

Case study on a Newbury Park social business earns national award for CI instructor and graduate student

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"We have an Instructor's Manual and the students read the Case Study," Forrester, 24, explained. "We created a guide for what the class can discuss after the students read about the case. It can be used for a course on nonprofits, social business or a course involving disabilities, for example."

Black Sheep Food Co. is still being developed by Newbury Park entrepreneur Cindy Liu, who plans to employ people with disabilities to make non-perishable food that customers can purchase either over the internet or from a store.

"My dream location is to have a bricks-and-mortar space where we can manufacture products and so some packaging," Liu said. "There would be a window into the commercial kitchen where people can see our employees working, and a tasting room in front."

Ballesteros-Sola explained that a social business is a for profit business created to address a social cause while being financially sustainable. In the case of Black Sheep Food Co., the social good is two-pronged.

"They would make preserves and other non-perishable food," Ballesteros-Sola. "They would use perfectly edible food that would otherwise be discarded by farmers and stores. This reduces food waste."

Ballesteros-Sola and Forrester also liked Liu's personal story. Liu and her husband's first child, Samantha, now 5, was born with Down Syndrome. Looking ahead to her daughter's future, Liu developed a passion to help those with disabilities, whose unemployment rate is about 60 to 70 percent, she said.

"We want to shift cultural attitudes," Liu said. "There is a prejudice when it comes to individuals with disabilities. When we had Sammy, the only thing I could think of that would be available as an occupation for her was as a bagger in a grocery store. The culture needs to shift and the laws need to shift."

Liu, who plans to launch her company in late 2017, is a community partner with the California Institute for Social Business (CISB) at CSUCI.

The CISB is dedicated to teaching, research and development of social businesses. The CISB is a legacy of Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, Ph.D., a champion and pioneer of social business who collaborated with CSUCI in 2010 to found the CISB.