

Program creates new opportunities

Community Futures targets enhanced skills for employees in North Okanagan

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Morning Star Staff

One piece of advice for people who finish school and enter the workforce is, never stop learning.

A new program funded by the federal and provincial governments is allowing small business employees to do just that.

The Small Business Employee Training Program, run locally by Community Futures, is a pilot project of the Canada-B.C. Labour Market Agreement and allows small business employees a chance to upgrade their skill sets.

The program is for businesses with less than 50 employees or non-profit organizations.

Program training co-ordinator Karen Heiberg says the program is ideal for these types of employers who often don't have money budgeted for upgrading workers' skills.

"Employees feel really good when they see their employer wants to invest in them. It makes better employees and they develop a loyalty to the place they work," she said.

"It's such an easy program to be involved in. All an employer has to do is arrange a meeting. Then I meet with the employee and make sure everyone is on the same page."

Heiberg's clients work in sectors ranging from forestry to health and fitness.

She has many years experience as a career counsellor and still does that while finding courses that improve clients' skills in everything from first aid to bookkeeping.

"Each (individual case) is so different," said Heiberg, who clearly loves her job.

"Their needs are based on the business that they do. Anything they need, I find something that fits them."

One business that is taking advantage of the offer is BreakAway Fitness.

Owner Lori Moger wanted her one full-time employee, Brenda Spelay, to handle more computer programs at the office so Heiberg found her courses that teach them.

"We're a small business so we need our employees to be able to do lots of things," said Moger.

"It's an advantage to us for our employees to have lots of different skills so this program



BRENT MUTIS/MORNING STAR

Brenda Spelay, right, shows off her new computer skills to BreakAway Fitness owner Lori Moger. Spelay has broadened her skill set and value to her company thanks to a new program aimed at teaching new skills to small business employees.

"It's such an easy program to be involved in."

— Karen Heiberg

is great for us and really well timed."

Spelay's goal is to work alongside Moger in a management capacity.

She has been taking courses through Okanagan College and Power Concepts computer training, and finds her new soft-

ware skills are quite valuable at work.

"They (courses) were great and I'm even going to go back to keep fresh with everything. I just love it; I wish I could do more."

Workers from their early 20s to mid-50s have taken the program and Heiberg finds she's picking up as much as many of the people she meets.

"I'm learning about businesses I didn't know about before. That's the fun part. I get to meet people, learn about what they do and help them."

To participate in the program, an individual must be identified as a "growth employ-

ee" meaning they lack a high school diploma or have one but need essential skills. Those with post-secondary education are ineligible.

Training modules last about four months but don't have to be consecutive. Schedules are flexible to accommodate employee work hours.

Up to 20 people can qualify at a time for the program. Right now there are 12 spots open.

Anyone interested the program can contact Karen Heiberg by phone at 250-545-2215, extension 224.