahead.

Mona Freedman: If you hire employees, then you have the expenses that go along with actual employees, the workman's comp and-

Lorraine Woodward: Unemployed insurance. Yes.

Mona Freedman: Yeah, so there's those aspects. It's good to start off with some contractual workers. That's what she did with the assistant who came in when she could, and it's built up, and now she's a true employee.

Lorraine Woodward: Right.

Ciara Ladroma: I really love that you brought up that you can hire in a way that is best for your business. So that means for you, Lorraine, you're looking towards contractors. So I've gotten some questions in previous meetings of people asking, "Okay, so I have this business, it's going well. I'm personally very tired. At what point do I hire? Is there an exact mark, or is it just depending on A, B and C?" So when did you all know or start to think, "I think it's time to hire someone to help with this"?

Lorraine Woodward: For me, I work 10 to 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, and I am now really tired. And I don't have time to enjoy the beach, when I go to the beach, or participate in family activities. My nervousness is the financial responsibility, following through on my commitment to hire contractors. And it's only when I have contracts in place, when I'm hiring these contractors, I can identify a timeframe which I know confidently, and comfortably, that I can pay them. And for us with 21 volunteers, and that we've been doing this for almost two years now, I'm very sensitized to the fact that they haven't gotten paid. That they've put in sweat equity, they believe in what we're doing, they've proved their skills and abilities, and my heart's desire is to financially compensate them for the work that they've done.

Lorraine Woodward: And it's only now that we've focused on bringing in money, that I can now make that commitment not only in good faith, but as a business leader. I know that they will be compensated for the period of time in which we can hire them for. And that was my big hurdle, is just knowing that I could follow through on that financial commitment. Because it is a big deal, when you bring on an employee or a contractor. But yet there's also a sense of company growth, that the only way we're going to grow is by getting more help that's talented.

Lorraine Woodward: We will be hiring some lady to help us with our social media effort. Well, I'm 61, I still say VRBO. And my son the other day said, "Mom, it's not VRBO. It's VRBO." You need to learn the language. So I don't feel that my 61-year-old brain is reaching people that are in their twenties, that want to travel, in their thirties, that want to travel, and that I need that youth perspective. And by hiring somebody to do that will not only take that element off my plate, but it will hopefully grow our business, and our traction in a targeted audience space. So, I've realized how we can grow by bringing on that financial, I call it a risk, and hiring people.

Ciara Ladroma: Thank you, Lorraine. Andrea, what about you? Was there a moment where you maybe looked around and said, "I need help."

Andrea Freedman: Yes. Since I've been looking all year round pretty much except three months in advance, but I have the majority of my clients booking all year round, until next January. And I'm like, "It's physical, and emotionally draining, and tiring." Because I'm the only groomer, and I'm also the owner. So everyone wants me because I'm the owner. But I do work about five days a week, and I do work about 10 to 12 hours a day. And then, these phone is actually connected to my cell phone, so I have people text messaging me, and calling me even on days I don't even work. So yeah, I do work about 7 days a week, five days of physically grooming, and it's just tiring. But I take a lot of vacations.

Ciara Ladroma: As you should.

Mona Freedman: She has another grooming table. The picture didn't reflect it, but another whole grooming setup, and table inside the store now. So she is really ready to go where she could take turns with another groomer. When you see a trailer, it looks like she's a mobile groomer. She's not, she's not a driver. So the landlord did not want any water type situations in the building. So the grooming trailer is parked out front, so she could have another groomer inside, and just trade the time with the whole sink, and tub, and everything in the trailer. And also that grooming assistant could work for both groomers. So she's all set up for having someone, but she's really leery about hiring people.

Mona Freedman: Even if we could find them, I know Andrea would watch them like a hawk. She would make sure she could talk to the families. She might not like the way that they explain things to them, she has a way about her, she's a very quiet, mild-mannered person. And she's actually... How old are you?

Andrea Freedman: 36.

Mona Freedman: She's 36. She does not look 36, so sometimes when people work for her, they don't treat her like she's the boss because of her looks. So she wants someone that's going to respect her, and listen to her, and do it the way that she likes to have it done, because it's her store. So there are some factors in hiring strangers to come into her world.

