

From entrepreneurial passion to practice: Insights from Start:ME Micro-Business Accelerator in Atlanta, USA

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Northern Institute and Australian Population Association seminar

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Presentation outline



Background to the project in Atlanta

Start: ME Accelerator overview

Findings

What makes a successful micro-business accelerator?





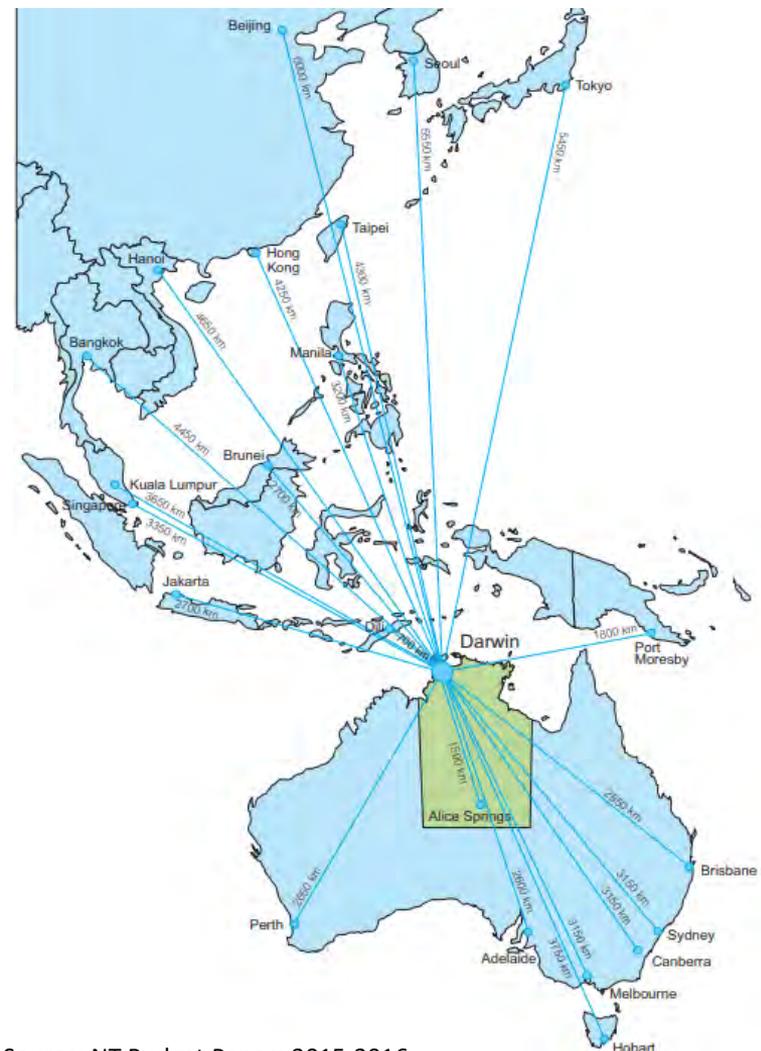
Source/credit: Canva 2021.

30% migrant-born in Darwin vs. 29% in all Australia (2021 Census)

Migrant women own and operate ~ 8% of all 10,466 businesses in Darwin (2016 Census)

Did not arrive as business migrants

Migrant and Australian-born women entrepreneurs most likely to be solopreneurs



Source: NT Budget Papers 2015-2016.

Exploratory project on migrant women entrepreneurship, Darwin 2017-18

Diverse industries of operation

Food & beverage: @ markets, catering, selling on FB, cafes

Services: cleaning, hairdressing & beauty, migration advice, post-school classes for children, professional editing

Healthcare & soc. assistance: health clinics, family daycare centres

Motivations

Discrimination in paid work

Financial imperative when foreign qualifications are not recognised

Business owners in the family (role models)

Intrinsic passion for business



BUSINESS TRAINING



MENTORSHIP



PEER-SELECTED
GRANT CAPITAL

2013-22 Start:ME Overview

OUR OUTCOMES

Since 2013, we've built a community that is helping entrepreneurs thrive.



