

Afghan woman gets helping hand in Stamford
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There is nothing like the Women's Business Development Council in Afghanistan.

Resources there are designed to help men instead of women, said Hamida, an Afghani woman who was in Stamford for the past three days to find ways to help other women start businesses in Kabul, the country's capital.

Hamida spoke yesterday to about 10 development council clients.

"Women are eager, but they don't have the same opportunities," Hamida said. Her last name can not be revealed for security reasons, according to her sponsor, the Business Council for Peace.

Hamida worked as a doctor for the International Center for the Red Cross until 1994, when she and her husband moved to Pakistan as the military situation in Afghanistan worsened.

In 2001, she returned to Kabul as a worker for United Nations Habitat, where she has been trying to empower women to start their own businesses.

Hamida said she is trying to start a non-government organization to help women become entrepreneurs in Afghanistan. She said she will return to Kabul with knowledge she has gained from the Stamford business group.

"I want to convince the government to involve women in its economic strategies," she said.

"One thing my mother told me is 'Nothing is impossible,' " she said. "Just do it."

Hamida she has helped about a dozen women start their own businesses in Kabul.

In helping Hamida, Fran Pastore, the Stamford group's chief executive officer, said the WBDC wants to teach her how it trains

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its clients in every aspect of business development, including advocating legislation and identifying needs.

"We also want them to learn how to start nonprofits," Pastore said.

Bernadette Nelson, owner of Studio Visual Communications and a client of the Stamford center, said the nonprofit group has helped her business succeed.

"Many of us women have never been taught," she said.

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