Ciara Ladroma: Yeah, understandable. Thank you for that. Lorraine, right now you are in that position to hire, but you have an amazing group of volunteers who are putting in their sweat equity. How did you find that?

Lorraine Woodward: Fortunately, I have had other businesses. So my first four that I reached out to worked with me, and have worked with me for 25 years. So they were known people. And then, like my former boss, Adele, reached out to me. I've reached out to others, who I felt had gifts and talents that could benefit our company, and asked them of their interest. And then, people have called me. That's been a big surprise. Today, I took a call from a gentleman from Georgia, and he is in the technical field. He was not calling about selling a product, but calling to reach out to say, "I believe in what you're doing, and I've been in the travel industry, and I want to do what I can to help you." And that relationship has started, and he's already connected me with some national organizations for speaking opportunities.

Lorraine Woodward: So I think we're in a new industry that has not been developed. There's a lot of interest, particularly because of COVID-19, and people traveling. Because this is a new area of interests, people have curiosity, and so that they're reaching out to me. We have people I've physically never met, we have Zoom meetings every week, but I have a volunteer from New York, I have one from Portland, Oregon, Little Rock, Arkansas. I love geographically how the different folks at different levels. We have a retiree, who is not interested in the working and making money, but I'm making a difference. We have another lady who was a former reporter, who was diagnosed about 15 years ago with a mental illness, where she hasn't been able to work. But now she feels that she can, and she's a part of a team, so it's part of her personal growth.

Lorraine Woodward: We have different situations where either I knew the person in their talents, or that they've come to me, and shared those talents, and looking for an opportunity, that they want to be a part of a team. And it's having that open mind to work with, and the talents from different people that I don't know. And it's a little different, too, in that it's volunteer. So when you have an employee being a contractor, and or a traditional employee, there's a set of responsibilities because you're getting compensated. But as a volunteer, there's not those parameters in place. So in a way, there's a risk that they identify a scope of work that they're going to volunteer to do, but yet their personal life, or other responsibilities come in, and they're not able to do that.

Lorraine Woodward: So as the CEO of the company, it's addressing that, having open communication, recognizing, and inviting diversity of skills, talents, and abilities to our organization. That has been something that I've looked at, looking at and defining specific roles in what our volunteers are going to do. In fact, last night we had a team meeting, and because of some new opportunities that we have, some of the roles are going to change. So I ask our team, "We're not going to be focused in this area anymore if need, but we're going to need talents in this area." And two people said, "I have full-time jobs, and I'm not comfortable with that. So I'm going to have to leave the team." And that made me really, really sad. Because this team is about relationships, and I love seeing our team together every Tuesday night, and learning about their personal growth as well as their professional growth. And the contributions that they've made have been tremendous.

Lorraine Woodward: So that's the downside of contractors and volunteers, is that there is that revolving concept of you're a part of our team now, and as we change and grow, that same team may not stay together. And I'm learning a lot, and to encourage, that was something last night of really encouraging our team members about the growth, and the opportunities that we have. And particularly when I was surprised, "What do you mean you don't want to continue in doing something else?" I didn't even consider that because what we're doing is so fabulous. "Of course, you're going to want to stay." But again, it has to be the right fit. And that's one of the things in contract work, Andrea, you talked about trust. That is huge. And there's a lot of things to think about as we're going through building our teams, and the emotional part of our team, and the responsibility as the CEOs of our companies. So there's a lot that does evolve, and change, and grow that we adjust to.

Ciara Ladroma: Thank you. Andrea and Mona, do you want to add anything to that?

Mona Freedman: You also have to think about the future too, and where you want this to go. Because Andrea has some type of rheumatoid arthritis from her dad. They think that that came from that side, but she's functioning now, but she's having some pain with it, and trying to keep it under control. But what happens if she can't physically do it? She can always guide someone, and supervise, or she needs to cut down hours. So, you want to build your team so everything that you started doesn't fade away, and that it can keep going as the company grows because the need is there, obviously for Andrea and for your company.

Andrea Freedman: Also, me and my dad were also talking about down the road, that I would still be working, but I would be a supervisor. So supervise the other groomers, still be there, probably maybe grooming two days, three days a week, and just limit my hours. But I'll still be there to tell people what to do, how to do it, but the business will still be there, and making money and everything. It's just my life is going to change as I get older.

