

FROM INSPIRATION TO INCORPORATION

By Gina MacArthur

How CNA is supporting entrepreneurial women in Labrador

Megan Ford knows she wants to live in Labrador City. She knows she wants to start a specialty coffee shop and she knows that it's going to take a lot of hard work to get her idea off the ground. Now, thanks to the Inspired Women program, she knows more about how she's going to do it.

College of the North Atlantic is a partner in the program, which brought local women together with a facilitator who helped them develop their inspirations into solid business ideas.

The bilingual program is jointly organized by the Newfoundland and Labrador Francophone Economic Development Network and the Central Labrador Economic Development Board.

Richard Sawyer, CNA's Labrador West campus administrator says providing the classroom space and other services is just one of the ways the college supports its local community.

"Programs like this one help to strengthen the community, not just economically but even socially," he says. "We don't have a program like this in our area, and certainly not in French. It fills a gap in our programming."

For Ford, the timing was perfect. Having grown up in Labrador City, her travels took her around the country and as far away as Asia over the last eight years. Through that experience she began learning about Fair Trade goods and services, and got interested in promoting the concept of paying fair prices to producers in developing countries.

Ford eventually ended up working at a coffee shop in Edmonton, Alberta, where the owner followed socially responsible purchasing practices to run his business. There, she gained some experience and solidified her plans to start a Fair Trade coffee bar in Labrador City. When she moved back last August, she saw a flyer for the Inspired Women program, and knew it was just what she needed.

"The beginning part of the program is getting to know yourself, which is actually really important if you're going to be a business owner and working with other people," says Ford, adding that she also got to meet other people in the local business community.

Angie Cormier is the program's facilitator. She says it's about more than developing the hard skills needed to start a business. "It walks them through their idea in terms of 'How do I move this idea forward?' and 'How



Inspired Women facilitator Angie Cormier (left) and aspiring business owner Megan Ford.

does it need to change to be something that I can make money out of?"

She says the ideas that the women brought to the program were quite diverse, ranging from jewelry making to holistic wellness and even dog sledding.

"Women don't realize how much skill and knowledge they have and how transferable it is," she says. "(They) don't go into business for job creation they go into it for self-fulfillment, for independence."

Ford is continuing to develop her business plan and she knows that she still has a lot of work to do, but she says the Inspired Women program helped build her confidence so she could move forward.

"When I first went there I was so nervous to tell people what I was doing, but then I just became very comfortable and confident in my idea because the other women in the program were just very supportive."

The Inspired Women program has now expanded to Happy Valley-Goose Bay and may be offered in Labrador West again this fall. It is mainly funded by Status of Women Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. *~*