351

MICROBUSINESSES SERVED



\$14.7M

ANNUAL REVENUE



566

JOB'S CREATED OR RETAINED



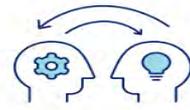
83%

VENTURES LED BY
PEOPLE OF COLOR



71%

FEMALE-LED BUSINESSES



75+

VOLUNTEER MENTORS



65

BRICK AND MORTARS



67%

ALUMNI ACTIVELY OPERATING



\$322K

CAPITAL AWARDED

A 'peek' behind the stats



A small paid team of community passionates @ Emory University

Paid program coordinators in Atlanta communities where

Start:ME is offered

Trust and shared vision with community-based partners and funders that enabling micro/small business can contribute to economic mobility

Year-round promotion and support of participants & alumni enterprises, highlighting mentors and funders





CLARKSTON



**Friends
of Refugees**

EAST LAKE

East Lake
FOUNDATION

SOUTHSIDE

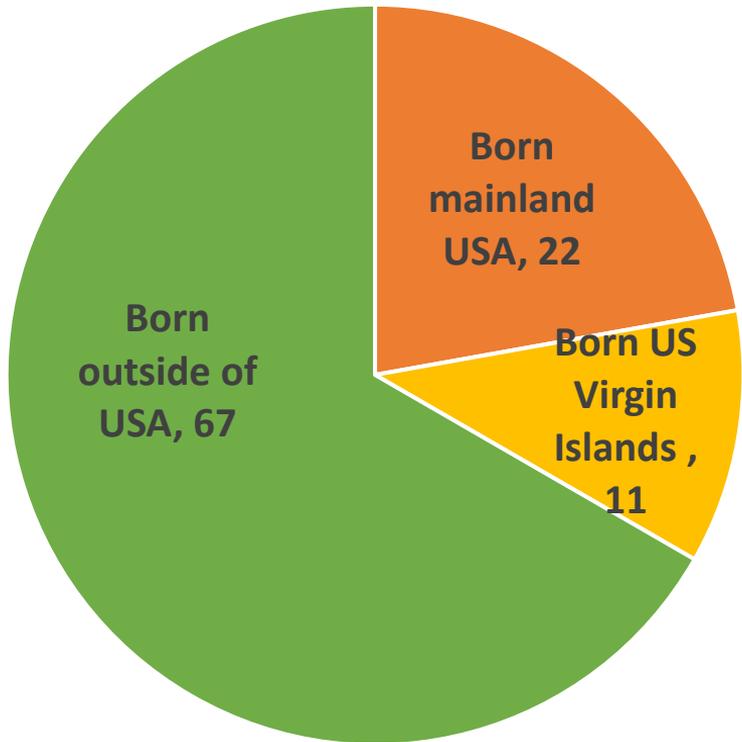


PURPOSE
BUILT
SCHOOLS
ATLANTA
Innovating schools. Inspiring minds.



EMORY
GOIZUETA
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

% Place of birth of women interviewees in Start:ME



Born outside USA – Asia 42%, Africa & Middle East - 17%, Europe - 17%, Caribbean - 17%, South America 8%

Born in mainland USA & VIs – 83% visible minorities



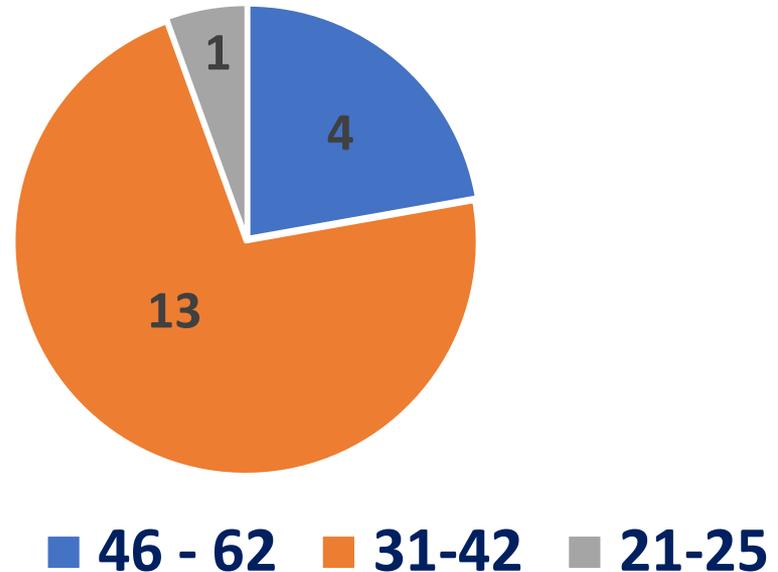
Family situation, age group when in Start:ME