Mona Freedman: And she's going to use the ABLE program, she's in the process now. Marilyn able to be able to put some of that money into an account, so she'll be able to access it, as she gets older and has her resources, which is a great program. So you should look into ABLE, also.

Ciara Ladroma: Thank you. I know that both of you are so intentional with the growth process of building your team, and growing your business. Andrea, do you ever see yourself with the instructor that taught you in that one-on-one setting. Do you ever see yourself in the future as being that potential instructor, who works with one person at a time, or maybe having an apprentice?

Andrea Freedman: I did think about it a couple of times here and there. Actually, maybe teaching someone how to groom, it's hard for me to teach someone to groom. But we did consider maybe having a school for me to have people come to my store, and me teach them how to groom since there is no grooming school out there. I was actually in the last grooming school before they shut a lot of them down. So, I was thinking about that, but it might be down the road. Right now, my life is too busy grooming, so I don't really have time to sit there and teach anybody.

Ciara Ladroma: The future looks like there's some option for you to expand in multiple pathways there, to be a teacher, and a business owner. And to really create that new and future grooming community, which is really neat.

Andrea Freedman: Yeah.

Ciara Ladroma: Something that people ask in previous webinars is what advice do you have for them? So we'll go with Lorraine. Lorraine, what advice do you have for people who want to start a business and are either at that, "I have this idea and I feel like it can be really good, I just don't know where to start."

Lorraine Woodward: Well, I first personally believe in dreams. And I believe that we need to all think about what are those things in life that bring us joy, and happiness, and really looking at from a business perspective, what you want to be a part of. Again, as I did when after college, really have to sit down, and look into my soul, and my abilities, and being able to identify what I was good at. In the beginning, I really did think I could do it all. And I couldn't, I am not a proofreader at all, I will read something, and not recognize that it's misspelled, or the capitalization is not correct. And proofreading is an important part of communications.

Lorraine Woodward: So, I really think to look hard at what you enjoy, I also look at sharing those ideas with others. Like I said, with Adele, I would've never thought about starting my own business. I didn't have the confidence, it's just not something I even thought of until she brought it to me. And so now I have been sharing my hopes, and dreams with a lot of people, and this is a personal one, but I hope that it will inspire people to fulfill their hopes and dreams.

Lorraine Woodward: So as a child, I could relate to Snoopy of the comic strip Peanuts, and for whatever reason, that character of Snoopy made me happy. So I had in my mind that I wanted to meet Charles Schulz, that that was now call it a big dream, realistic or not. But that was my dream. And I told people that for years, and years, and years. And then when I was 23, somebody called me up, and said, "There's a meeting in Santa Rosa, California that we would like you to attend. We have set up what they called a grip-n-grin meeting. It's a two-minute introductory meeting with Charles Schulz. You will go there, you will shake his hand, you will get your picture, and you will leave." I'm like, "Okay, dream come true."

Lorraine Woodward: Well, the dream was actually bigger because Mr. Schulz, he asked me to call him Sparky. How cool is that, to call this person that you have such great respect for to say, "This is my nickname that I ask people to call me who know me." So Sparky had just had a stroke, and he had never talked to anybody about disability, and what it was like because his life had changed. And anyway, the long story of it is we work together for two years, and it was an incredible gift that would not have happened if I didn't share it with others.

Lorraine Woodward: So my latest gift is the house behind me, is known as a little yellow house. It's in Conway, Arkansas. It's a model house for the short-term rental industry of what a short-term rental industry property would look like if it had mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive access along with our senior access. So we have this property. Well, now, my dream is to have more properties. So I'm reaching out to Coach Mike Krzyzewski, the former Duke basketball coach, to build a little blue house in Durham, North Carolina, near the Children's Hospital. Because there's always a need for accessible rentals near hospitals.

Lorraine Woodward: Nothing has come true yet, but I've put it out there. And that's what I think is important as we look at our careers, as we look at growing our businesses, to be sure to share those professional ideas and needs. And Andrea, I know you're going to find a groomer, because you're putting it out there, and sometimes in the least way that you find somebody may come to you. In fact, a friend of ours just got a puppy, and he needed a groomer. And do you know where they found that groomer? In a grocery store.

