

By Lorrie DeFrank

A bilingual speech language pathologist, Lesley Summers holds three master's degrees. Yet she regards her recent participation in Jacksonville Women's Business Center's Entrepreneur Certificate Program (ECP) with providing the knowledge and skills she needed to grow and market her therapy business and understand different business models.

Owner of Luna Therapy Services that treats children ages 2 to 18, she had attended a couple of JWBC workshops and found them to be insightful. On a lark, she applied for an ECP scholarship and was surprised to be among the handful of women chosen to receive one. She got serious, adjusting her busy schedule to attend classes in the five courses as a cohort with the other recipients. "I highly recommend it to other therapists. The networking angle alone was invaluable," she said. "I felt a sense of belonging and camaraderie with the other business owners."



The program uses some of the scholarship funds raised from proceeds of JWBC's 20th anniversary celebration in 2024, according to Annie Grogan, JWBC director, who said managing the group like a cohort encouraged completion and fostered friendships.

"Lesley was chosen for a scholarship because she is bilingual and has a nice broad base of customers that she can help and she is helping children get along in school and in life," Grogan said.

"It was a time investment but the moments I spent collaborating with the other women attending the classes, listening to their life and business experiences, and networking with other business owners that are small and local were golden nuggets," she said. "I felt supported as a business owner."

Because she goes to her clients and does not have a shop, the program helped her think more creatively about her business structure. "The other women's stories were empowering. I'm not the only one struggling out there. I gained a deeper understanding of business practices, like making connections with accountants and with Hispanic business owners," said Summers, who joined the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to enhance her business.

Fluid in English and Spanish, Summers taught Spanish at elementary, high school and college levels for 17 years before switching careers to linguistics and specializing in bilingual speech therapy, a relatively new field. She still works part-time as a subcontractor in Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville's Arlington area.

Early influences were two aunts and an exchange student. She grew up in Tennessee with a deaf aunt who communicated through sign language. Another aunt married a man from Iran who spoke Farsi. In high school, an exchange student from Colombia, South America, lived with her family and taught her Spanish. “One of the things that intrigued me early on was that people can communicate differently,” Summers said. “I had a bit of linguistic diversity when my aunt learned Farsi and started teaching me, too. It’s really empowering to be able to communicate in a different way.”

By the time she applied for doctoral status in 2009, she imagined herself working only in linguistics. Two years later, she, her husband and then 14-year-old daughter moved to Jacksonville. While pursuing her Master of Speech Language Pathology at the University of Florida in Gainesville, she participated in Project Yucatan by partnering with audiology students and bringing the SLP program to Mexico. She went again this year and, coincidentally, one of her colleagues in JWBC’s Entrepreneur Certificate

Program, a Spanish teacher, wants to go with her next year, when Summers would like to sponsor SLP students from UF who are interested. Summers also holds master’s degrees in Hispanic linguistics from The University of Illinois in Chicago and in teaching, specializing in communications, from Webster University in St. Louis.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Summers had been working full time as an SLP in public schools and part time as a bilingual SLP in a private practice. In 2021 she started Luna Therapy Services—named after her dog—where she sees children in their natural environments, usually their homes. “This is the optimal place where you can see the child communicating,” she said. “I’ll see a child grow from two words to 40 in a matter of a few weeks.”

Trained in the Hanen approach, an early language stimulation program that empowers caregivers, Summers also coaches parents. Her business accepts Florida’s Step Up for Students Scholarship. She gets clients mostly through word of mouth and preschool screenings. Summers maintains that when you are a business owner, you have to network, for which she is grateful for her JWBC experience.

She said she gained useful information from all the sessions—Marketing Matters, Financial Matters, Legal Matters, Customer Development and Venture Leadership. Since taking Marketing Matters, she has realized the effectiveness of beefing up her social media presence. Legal Matters helped her understand the structure of an LLC and made her more aware of different business types.

Participating in the scholarship program inspired her to share her knowledge of communication with other women business owners and she would consider giving back to JWBC by facilitating sessions.

“I see myself being a resource, especially for families that speak other languages, particularly Spanish, in the community,” she said. “I also envision helping bilingual clinicians be more prominent and more of a resource in general in the community.”

How to contact Lesley Summers:

Bilingual Speech Language Pathologist

Owner, Luna Therapy Services

(904) 431-7276

lesleysummers.slp@gmail.com

www.lunatherapyjax.com