

EDG Bulletin Column

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Self Employment a Good Option for Some

As unemployment rates have risen recently in BC, more people have been considering starting up their own business. Nanaimo's Ethos Career Management Group offers the Business Works Self-Employment Program to provide business training, financial assistance, advice and support to unemployed persons with a business idea who have relevant skills and experience. It is intended to assist individuals to create a viable business plan and give them the necessary training and support to help them succeed.

Bill Stockmann took part in the first business plan 'bootcamp' offered through the Business Works program, and is now running his own visual communication business, Stockmann Images, out of his home. He had previously earned a diploma in Visual Arts from the Alberta College of Art and Design, but had never run his own business. After being referred to the Business Works program by a Nanaimo employment centre, Stockmann was able to organize his ideas into a business plan. "Starting out on your own is scary," he says. "It takes time." However, the ongoing support provided by the professional staff and volunteers of the Business Works program has made the experience less daunting and more enjoyable. He now enjoys working from home, and is getting used to the ebbs and flows that are a part of owning a business. Instead of panicking during a slower period, he has resolved to take a methodical approach and stick to his business plan.

"For anyone starting a new business, keeping operational costs down is key in the early years", said Marilyn Hutchinson, Nanaimo Economic Development Officer. "Many entrepreneurs locate their business at home, using available garage or basement space while they build up revenues. Managing a home-based business with its potential distractions by other family members, is a positive trade-off when the cash flow is low."

Another entrepreneur who took part in the Business Works program is Sheri Levy, owner of Clearly Visible, a business that provides emergency disaster solutions. Levy has been a volunteer with Emergency Social Services in Nanaimo for over five years, and has learned the ins and outs of emergency preparedness. The idea for her business was sparked when she saw an ad in the local newspaper encouraging residents to upgrade their home addresses to high-visibility numbering to assist emergency personnel locate their homes if necessary. She began by selling reflective boardwalk home numbering signs, and has since expanded and now sells 72-hour emergency survival kits for as many as 1,000 people. She also facilitates Provincial Emergency Program seminars at no charge to the public. Business Works provides Levy with support, advice and encouragement, as well as financial assistance, to help her realize the goals outlined in her business plan. Within three years, she hopes to occupy storefront and office space outside of her home. Her long-term growth plan also includes hiring five salespeople.

Self-employment is just one of the options available to those looking for work. Employment centres, such as Supporting Employment Transitions on Skinner Street or Nanaimo Youth Services Association on Bastion Street, help clients explore their options for employment.