Lorraine Woodward: I promise you that they were in a grocery store. This family had a service dog exactly like Michael's puppy that they just got. They started talking about dogs, and they needed to find a groomer. And in the grocery store at Harris Teeter in Raleigh, North Carolina, he found his groomer. So, keep sharing, because when you share those things, people go, "Wait a minute, I know somebody." In fact, why I'm here today is to talk and to share. But I don't know the sponsoring organization that is a part of this, and I want to get to know more people, so to share our ideas, to see change. And my biggest thing is for people to share, share it with your church, share it with your family, share it with your next door neighbor, share at the grocery store. And that would be my recommendation.

Mona Freedman: The internship and volunteer.

Ciara Ladroma: I really love that, Lorraine, because I believe that things, the moment you share it, or speak it out loud, you bring life into that idea, or you bring life into that ask that you're asking your community. Thank you. Andrea, you started your first business when you were 17. What advice do you have for entrepreneurs who are maybe at that age now, or they're in their twenties thinking, "How am I going to do this? I'm only 21." What advice do you have for younger entrepreneurs?

Andrea Freedman: Well, I started doing internships, so my first career was when I was 17 years old. I owned my own candy business. And to really start to start the business up, I actually did an internship at another candy store. He was the one who actually taught me how to make candy, do the cash registers, do ice cream, even he even taught me to do the lottery. And then he liked me so much that he was going to hire me, but at that point, I already was wanting to do a candy business.

Andrea Freedman: So I started the candy kiosk for Andy's candies. I started small, and then when that was done, then I went into a flower store. And we asked them if it's okay if I have a spot in their flower shop. And they said, "Sure." So really, you have to start small, and you have to do internships. And that's how I started my own businesses, is to do those things. Then you work yourself up, and then that's when you rent stores, and you pay the rent, and then you go from there, and then you become successful. So you got to have to really start small, and just ask around what place can I go to do internship to see if I like it? And then you go from there.

Ciara Ladroma: Oh, no, go ahead.

Lorraine Woodward: I'm so glad that you mentioned internships, because when I went to D.C. my junior year in college, it was for an internship. And I learned so much from that internship about me, and my skills, that every year since I hire an intern. That has been my commitment to education, and helping somebody in their careers, is by having interns. And it's a hard thing as a CEO, there's a lot of work in bringing on an intern, because it is about education, and awareness, and teaching. But internships are valuable for both parties. And again, it's looking at making it mutually beneficial for both parties. But internships was what got me of where I am today. So thank you for bringing that up.

Ciara Ladroma: Perfect. And I heard from all of you, "Just ask." Ask a question, ask how you can learn more, ask who you can meet, and just put out there what your goals are. Because it is way more powerful to share it than to keep it to yourself. All right, I am going to share my screen again, so we can focus on the questions that have come in for today. Hold on one second. Perfect. Can you see that?

Mona Freedman: Yes.

Andrea Freedman: Yeah.

Ciara Ladroma: Okay. And before we head into the Q & A portion of today's session, I just would love for us to take a moment to thank Andrea, Lorraine, and Mona for sharing their stories and expertise with us. I encourage all of you to reach out, and learn more about Puppy Luv Dog Boutique, and Becoming Rentable, to build connections and community, and to just learn more about their businesses.

Ciara Ladroma: Now, personally, if you know someone who is a dog groomer in Andrea's area, reach out. And if you are looking to travel, or if you have an Airbnb or some sort of rental, and you want to make that accessible to more travelers, reach out to Lorraine. You can find their contact information on this slide, as well as their business websites. And then, Mona, I just know that you have a pretty amazing event coming up. Do you want to share just a little bit about the World of Possibilities Disabilities Expos?

Mona Freedman: Yes, thank you. We have been running the World of Possibilities Disabilities Expos since 2004. My husband and I, we still do it with private funding, very little funding. We have free wheelchair repair, we have assistive and adaptive technology, sign language interpreters, personal care attendance in the bathrooms, vendors, community support agencies, all kinds of DME, durable medical equipment. We have fun, food, entrepreneurs with disabilities, artists with disabilities. And it is a huge day of resources, networking, fun, laughing, crying, having feeling like you can belong, and meet people. And people will walk out with a bag full of things that they could use as resources, and they feel that they've become empowered, and they're not getting to the point of, "Fix me." Because once you get to that point it's very, very difficult.

