

“ We envision a world where people who face barriers to employment achieve personal, economic, and collective empowerment through self-employment.

Reclaiming Employment offers self-employment support for people with mental health challenges around work. It was designed by people who have been there: our team members have personal experiences with mental health systems and business ownership.

This report includes data from 68 users who participated in a six-month pilot study of Reclaiming Employment. The trial was designed to gather user feedback and measure outcomes of people who desired to become self-employed or grow an existing business.

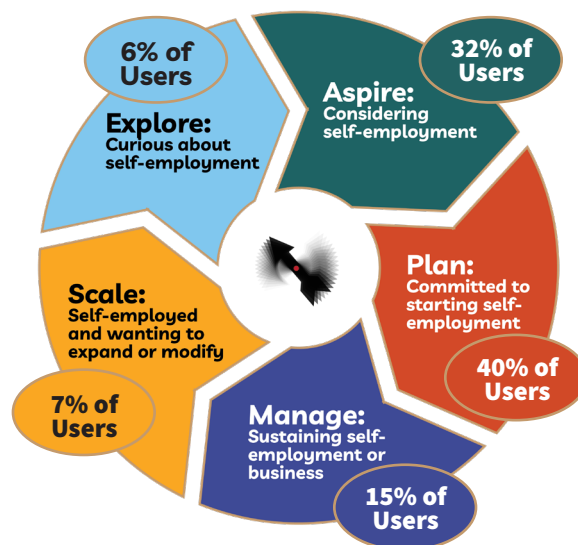
“ It helps to know there is a resource I can use when I am ready to return to work and be self-employed and there are others doing the same.

Community Input Drives Design

Reclaiming Employment was developed using participatory action research, collaborating with individuals who benefit from the research. It was designed to provide choice in selection of content, order and pace of completion, and level of engagement.

Support for Every Stage

Users started at various stages of business maturity.



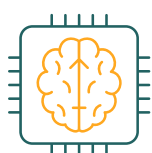
Self-employment Preferences

Self-employment offers opportunities for work time self-care, improved earnings, and a trauma-informed work environment. It honors individual preferences, which fits the recovery paradigm, by shifting from deficits to self-determination. However, social isolation and negative prior work experiences magnify gaps in business support.

Did you know...

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that self-employed workers will increase to 10.3 million by 2026, with a self-employment rate among people with disabilities nearly double that of the general population.

Reclaiming Employment Platform Tools



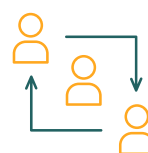
Library:

Gain knowledge with vetted business resources



Courses:

Increase skills with online business courses



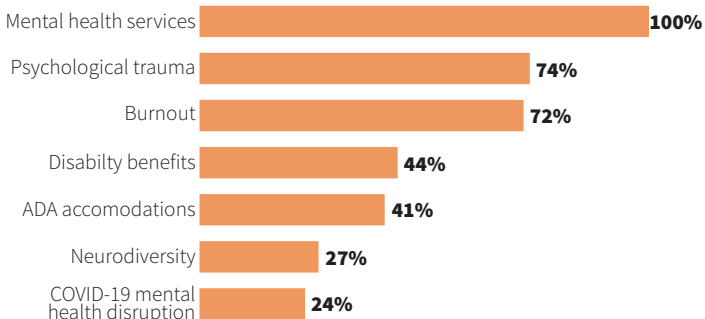
Community:

Build relationships with other business owners

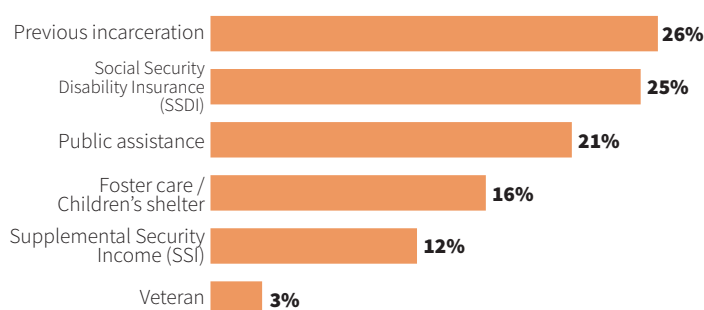
Beta Users Fight Challenges with Purpose

All beta users in the Reclaiming Employment pilot study reported having used mental health or substance use services at some point in their lives. Almost three-quarters were also living with psychological trauma or burnout. Nearly half had used disability benefits and/or workplace accommodations. About a quarter were SSDI beneficiaries, and a similar proportion had been incarcerated in the past.

