

Deaf Can! Coffee opens new café

DEAF CAN! Coffee, a social enterprise company empowered by the Social Enterprise Boost Initiative (SEBI) of the JN Foundation, officially launched its E3 Café, located at the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf on Cassia Park Road in Kingston, recently.

The E3 Café provides a spacious customised area and is an excellent location for business meetings, conferences and casual functions. The facility also boasts modern amenities, such as high-speed Wi-Fi access, a flat-screen television for presentations, and state-of-the-art coffee-making equipment.

The establishment was officially opened recently at a 'sip n' sign' event held on the campus of the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf.

Blake Widmer, co-founder of Deaf Can! Coffee, said, "The E3 Café, which stands for 'engaging, equipping, and empowering', is one means to provide job opportunities for members of the deaf community.

"We want to engage deaf young persons, in the process, to learn about coffee, acquire the skills to be a great barista, and know how to serve customers with the skills and confidence which will lead them to be empowered," he said.

Widmer said that the café has a captive audience of some 50 students at the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf and that members of staff would either be students at the school or past students who recently graduated.

"Deaf Can! Coffee's growth can be attributed to several factors. One feature is primarily partnerships. This has allowed us to grow beyond our capacity. But, if we had to go out to purchase equipment and rent space ... it would take a lot more capital investment and time. Therefore, what we have done is to partner with existing coffee shops and cafés," Widmer informed.

Consequently, during the past year and a half, Deaf Can! Coffee increased its partnerships from one to 11 in Kingston and St Andrew, St Catherine, St Elizabeth and St James. Some of its outlets are located at the Embassy of the United

States of America, Toyota Coffee House, Jake's Hotel, Script Café, Jablum Coffee House at the NCB Towers, Morgan's Creek, and Bookophilia. The company also operates a mobile unit.

"Another factor which contributed to our growth was the networking we built from the social enterprise community, primarily through SEBI and the JN Foundation. Through networking, we learned what they were doing, what worked for them, and we were able to build awareness about our products and services through the Buy Social campaign," he explained.

Opal Whyte, project manager of SEBI, said that the new facility was another revenue stream for Deaf Can! Coffee.

EXCELLENT SERVICE

"What we say to prospective clients is that they can use the power in their purchase to create change by supporting E3 Café. They would be satisfying their needs for a private meeting space with great coffee [and] excellent service, and their purchases would stretch beyond to impact the entire deaf community," she explained.

For the past six years, through the JN Foundation and USAID, SEBI has mobilised investment, enterprise development, employment, and revenue, particularly in underserved communities across the country. SEBI has trained managers and employees to achieve efficiency and growth in their social enterprises by improving their core business competences, such as management and marketing skills.

As a result, participants have enhanced their operations, generating in excess of \$37 million in revenue; created more than 15 new market-ready products and services; and have employed more than 100 community members. To date, approximately 24 social enterprises have benefited directly from SEBI through training and participation in its incubator programme.

SEBI is a joint initiative of the JN Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development.



Joni-Dale (right), owner of Morgan's Creek, orders her coffee from Wadia Barnes of Deaf Can! Coffee. The occasion was the official launch of Deaf Can! Coffee's E3 Café at a 'sip n' sign' event held recently at the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf on Cassia Park Road in Kingston.