

BRONX*Times*

Nonprofit helps south Bronx small businesses in struggle for survival

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By [Jason Cohen](#) Posted on [April 22, 2020](#)



Angiolina Castillo, who owns a driving school and restaurant with her husband Peter and is struggling during the crisis.

Photo courtesy Whedco

Small businesses are struggling throughout the borough during the COVID-19 crisis, but the south Bronx, a low-income area with many undocumented people and food deserts, is hurting even more.

The nonprofit Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco) at 50 East 168th St., is doing its best to help people during COVID-19. Marco Castro, who is WHEDco's senior program manager for community development, has been meeting with business owners and trying to find short term solutions for their problems.

However, Castro knows there is no panacea. Working in the poorest Congressional district in the country with an average household income of \$25,000, the picture is quite bleak right now, he said.

"It's a very difficult time for this community," he commented.

Castro explained that while the money from the stimulus package for small businesses ran out last week, many in the area did not receive funds or are ineligible because they are undocumented. The staff at WHEDco is encouraging people to apply for a grant from the chamber of commerce, which does not exclude undocumented people.

WHEDco is also providing legal assistance through a partnership with Volunteers for Legal Service and rolling out a partnership with Start Small Think Big to connect businesses to one-on-one financial management assistance next week.



Closure notice from businesses on Jerome Ave

Photo courtesy Whedco



Closure notice from businesses on Jerome Ave

Photo courtesy Whedco



Shot of closed businesses on E170 Street

Photo courtesy Whedco



Angiolina working in the restaurant

Photo courtesy Whedco

It is also [hosting a webinar](#) with Start Small Think Big April 30 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. to help address common questions small business owners have about contract obligations and financial options. Businesses can call 347-906-2335 to schedule a call with a lawyer or a financial counselor or to register for the webinar.

Many business owners are scraping by, while others have shuttered.

“They know it’s really tough because they still have to pay rent and bills,” Castro explained.

One of those struggling business owners WHEDco works with is husband and wife Peter and Angiolina Castillo. They rent out two storefronts on Jerome Avenue in the same building, the Jerome Auto Driving School and Angiolina’s Restaurant.

They closed March 20 and had to lay off staff. Angiolina said the landlord has started harassing her as well.

“I’m scared to come back,” Angiolina said. “I don’t know if we’re going to sell enough to pay utilities and our employees.

They applied for money from the first stimulus package, but did not receive anything. They hop that with the \$500 billion package passed today, they will get the funds they need.

The eatery has been open for three years, but they have never dealt with anything like this since they’ve been established.

“I’ve been trying to get a loan,” she stressed. “We don’t have help or savings from the restaurant.”

Peter explained they owe about \$9,000 in rent and are not sure how they will pay it or if the landlord will forgive it.

“We’re hoping to get some money for the employees, but nothing came to fruition,” he said. “We don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Link: <https://www.bxtimes.com/nonprofit-helps-south-bronx-small-businesses-in-struggle-for-survival/#3>