



LAW OFFICES OF
TEXAS RIOGRANDE LEGAL AID, INC.
LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO MICRO-ENTERPRISES PROJECT
PROYECTO DE ASISTENCIA LEGAL PARA MICRO-EMPRESA
1719 MATAMOROS
P.O. BOX 888
LAREDO, TEXAS 78042-0888

Tel. (956) 727-5191 Fax (956) 727-8371 (800) 369-2741 email: dsong@trla.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Diana Song

(956) 727-5191

February 17, 2004

Local Small Business Legal Assistance Program Contributes to National Event

Laredo, Texas - The Legal Assistance to Micro-Enterprise Project of Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. was selected by a national association, the Association for Enterprise Opportunity, to be a member of a national Learning Cluster focused on rural policy and microenterprise development.

The Legal Assistance to Micro-Enterprise Project (LAMP) has exhibited consistent leadership in rural microenterprise development. As a result, LAMP has been selected to exchange effective practices with peers through the Rural Policy Learning Cluster. LAMP also has the honor of hosting the first meeting of this Learning Cluster. Members of the Learning Cluster will be traveling from different parts of the country to attend a series of seminars and workshops scheduled for February 25 – 27, 2004, at La Posada Hotel in Laredo.

Thousands of low-income people, women, minorities, and persons with disabilities have achieved the American dream of owning their own business through the help of microenterprise development. Microenterprise development creates new jobs, increases tax revenue, and preserves local assets. “This Learning Cluster focuses on how microenterprise development programs around the country are increasing public awareness of the value of supporting locally owned, small businesses. The ideas we exchange are going to be distributed to the Association for Enterprise Opportunity’s (AEO) national membership of over 460 microenterprise organizations across the country,” said Diana Song, Project Director of LAMP.

-more-

Local Program Contributes to National Event – Page 2

LAMP is a community development program of Texas RioGrande Legal Aid established in 2001. LAMP provides free legal services to low-income and disadvantaged clients in a 68-county service area that covers the southwestern third of the state of Texas, including the entire Texas-Mexico border region. The 68 counties include the cities of San Antonio, Austin, Victoria, Corpus Christi, Laredo, El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley. Clients receive one-on-one legal counseling on the laws that may affect new and existing businesses, including contracts, employment, partnership and corporation, and commercial landlord and tenant laws. To qualify for free civil legal services, clients must have an income at or below 125 percent of federal poverty guidelines.

“Microenterprise development programs are a highly effective approach to fighting poverty and lifting communities,” said Bill Edwards, Executive Director of AEO. “Approximately 2-3 million people nationwide are improving their economic prospects through microenterprise businesses. Whether the business is the sole source of family income or a crucial supplement to family earnings, microenterprise development has put many low-income families on the road to self-sufficiency. ”

Facts About Microenterprise:

- A microenterprise is defined as a business with five or fewer employees that requires less than \$35,000 in start-up capital and does not have access to traditional business development services.
- Microenterprise development programs assist these very small businesses by providing business training, technical assistance, access to credit, access to markets, economic literacy and asset development.
- An estimated 700 microenterprise development programs in the U.S. are creating jobs, generating income, building assets, and enhancing skills.
- A significant proportion of assisted microentrepreneurs are individuals facing barriers presented by race, gender, ethnicity, income, job market fluctuations, or location.
- Studies show that more than 70% of low-income entrepreneurs experience gains in their household income with an average increase of nearly \$8,500 annually over five years. In addition, more than half of low-income microentrepreneurs have household income gains large enough to move above the poverty line.

For more information about the Legal Assistance to Micro-Enterprise Project and local microenterprise development efforts or to schedule an interview, please contact Diana Song at (956) 727-5191.

###

AEO's mission is to support the development of strong and effective U.S. microenterprise programs to assist underserved entrepreneurs in starting, stabilizing, and expanding businesses. To learn more about AEO or microenterprise, please visit our website at www.microenterpriseworks.org.