

Pennsylvania “Mompreneur” Takes Home SBA’s Top Export Award in 2017

Rose Morris is the ‘mompreneur’ behind The Safety Sleeper™, the winner of the U.S. Small Business Administration’s (SBA) 2017 Exporter of the Year Award. When Morris’ middle son, Abram, was a toddler, he had difficulty maintaining a regular sleep cycle because of his autism diagnosis. Worried about the health and safety of her young child, Morris developed a lightweight tent-like structure that is placed on top of the bed, which includes padding and an air mattress.

Over the years, Morris made myriad improvements to increase the quality and durability of her product, including an extra safety zipper system, fire retardant material, and stabilizing straps to prevent tipping. She did this in part due to the classes and counseling from her local SCORE Pittsburgh Chapter, the Duquesne University Small Business Development Center, and Chatham University’s Center for Women’s Entrepreneurship. Morris also conducted additional research by speaking with other parents and learning about different sleep disorders.

It wasn’t long before parents in other countries took note. The Safety Sleeper™’s international sales “all began because of a phone call from a father in Europe” according to Morris. “He said ‘I saw your product online, can you ship it to England?’ Since I don’t have ‘no’ in my vocabulary, I said ‘yes’ and then set out to figure out how. Shortly thereafter, I received a similar phone call from a parent in Ireland. That’s really how we began to sell abroad.”

Since its inception in 2009, Morris’ business has grown year after year, hitting the \$1 million sales mark in 2016. Simultaneously, she has also created *Fund it Forward*, a non-profit charity which helps to purchase equipment for families with special needs children when traditional insurance will not cover the costs.

Today, The Safety Sleeper™ has expanded well beyond our borders to include sales to 12 different countries around the world. While she didn’t originally set out with a proactive export plan, she credits her two SCORE mentors as key resources who helped to craft the company’s international growth trajectory. U.S. exports, just like The Safety Sleeper™, make up a large part of the economy; 98 percent of all exporters are small businesses, just like Morris.

Morris admits that the road to success can be bumpy at times, but this social entrepreneur continued to push forward by focusing completely on the families she serves. Her advice to other budding entrepreneurs? “Trust your gut”, Morris stated passionately, “and definitely trust your intuition!”

To learn more about the counseling, training, and financial tools available to help your small business sell abroad and to find the offices located closest to you, please visit: www.SBA.gov/local-assistance