

BELEN'S SPEECH

"My name is Belen Hernandez and I want to thank you so much for this award! Actually, I'd like to accept it on behalf of my entire class. We all have these big dreams for our families. Together at the Community Business Academy we have learned how to put in the work to make it a reality. For those of you that don't know me, I was living on the street on drugs 5 1/2 years ago with my partner Henry. Just a quick reminder for those of you who have family with an addiction. I want to give some hope because we can recover! Just one year after we got clean, I had a baby! To my surprise I had a beautiful son on the Spectrum. He is autistic with a speech impairment. Raising a child with a disability is a challenge in itself. But really, he fuels our motivation. We, like any parent, want him to have the best life possible. I want us to be present for him more instead of working long hours, away from home to make ends meet. When his father and I are gone, we want him to be taken care of financially. Our dream is to start a Security Company for Film Production on Set. Although we knew we wanted to work for ourselves, we really had no previous knowledge about what it takes to start and run a business. At LIFT, I received one-on-one coaching to help me organize my plans. LIFT's monthly coaching program helps families manage personal finances and set goals. My coach later informed me about The Community Business Academy. Since enrolling in the CBA, I've learned how to structure my business, start-up costs, wages and cash flow. We also discussed what our clients' demographics are and what our competition looks like. These are topics my partner and I really didn't have before the class. I enjoyed researching details about Security for homework. I set time aside each week away from my busy life to nurture this idea and really bring it to fruition.

I am so grateful for this experience. Thanks again for this honor and for allowing me to participate in this course. I've since passed my licensing test for Private Patrol Operator, and I am waiting to hear back from the Bureau of Security and Investigative services. Very soon I will be having the grand opening of my business."

Belen Hernandez
Entrepreneur, Class of 2023