Mona Freedman: It is for children, adults, seniors, veterans, baby boomers, people that headed down that road. And it's for individuals with disabilities, and those who serve and love them. So we will have administrators and everyone. So people, sometimes they stay the whole day, and get a little workshop information, or a demo, and sometimes they just run in, and grab resources and leave. But it is worldofpossibilities.org.

Mona Freedman: I probably have done about a hundred of them, but we have chosen Prince George's County, is in the nation's capital area. It has a good reach, nice central location. And the next closest expos would be way up in New York, or Chicago. So it is worth the trip, they are regional, and they are cross disabilities. It is for any, and all disabilities, cognitive, medical, physical, learning, anything. So everybody has something in common if you are in that world, or that maze of disabilities. So, thank you for letting me tell everyone.

Ciara Ladroma: It's April 22nd.

Mona Freedman: Thank you, Andrea. It's April 22nd, at the Samuel Riggs Alumni Center College Park University, big university, lots of accessible parking. And it's really worth the trip if you're in this region, Cherry Blossom time, so you can come into the D.C. Area, it's very nice time a year.

Ciara Ladroma: Thank you so much for sharing about that expo. Ruth did drop a link where you can learn more about it, register, and go visit. So here are the contact information for Andrea, Mona, and Lorraine, please reach out to them, connect, grow your networks, and see how you can help each other. And then, if you have any questions for Molly and I, or if you'd like to connect with us, please feel free to reach out to us via email. Molly will go ahead and drop our contact information into the chat box. And then let's get into the Q & A. Molly, do you have any questions, or comments for the group that we can chat about?

Molly Sullivan: Yes. Hello, everybody. This is Molly Sullivan speaking. With Griffin-Hammis, Ciara's colleague. And first of all, just a quick, huge thank you both to Lorraine, and Andrea, and Mona for sharing all of that wonderful information. I've just been sitting here smiling from ear to ear, enjoying everything you've been sharing. There's a few questions that have come in. So the first one goes back to a little bit earlier in our time together, and Lorraine, if you could keep your ears extra open for this one. I think this may have been related to something you shared, not positive, but the question was, and this is in quotes, "what brings me joy, brings me happiness. Is that an assessment?"

Lorraine Woodward: An assessment? I don't know.

Ciara Ladroma: You had brought it up when we were talking about your business at first, and realizing your happiness. Are you at your best is at the beach house?

Lorraine Woodward: Right. And I guess I looked at it in the sense of, I'm starting a new venture, and what do I want in that new venture, and creating that adventure or venture. And for me, it needed to reflect on things that bring me joy, and make me happy, knowing that that's an important part of my growth in my business. That I can bring my team members, my community, the work that we do. May there be an element of joy in, and purpose, as we build what we're doing. So, a personal assessment? Yes. As well as to degree of professional one, but yes.

Molly Sullivan: Great. Wonderful. Thank you. So the next question is if either of you have ever tried to recruit using vocational rehabilitation in terms of growing your team?

Lorraine Woodward: I have not.

Mona Freedman: Not yet.

Andrea Freedman: No, not yet.

Molly Sullivan: Okay. There were a couple comments in the chat box, just a few people mentioned that. And we've got a number of people from different states with vocational rehabilitation agencies in different states. And a few people pointed out that the vocational rehabilitation agencies often have on-the-job training support. So, that was put out there as a possibility, and will pay for training.

Molly Sullivan: Great. I've got one more question, and that is, if you think about the evolution of your venture, let's go with your current business, since you all have such wonderful multiple experiences. With your current venture, how has your team evolved or changed? If you think about who was providing you support when you were just building this idea, and putting the idea together, in that planning stage, versus how did your team change when you were launching your business. And, has your team then also then evolved now that you're maintaining and growing your business?

Lorraine Woodward: I know for me, there has been an evolution, an evolution of long-term commitment. Again, our first year and three quarters has been focused on developing who we are, what we want to do, and how to go about it. There's been a degree of philosophical discussions in creating what Becoming Rentable could look like, should look like, is looking like. And now that we are moving forward with new relationships in the business community, our team members, they're changing in what roles they play, and their own responsibilities, their participation are not participation. It's also changing in reflecting about current needs, and future needs. We know that we are known as a tech company, which really surprises me because I'm not technical. I'm the least technical, probably of anybody out there. I'm like, I asked Alexander, "Can you help mom on her phone? I pushed a button."

