ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

ALLPARENTSONDECK promotes parental involvement in schools. The SBDC helped it grow.

Back in 2009, Sharon Billings saw a brochure for the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). After working as a law librarian, a reservist with FEMA and later in FEMA’s human resources department, Sharon had recently put her career on hold to focus on her calling: a business she had started called ALLPARENTSONDECK.

When Sharon and her husband moved their family to Wisconsin from California, she was surprised to find that they were some of the only minority parents who regularly showed up at meetings and events at their daughters’ schools. Sharon realized a lot of people struggled to be involved and began thinking of ways to facilitate communication between parents and teachers. So she facilitated parent groups in libraries to figure out ways to strengthen communication between parents and teachers.

When Sharon saw that the Small Business Development Center was promoting an Entrepreneurial Training Program (ETP), it occurred to her it might be helpful. She had a vision for ALLPARENTSONDECK, but needed help prioritizing her ideas and wading through the initial logistics, like knowing where to register the company’s name.

She was not sure she’d be accepted into the program but made the call anyway. The process was surprisingly simple. The program, which lasted for several weeks, featured entrepreneurs from the community explaining different aspects of starting and growing a business, using their own experiences as examples and personalizing ideas for each person in the class.

Since then, as founder and president of ALLPARENTSONDECK, Sharon has consulted with local schools like LaFollette, Memorial and East High Schools, Toki Middle School and Orchard Ridge Elementary School. She plans events for schools and advocates for state legislators to recognize active parents and volunteers. “As parents, we need to see ourselves as the primary educators of our children,” she says.

In 2014, Sharon wrote, produced and published an original song to spread the message about the need for more parents to get involved in their children’s schools. The song, “We’re Getting Involved,” is available for sale on the ALLPARENTSONDECK website.

From the beginning, Linda Davis, business consultant at the UW-Madison Small Business Development Center, was very supportive of Sharon’s goal to form a national parent and student advocacy organization. Sharon and Linda have continued to meet regularly since 2009, which demonstrates the uniqueness of the free business consulting services offered through nationwide Small Business Development Centers. Sharon says Linda gives her direction and pushes her out of her comfort zone. “Since I’ve been working with her, my presentation is clearer, I know what I need to put on my website, I know what I should not be focusing on, I know what I want to offer in terms of products and what is not going to work.”

Linda also encouraged Sharon to spread awareness of ALLPARENTSONDECK by arranging local media interviews and reaching out to the Green Bay Packers, who ended up sponsoring ALLPARENTSONDECK billboards and newspaper advertising in 3 counties for 2 years. Sharon has been interviewed on WKOW 27 (ABC) News and LIFE 102.5 Christian Radio.

“Whenever I feel myself stuck, I just email Linda and say, ‘Can we meet?’” Sharon says. “And she always finds a way to meet with me. She’s an expert at what she does and she’s imparted her wisdom onto me.”