

# Connecting with community resources is key to self employment

by Stella Shepard

Business start-ups



Laura-Jane Koers and Cameron Lerch of Whim Road discovered self employment opportunities on PEI. Laura-Jane started her own business called Brightflock. Cameron is working on his own home-based business, Kibo Software.

Two years ago, **Laura-Jane Koers** and **Cameron Lerch**, formerly of Victoria, British Columbia, decided on a complete lifestyle change.

They gave up good-paying jobs, sold their condo, packed their belongings and drove across Canada. They arrived on PEI in January 2008 and purchased a farmhouse on Whim Road near Montague.

In 2008, Laura-Jane opened a company called **Brightflock**, which offers web-based writing, marketing, designing and coding services.

“Self employment has always been a dream of mine,” says Laura-Jane. “Soon after we moved to PEI, I decided it was time to move forward and make my dream a reality. I developed a business plan and connected with organizations that helped me to believe in my vision and guide me through the steep learning curve.”

“Soon I was running my own business. The first year was full of highs and lows; I learned so much. Moving across the country was the easy part. Running a business, learning and making mistakes have been both hugely challenging and satisfying.”

## Community resources

Laura-Jane contacted the following resources for information and support:

- **PEI Career Development Services, Montague.** “As I was exploring my options, I met with CDS and they provided insight into the local labour market.”
- **Active Communities Inc., Karl Johnston, Self Employment Manager** “Karl seemed to believe in my business idea, which gave me confidence.” Laura-Jane was eligible for the Self Employ PEI program administered through **Skills PEI**, a division of the Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning.
- **Innovation PEI, Preston Llewellyn, Business Development Officer** “I met with Preston a few times for guidance and business advice.”

- **PEI Business Women’s Association** “I joined the PEI Business Women’s Association with a marketing plan. In order to get my name out there, I set a target to attend four of their networking functions within six months.”
- **ProfitLearn PEI, Business Learning Resource** “I attended a few ProfitLearn business seminars. The seminars covered valuable topics, and they were a great place to connect with the local business community.”
- **Community support** “After being in business for six months I found myself with a lot of work - too much work. At that time I realized that I needed to learn how to better manage working on multiple projects and to deal with more stress and responsibility than I was used to. I read some key books, connected with a mentor, and I learned some practical time and stress management tips from a counsellor.

“Being an entrepreneur can be exciting and rewarding, but it can be difficult too. It’s important to connect with people who have been through what you’re going through as a new entrepreneur.”

## Hiring staff

“I work on two or three projects at a time,” says Laura-Jane. “With each project, I hire one or two web designers or developers who work from their homes. I need graphic designers who can fully understand what I am asking and meet my deadlines. They need to be able to communicate effectively and be reliable.”

## Networking

“Starting a business takes more than just opening your door to the public. Clients aren’t necessarily going to come knocking on your door. Getting out there in the business community is crucial, especially if you are new in the area. Attend job and career fairs, join organizations, volunteer, strike up conversations. Get out there.”

“I’ve discovered that word-of-mouth is very powerful on PEI. As a result, Brightflock has not paid for any advertising. My new clients tend to come from referrals.”

For more information about **Brightflock**, contact **Laura-Jane** at 838-3216 or visit [www.brightflock.com](http://www.brightflock.com)

For more information about Laura-Jane and Cameron’s personal experiences of living on PEI, visit the blog at [www.whimfield.com](http://www.whimfield.com)

For more information about **Innovation PEI**, visit [www.innovationpei.com](http://www.innovationpei.com)

For more information about **Active Communities Inc.**, call toll free at 1-800-953-4030.

For more information about **PEI Business Women’s Association**, visit [www.peibwa.org](http://www.peibwa.org)

For more information about **ProfitLearn PEI**, visit <http://profitlearn.upei.ca>

For more information about **Career Development Services**, visit [www.careerservicespe.com](http://www.careerservicespe.com)