Lorraine Woodward: So I don't think technology in that way, but you use technology to access our website, and it's geared towards a technology focus. And our needs from a technological standpoint are now in need a lot more than they were in our first year, because we were in the development stage of who we want to be. So now, we're looking into areas of development that we didn't look at as a need, and now not only as a need, but as hiring out to do those services. And looking at the dynamics of our team, the personality of our team, and really look at the different levels of how we communicate, when we work together, when we meet, and all of those things. So we're new, and so we're still evolving, but that's been in the last six months, a big part of our growth and development is that the team experience, and what that looks like. And it looks very different today than it did six months ago, and I'm sure we'll look very different in the next six months.

Molly Sullivan: Great. Thanks for that. Lorraine.

Mona Freedman: Jump in for a second. With Andrea's team, she's been doing this for four years. So the team that got her started, her family, and those supports, she's using that less and less now. She's really become much more independent, less questions, less support. And not everybody wants to grow, and grow, and grow, there are lots of companies that she could probably someday open up franchises, or places all over, and grow that way. But it really depends on what you want, and how much growth you want. She wants to sustain this business, and make sure she can do it independently, her parents are getting older. We're older than Lorraine, so it's not like the team may not grow, except for maybe an employee.

Andrea Freedman: A lot of times what's also good, including the grooming business, it might not be good to have a franchise, or a second store. It might always be good just to have one store, but get more groomers, because there are stores that have 3, 4, groomers, but they have one store. So, sometimes in the grooming field is not the greatest of franchise because then your business goes downhill. So if you actually have one store, one business that the owner is there, then you'll be more successful, and more have more clients, and then you have more groomers in that one store.

Molly Sullivan: Wonderful. It's helpful to hear. It sounds for both of you, there's been some evolution in your team, and how you use them over time, which makes sense. Another question just came into the chat box. Ciara, do we have a couple of minutes for that? I think we're okay for time, yeah?

Ciara Ladroma: Yeah, I think so. And I think it would be great if it sounds like this connection could also go beyond a conversation here.

Molly Sullivan: Yeah.

Ciara Ladroma: So definitely, if you haven't already, take a picture of the screen that you're seeing, or write down the email for Andrea and Lorraine.

Molly Sullivan: Yeah. Wonderful. So, Brian, who is with an organization called Opportunity Development Center in Wisconsin. Was asking if you could share your timeframe from start to finish, when beginning your self-employment ventures. And before you answer, what I would also say is just a shout-out, to Brian. We've popped contact information for Andrea and Lorraine in the chat box. So you may want to reach out to them specifically if you want more than what we can share in the few minutes we left. But yeah. So Lorraine and Andrea, if you could share a little bit about your timeframe from start to finish... or not finish, start to now. Nothing is finished.

Lorraine Woodward: Right. For Woodward Communications, I knew that I wanted a full-time salaried position. So when Easterseals could only afford a part-time position, I moved forward very quickly in identifying my consulting services. Because I was not in a financial position to extend that lack of revenue for a long period of time. So it was a very short window, and I still paint canes. I've been doing that for, gosh, about 15 years. So, that was very quick too. It was more of a need, as my children were growing up, and they need a cane, I was looking at what kind of canes are out there for young men, and boys, and I didn't see anything.

Lorraine Woodward: So, I tend to look at what the needs are, and what's out there, and I jump on pretty quickly. Becoming Rentable has been the exception, that we really looked at a three-year window of building who we are, and have been more methodical about our business, and our approach. And looking at not focusing on the revenue first, which is not common in building a business. But I like to take different approaches. But I felt like that that's what we needed to do as we're tackling a new issue in a large industry.

Lorraine Woodward: So we're ahead of that time period, and we're adjusting accordingly. For example, we're just now unveiling our evaluation certification program for mobility. Although we have five areas of focus on our website, our cognitive, vision, and hearing are in third and fourth quarter development of this year. And our aging materials will be developed for first quarter of the next year. So, the evolution is really planning for the future. And we've put a lot more time in energy in identifying this business. By first ones we're pretty quick, in this one, I don't know if it's because I need more naps... no. Or what, but we're building this a little slower.

