



Contact: Director Guy Peduto  
2014  
Email: [gpeduto@wvhtf.org](mailto:gpeduto@wvhtf.org)  
Phone: (304) 333-6769

February 26, 2014,

**\*\*\* For Immediate Release \*\*\***

## **INNOVA Commercialization Group and the West Virginia Jobs Investment Trust Invest In Mighty Tykes™ Infant and Child Weights Product Fills the Gap for Early Intervention Market**

Fairmont, WV – INNOVA Commercialization Group, (INNOVA®), an initiative of the West Virginia High Technology Consortium Foundation (WVHTC Foundation) is proud to announce that it, and the West Virginia Jobs Investment Trust are investing \$200,000 into Mighty Tykes™ LLC.

The Mighty Tykes™ Infant and Child Weights are a unique invention specifically designed to help infants who suffer from poor muscle tone (hypotonia) or muscle weakness. Designed with kids in mind, these cheerful wrist and ankle weights are smaller in size and lighter in weight than what's commonly available. They can also benefit children with tremors, palsy movements or sensory issues. Some or all of these impairments are common to several physical conditions found in children, including Down Syndrome, prematurity, Autism-spectrum disorders, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy among many others. These physical limitations impair a child's timely mobility and the ability to fully explore their environment and in turn, learn and socialize.

Research shows a weight training program can be an effective treatment to improve strength, balance and coordination, or simply ease sensory discomfort. The inventor, Berkeley Springs, West Virginia resident Isabella Yosucio, had a unique incentive to develop the infant and child weights; her three-year-old son Isaac who has Down Syndrome. When she learned about her son's hypotonia from her Birth to Three assigned physical therapist, Yosucio sprang into action.

“Honestly, it seemed really obvious, so I went down to my basement and used some leftover fleece and a bit of our boys' sandbox sand to make up these tiny little weights” Yosucio explained . “When our Physical Therapist saw them, she was really impressed, and encouraged me to explore manufacturing them.”

MightyTykes™ Infant & Child wrist and ankle weights can be used—by parents and professionals alike—in targeted exercises and also incorporated to enhance the effects of both structured and casual play effectively building strength, particularly in the arms, legs and abdomen. In addition, wearing them can help minimize unwanted movements and provide comfort to young children with sensory issues who enjoy the feeling of weight on their limbs.

As part of the product development effort and to test the receptivity of the product to the market, MightyTykes™ initiated a market trial in the fall of 2012. Prototypes and a survey were sent to early intervention program families, professionals and institutions around the country. Among them, three appeared on *U.S. News & World Report* “Honor Roll” of the best Children's Hospitals and all of which provided extremely favorable feedback.

“I met Isabella in the summer of 2012”, stated Guy Peduto, Director of INNOVA. “When I heard the idea over the phone I really had no idea what to expect. But after meeting Isabella and hearing her story about creating these early versions in her basement and working with Isaac’s therapist, and understanding what she was trying to create, I was committed to helping bring these to market and began to put together the team to make it a reality.”

Instrumental to this effort was Robert Marggraf, a West Virginia Small Business Development Center Business (WVSBDC) Coach. Living in the area, Bob was able to provide the day-to-day business coaching, business plan development and financial analysis needed to meet the investor’s requirements.

The West Virginia Jobs Investment Trust (WVJIT) is co-investor with INNOVA in MightyTykes™.

“Mighty Tykes is an example of what the spirit of entrepreneurship is – identifying a problem, developing a solution to meet the market demand and having the courage to do it”, said Andy Zulauf, executive director of WVJIT. “The collaboration between WVJIT, INNOVA, WWSBDC, West Virginia Capital Access Program (WVCAP) and the company allowed each group to contribute vital resources to best position the company for success. WVJIT is delighted to be part of the Mighty Tykes team and look forward to working with Isabella in achieving her goals.”

Funding for this investment is made available through the Appalachian Regional Commission with additional funds provided through the WVCAP which provides West Virginia small businesses with access to new loan funds they can use to invest, expand and create jobs. The state-run program has access to \$13.1 million through the State Small Business Credit Initiative, created under the federal Small Business Jobs Act of 2010. WVCAP is administered by the state’s venture capital program WVJIT.

“I am deeply grateful and very excited about the future,” said Yosuiico. “As both a “*mompreneur*” and a resident of West Virginia, I am so thankful and impressed that there are those who are willing and able to nurture creativity and drive to solve problems, help others, and promote economic vitality, taking thoughtful risks to support people like me.”

For more information, please contact INNOVA Director Guy Peduto by phone at: (304) 333-6769 or email at: [gpeduto@wvhtf.org](mailto:gpeduto@wvhtf.org).

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### **About Mighty Tykes™ LLC**

Mighty Tykes™, LLC was founded by Isabella Yosuiico, a medical company communications professional and the mother of a Down Syndrome child, to design, manufacture and sell its MightyTykes™ Infant & Child weights.

MightyTykes™ is an interchangeable wrist and ankle weight exercise device (as pictured) for use by small children and infants with hypotonia and possibly other conditions such as sensory issues, palsy, or physical injury. MightyTykes™ Infant & Child weights are a simple, effective and economical device to treat hypotonia and are also an effective therapy for tremors, palsic movements and various sensory issues that interfere with development. Moreover, early intervention, for both physical and cognitive development, is believed to result in better long-term benefits.

MightyTykes™ Infant & Child Weights target this important, underserved market with a device and a brand that the company believes presents a strong opportunity to introduce a widely applicable special-needs device promoted by a special-needs mom with a story.



### **About INNOVA Commercialization Group**

The INNOVA Commercialization Group (INNOVA®), an initiative of the West Virginia High Technology Consortium Foundation (WVHTC Foundation), is a business support services and seed and early-stage investment capital program dedicated to creating successful entrepreneurs and new ventures. INNOVA specializes in bringing vital knowledge and resources to seed and early-stage companies in support of product commercialization efforts. Although INNOVA's primary focus is on the geographic region of West Virginia, INNOVA can bring expertise to almost any project.

INNOVA offers its clients a unique understanding of the challenges facing seed and early-stage companies. In order to overcome these challenges, INNOVA has developed a portfolio of offerings designed specifically for commercialization and start-up companies. This assistance includes business support and technical services, seed and early-stage funding and entrepreneurial education and training.

### **About West Virginia Jobs Investment Trust**

West Virginia Jobs Investment Trust (JIT) is a public venture capital fund created to develop, promote and expand West Virginia's economy by making investment funds available to eligible businesses, thus stimulating economic growth and providing or retaining jobs within the State.

“WVJIT, created by legislation that was passed in 1992, is based in Charleston but also has an office in Fairmont in the same building where INNOVA is located. “Technically we are the state's venture capital fund,” said Zulauf. “We were created to support small business and entrepreneurship.” WVJIT invests in small businesses that have an opportunity to grow. It looks to invest in companies that can provide a financial return to the state as well as create jobs.

### **About WWSBDC Program**

The West Virginia Small Business Development Center (WWSBDC) works to ensure that small businesses receive the technical assistance that they need to be successful. The WWSBDC is supported by the West Virginia Development Office and is funded in part through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The WWSBDC Program is designed to provide high quality business and economic development assistance to small businesses and nascent entrepreneurs (pre-venture) in order to promote growth, expansion, innovation, increased productivity and management improvement. Business coaches help companies improve business performance. Business coaches offer workshops, coaching, mentoring, and support. The WWSBDC business coaching network has years of experience in translating the best ideas and practices into practical advice for businesses with fewer than 500 employees.