

BizTeam" program. Program participants developed a business plan for a cooperatively run café with the help of 20 Pioneer Valley business owners who served as guest speakers, business tour hosts, and mentors. The BizTeam's resulting 23-page plan went on to win the National 4-H Council's Cooperative Business Plan Competition last summer.

A member of the BizTeam, Floris Fortier, 18, of Orange, a 2002 graduate of Mahar Regional High School, has played a central role in developing the BizCenter project. She said the café will offer an affordable breakfast and lunch menu and occasional evening entertainment. Fortier was quick to emphasize that although the café will be co-operated by young people, "the BizCenter is not a teen center. It's a place of business and will be open to everyone who enjoys good food and coffee and an upbeat atmosphere."

A "BizTeam" comprised of an experienced adult manager and several youth co-operators will run each venture within the BizCenter, said YES Executive Director Tim Cohen-Mitchell. "The BizTeams will be responsible for all business activities of their unit."

Worker-managers, he said, will likely be YES alumni with 80 hours of prior entrepreneurship and job-readiness training. At the BizCenter, they will build on the basics they have already learned by receiving additional training both on the specific details of café and copy shop operations and management as well as in general workplace skills, principles of cooperative management, financial literacy, and career planning.

"Training will take place both on-site and at area businesses," said Cohen-Mitchell. The young worker-managers will job "shadow" and intern at cooperating local businesses whose owners and managers will serve as mentors.

Students will have an opportunity to rotate among different jobs at both businesses, added Mitchell. "Our goal is to help our alumni discover what type of work they like best and provide the training, support and experience they'll need to successfully transition into employment in the wider community," he explained.

The building to house the new BizCenter was purchased for \$74,900 with a Community Reinvestment Act loan of \$60,000 from Banknorth, a \$4,000 grant from the K.L. Bruce Charitable Fund, and contributions from businesses, organizations and individuals. The BizCenter will operate as a non-profit subsidiary of YES, with surplus revenue redistributed to cover training costs, donations to community groups, and building renovations.

To cover café start-up costs, YES is now selling "BizCenter Bonds". The bonds are sold in \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100 denominations at 10 percent under face value. Bondholders agree to hold the bonds for six months, after which time they can redeem them for face value for purchases at the café. Bonds may be purchased by mail or at YES, 1 South Main Street in Orange.

YES is seeking volunteers from the community to help with renovations and to serve as advisors on its BizCenter Council. For more information, contact Jeff Aho at YES toll-free at 866-YES-4-BIZ or at [jeff@yes-inc.org](mailto:jeff@yes-inc.org). Details about the BizCenter and YES programs may also be found at [www.yes-inc.org](http://www.yes-inc.org).