Users' Mental Health Experiences



Specific User Experiences



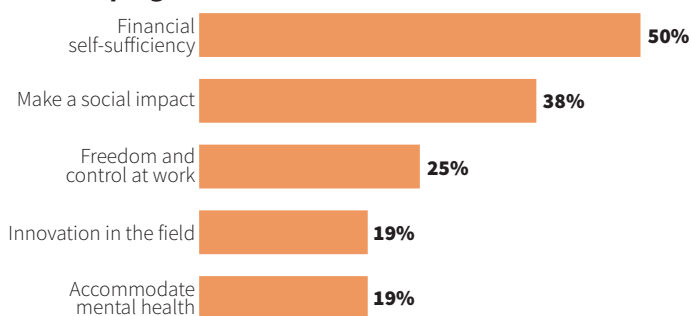
Users ranged in age from 25-68, with an average age of 50. Most (82%) identified as female; 10% male, 3% non-binary, 3% agender, and 2% genderfluid. When asked about their race/ethnicity, 2% identified as Asian, 19% Black or African American, 8% Multiracial, and 38% White; 12% identified as Latinx. Nearly 40% had completed less than a bachelor's degree. Self-employment is often beneficial for people with less educational attainment, which is common among people with mental health challenges.

“ It helped to listen to other folks talk about their ideas and their journeys. So many of us feel so isolated when working to create a small business, it helped to listen to how others talked about their values and motivations.

Self-sufficiency and Social Impact Draw Users to Self-employment

Many users cited the desire for financial self-sufficiency or wanting to use their lived experience to help others as a primary reason for becoming self-employed. Others were motivated by increasing their freedom over their work, contributing a new idea or innovation, and having greater flexibility to accommodate mental health challenges.

Self-employment Motivators



“ It's great to know other people are on a similar journey...The world needs people with lived experience to share what we know and to create space for other people like us to be seen, understood, and have agency in our society.

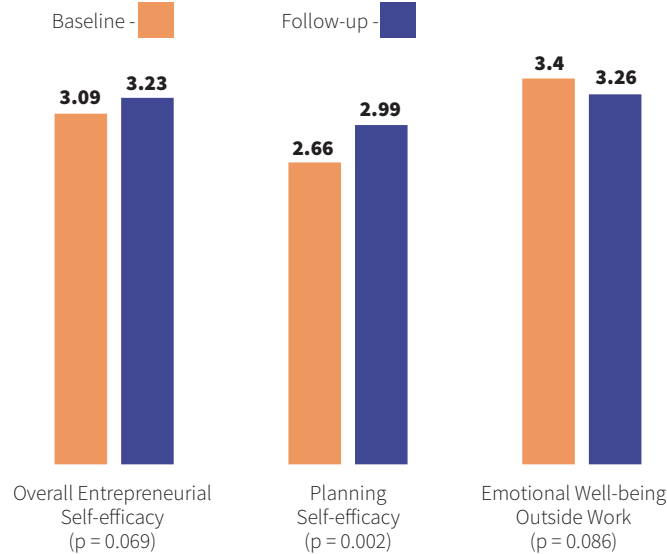
Did you know...

“*Inclusive entrepreneurship*” refers to business development processes that focus less on the attributes of the entrepreneur, and more on establishing supports necessary for individualized success.

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy Increases During Trial Period

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a person’s confidence about their ability to perform the various tasks relevant to self-employment. Users’ scores on measures of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy and Life Satisfaction changed significantly between baseline and post-intervention follow-up. The biggest gains were seen in overall self-efficacy scores and self-efficacy related to planning a business.

Statistically Significant Study Measures



The “Planning” domain assesses confidence in taking the business idea and making it a concrete business concept with plans and activities.

Scores on emotional well-being outside of work were significantly worse at follow-up than when the trial started, perhaps attributable to a growing understanding of the demands of entrepreneurship.

Other changes in self-efficacy and work life satisfaction were not statistically significant.

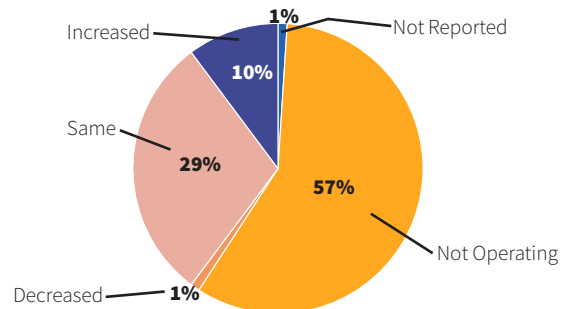
Did you know...

