

PROFILE IN SUCCESS



Rafaela smiles proudly while a stylist attends a client in the background



Hard work leads to success: One woman's journey

Rafaela Arriaga embarked on the adventure of starting a business in a period of her life she described as “el peor de su vida” (“the worst of her life”). The journey started when one of Rafaela’s friends asked her to visit the location where she wanted to open a new hair salon. Little did Rafaela know on that first trip that she would end up as the sole owner of the business.

It was not an easy start. There were multiple obstacles to overcome. First, she had to borrow money from family and friends because she did not have the funds to start the salon. Second, and even more importantly, she was with an abusive husband which further affected her emotionally. Finally, she was a mother with a son and daughter to raise.

Fortunately, the work ethic and decisive spirit she had developed as a child growing up in Mexico constantly reminded her that “doing the things you love helps you push harder every time.” She also knew that

being a hair stylist was her dream and passion.

Starting a business was challenging. In the beginning, she worked 10 hours a day, 7 days a week while taking care of her two children. Business at the new salon was slow. Many days, she had only two or three clients, but she persevered. At times when she was not busy with customers, the thoughts about her personal situation made her sad. She didn’t let this affect her outward appearance. Every time someone came in for a cut or style, she forced herself to smile, ask how they were doing, and take care of them.

She started noticing that the work of styling hair distracted her and lifted her spirits. Clients noted that even though “her eyes were sad, there was always a smile on her face.” Her reputation and business grew as people could rely on her for a cheerful word as well as the style they wanted. Word of mouth steadily brought more customers as time passed.

Since opening her salon, she

has been able to pay her debts, pay her bills and earn the money she needed to obtain a divorce from her husband without looking back for lack of funds. Now, Rafaela has employees, a steady flow of customers and plans to expand into nail care. She is also exploring locations with better traffic and higher visibility.

She explained that her proudest moment came when her daughter looked directly into her eyes and said, “Gracias por Disney World, mamá” (“Thanks for Disney World, Mom”) as they were returning from the first vacation they had taken since arriving in the United States.

The advertising and marketing classes Urban Business Initiative presented at La Rosa Family Services helped her think about new ideas to promote her business in the short, medium and long term. UBI wishes continued success to this woman who has proved that haircuts can change more than just looks.