14 out of 18 women interviewees (77.7%) have at least 2 children, most of them still at home

13 women were married (72%), 11% single parents, 11% single

Age group distribution of women interviewees when in Start:ME



Source: Author's interviews with Start:ME participants, 2023.

Types of businesses in Start:ME

Foreign-born

◆ Fitness training ◆ Home-based ethnic bakery ◆ Cooking classes ◆ Mural painting ◆ Production & sale of alternatives to plastic packaging ◆ Book distribution to community partners to improve children's literacy ◆ Design and sale of items for home

USA-born, Virgin Islands-born

◆ Jewellery store ◆ Sporting club for Muslim women and girls ◆ Farm production & sale ◆ Café & florist & community events space ◆ Clothes re-sale (online retail store & community events)

“I have no idea how to run a business. I think everything till that time was being led by an idea and a vision and my passion” [past participant]

Main motivations to apply to Start:ME

Main motivations to apply to Start:ME

- Navigate business environment in a new country
- Develop business 'infrastructure' in an existing business
- Wanting to apply for a **Start:ME grant**
- Practice confidence (pitching) to take advantage of opportunities
- To become more informed so that a family business can be more effective in creating intergenerational wealth
- Tap into networking opportunities

Is participation worthwhile?



Weekly Start:ME classes: participants, mentors, core Emory team and program lead, community coordinators

“I learned so much from the program! I wish I could take it again!”

- How to create a business plan with financials that will support the vision for the business
- **Clarity and rigour:** thinking like a business person and not as a person ‘merely’ passionate about an idea or a cause
- Business storytelling & confidence
- New relationships & community to make better/more business happen

A university-led micro-business accelerator?

- Building and fostering relationships with local stakeholders who share the same vision and come onboard to empower migrant and minority micro-entrepreneurs
- Paid management team, coordinators, program leads
- Curriculum combining ‘theory’, hands-on mentoring, many public speaking/pitching practices, access to financing
- Great (social) media coverage
- ‘Care’ and ongoing engagement with program alumni (return as mentors, speak well about Start:ME outside of it, value Start:ME funded executive education @ Emory)