“Earning revenue” stage is one of the last business startup events to occur.

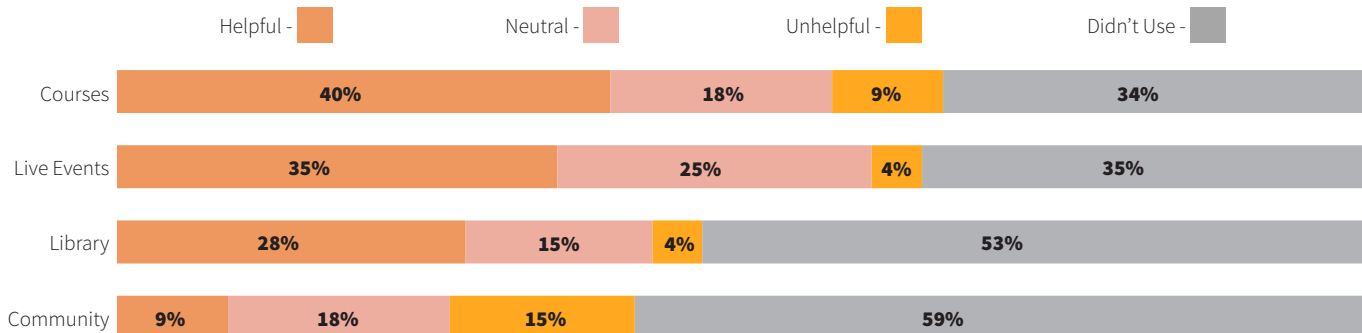
Reported Progress Toward Goals Better than Anticipated

Better than expected progress toward goals set at baseline was reported by 33% of participants; only 19% poorer than expected progress. While about half of participants were not at the stage of earning revenue, 10% increased revenues and 15% moved ahead in stage of self-employment.

Change in Revenue



Helpfulness of Features



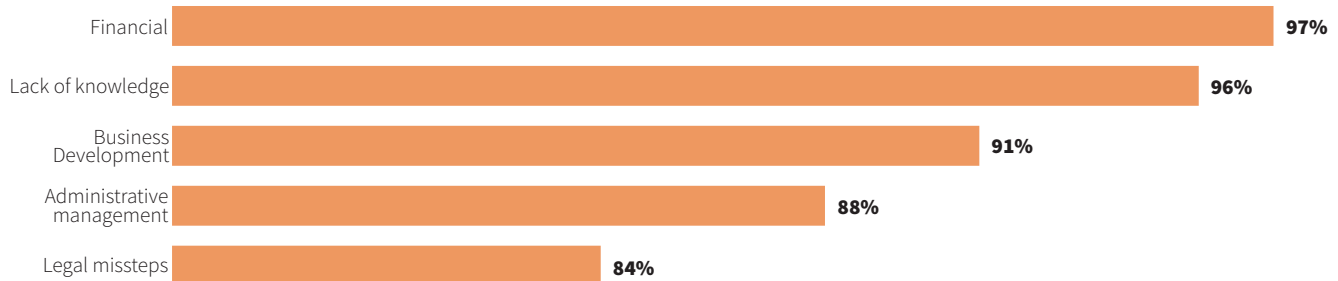
Reclaiming Employment Helped Users in Self-Employment Journey

- 63% - Helpful in their self-employment journey.
- 40% - Courses were helpful.
- 28% - Library was helpful.
- 35% - Live Events were helpful.
- 9% - Community was helpful.
- 69% - Would recommend to a friend.
- 74% - Would return to the platform for help.
- 29% - More connected to self-employed people.

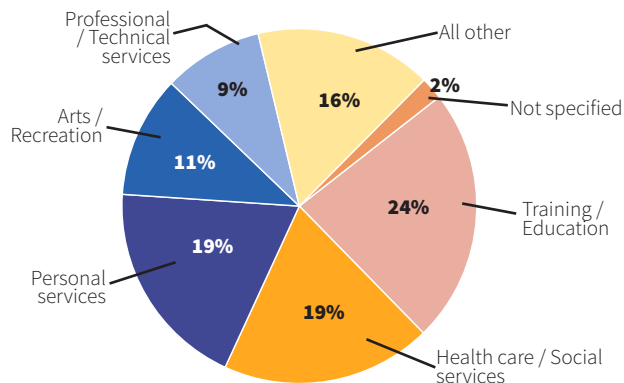
Financial and Knowledge Challenges Dominate Users' Concerns

Users reported facing a range of challenges with their business. The most common challenges were related to financial management (from getting paid to managing expenses to getting funding) and lack of knowledge about how to start or run a business. In other research, business knowledge challenges have been found to be associated with lower satisfaction with self-employment.