Molly Sullivan: Yeah, I hear that, a lot more development going into this business, for sure. And Andrea, what about you? What did your timeline look like?

Andrea Freedman: Well in 2019 before the pandemic, I actually learned how to bathe first, from about a year. Then after, when I started bathing dogs, learning how to blow dry, and bathe dogs, then I went to school. So, I did school about for 4 months, and then I graduated in December 2018, and then I started grooming from 2019. And then, I know a lot of people's business went out of business in 2020, but mine actually booms real quickly in 2020, because I was selling dog treats and dog food. So when you're allowed to sell that stuff, I was allowed to groom. So, I really became very busy around 2020, and that's really how my business started. But yeah, I started small, and I started bathing first, then I started grooming.

Molly Sullivan: Got it. Great. Thanks so much. Thank you both for your time in answering those questions. That's what we've got in the chat for now, Ciara.

Ciara Ladroma: Thank you, Molly. All right. I would love to share the upcoming events with the National Disability Institute team. And I won't go through all the detail here, but the team will put the link for the actual event page. So then you can go ahead, and register for all of these future events. But we have a session series on entrepreneurship, disability, and CDFIs with a session 3, 4, and 5 presented by Life Assets, Northwest Access Fund, and the Disability Opportunity Fund.

Ciara Ladroma: In April, we have an event called Creating Accessible Content for Content Creators, and that's presented by Results One LLC. Then, you'll see us again for another presentation on April 19th, and it's titled Business Feasibility and Creating a Plan. And that webinar, just like this, will feature two entrepreneurs who can share with us their real life experiences on this topic. And then, I am going to pass the screen over to the NDI team. Caroline, if you want to take over, that'd be great.

Caroline Bolas: Thank you so much, and just want to echo thank you to Mona, Andrea, and Lorraine for just an amazing presentation. Just so inspiring to hear what you achieved, and to know more about your business. I thank you for that. So, just a bit about the NDI small business team. Maybe you're sitting here thinking, "Gosh, I have an idea. I would love to start my own business," or, "I have started a business, but I would really love help to grow it, to build it." Or maybe you're working with somebody who is thinking about that, and you don't know where to start. So absolutely have a look at our website at www.disabilitysmallbusiness.org, or email our community navigator, Ruth Chavez, and that's rchavez@ndi-inc.org. And there you'll find lots of resources, and we'd love to connect with you to see how we can help you build and grow your business.

Caroline Bolas: Another potential help is with key financial health. So in order to grow a business, as we heard today, it's important to also think about the financial health of that business. We are currently running a cohort that one's full, but we do have a new series that is starting in the summer. So if you want to join a learning community that really focuses on things like pricing, and understanding your numbers, and how to pitch, and how to access capital, please feel free to email me. Caroline Bolas at cbolas@ndi-inc.org.

Caroline Bolas: A few other places you can find some resources really focusing on disability owned small businesses. One is our streaming TV channel. You can find this at www.disabilityowned.com. And then, we are partnering with Verizon Small Business, the Verizon Small Business Digital Ready Program, which provides free training, mentoring, business coaching, and grant opportunities. If you use the link, that is here, and we'll also put it in the chat box. Again, you can register for free and access those online learning tools that are very visual, short to the point, and really get the message across really well.

Caroline Bolas: And then if you haven't already, and you want to stay in the know, and learn about what else we are doing, please join our mailing list. And again, we put that link in the chat box. We are a small but mighty small business team. We have Nikki Powis, our director. We have Ruth, who as I said, if you want to connect to find out more about our resources, please contact Ruth. We have Alexis Jones, Lexi, who is the brains behind making sure our webinars, and everything else works smoothly. And myself, who provides support also to small businesses. So please do keep in touch.

Ciara Ladroma: I'm on mute. Sorry. Caroline, thank you so much. And again, thank you to Andrea, Lorraine, and Mona for sharing your expertise, and knowledge with us today. And please reach out to them to learn more about their business, and maybe just put out your ask, and your goals as well. All right, everyone, thank you for being here. We're going to go ahead, and stop the recording. I hope all of you have an amazing day, and an amazing rest of the week.

Mona Freedman: Thank you.