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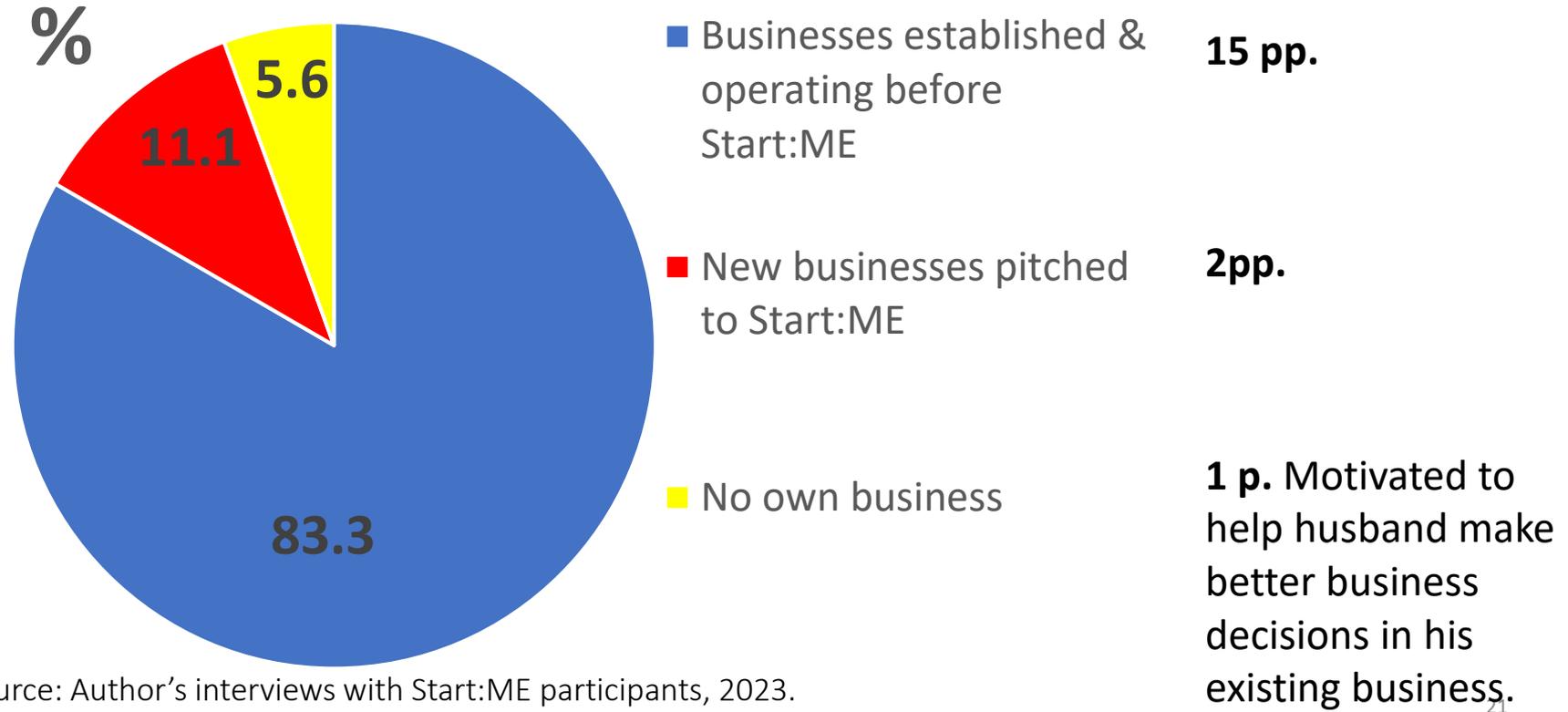
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Thank you



All photos: Tiffany Powell Photography

When were businesses started – women interviewees



Source: Author's interviews with Start:ME participants, 2023.

Region of birth of migrant-born women interviewees

Asian-born 42%

African & Middle East-born 17%

European-born 17%

Caribbean-born 17%

South American-born 8%

Virgin Islands and US-mainland born women - 83% minorities

Thinking in progress - for Darwin

- To run an effective business accelerator, a collective effort and ongoing commitment are needed
- Choice of partners and funders critical (must care and share vision of economic empowerment/to improve community well-being, have the bandwidth to commit)
- US examples of other Start:MEs (one ran by a university lecturer with a teaching relief fizzled out; another run by a university x community development agency with a combination of internal and external funding is flourishing)

Is own business a means to social mobility?

- Not a question asked directly
 - Comments from some interviewees suggest they agree
-
- Learning about business through StartME sets me up to start building intergenerational wealth for family (Myanmar refugee)
 - Owning a business is the quickest way to achieve social mobility for second generation migrants (second-gen Ecuadorian migrant)
 - Skills developed in StartME while working on my business helped me get promoted in my f/t job (Jamaican migrant)
 - Coming from impoverished background, I set up a coffee shop in a similar area in ATL, which is one of the local food deserts

Selection of best/hardest learning in StartME – mentees – cont'd



“(...) the legal paperwork around the business is *hard* because I was having a difficult time deciding if I should be a nonprofit or an LLC.” *past participant and mentor*

Selection of best/hardest learning in Start:ME – mentees



“(...) I got a clear business plan because they would *force* you to make a business plan. (...) I never thought how much is my cost per plate? But Start:ME made me calculate that in detail so I know exactly how much I'm spending (...), how much I'm making.” *past participant*

Selection of best/hardest learning in Start:ME – mentees – cont'd



“It was the pitching your business to investors. (...) we had to stand up. And for me, *I hate public speaking* (...) we just spoke at a conference (...), but because I spoke at Start:ME (...) it wasn't so bad because I've done this before.” *past participant*