Top Business Challenges



Industry Sector



Users also experienced challenges with business development (e.g., advertising and sales) and administrative management. These sorts of challenges are common among new business owners, regardless of disability status.

Users were starting businesses in a variety of industries. The most common were training/education, healthcare/social services, and personal services (e.g., massage, coaching).

Among Study Participants, Some Business Supports are More Helpful

Prior to using Reclaiming Employment, the majority of platform users had used online education, and of those, 93% found it to be helpful. Similarly, a large number of users who engaged in mutual support with other business owners with/without psychiatric histories found it helpful. At the same time, fewer had used the Small Business Administration and/or SCORE. Of the 29% that consulted Vocational Rehabilitation, only about one-third found it helpful. This matches findings from our other research, which found that, although these resources are commonly available in the community, they are not often accessed by this segment of small business owners.

Face-to-face support would “enhance the process greatly”

When asked to give recommendations for improving the platform, 38% mentioned coaching, mentorship, or group or one-on-one business coaching.

“ I think Zoom meetings would have been great so I could see people and talk with them so I could get a sense of those I’m communicating with.

“ A mentor to help with assessing business ideas & for feedback.

Lessons Learned from the Pilot Study

The pilot test users were invaluable in helping the Reclaiming Employment team understand the platform's benefits, and where there are gaps that could be improved.

Results indicate that users found the Community forums difficult to navigate. Many of the users provided feedback that they wanted **more engagement** with their peers and mentors, which are we now planning to enhance and then run another test.

Users desired a **more structured approach** that maximizes the impact of the courses and other features, including more interaction with peers, and that this may have benefited their progress towards start-up more than self-directed learning alone. Notably, 97 users enrolled at the beginning of the trial period in June, but by December, only 68 had used at least one of the offered features .

More than half of participants were at a stage other than “Planning” and may not have benefited from the availability of this resource at this time. Several participants reported specifically that this was **not the optimum time**, e.g., “I did not put in the time and energy that I thought I would. These past 6 months have been very difficult for me” and “Due to Covid, my participation was limited.”

Overall, we found evidence for Reclaiming Employment's **feasibility and acceptability**, despite limitations, as well as suggestions for maximizing the impact of content through interactions with coaches and other participants. The Live & Learn, Inc. team is working to **incorporate user suggestions** into content, design, and processes.



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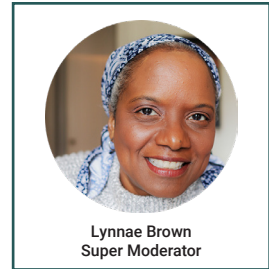
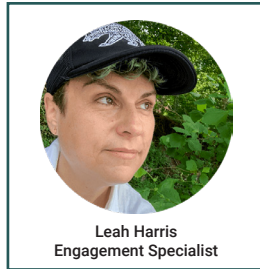
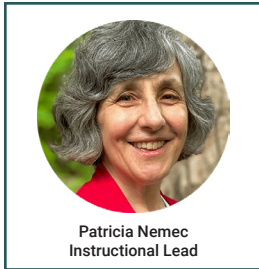
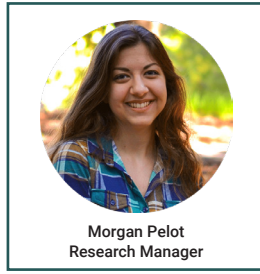
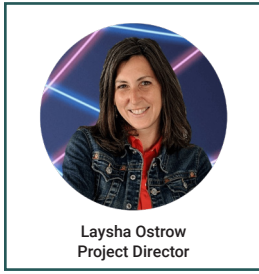
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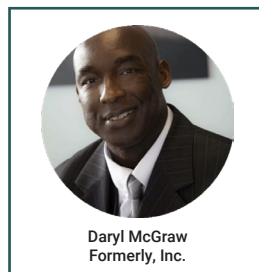
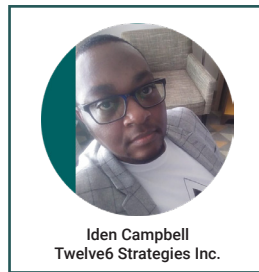
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Consultants



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