

West Kootenay Women's Association

Reclaimed and Recycled Textile Project: Goals, objectives, action plan and community support.

The Reclaimed and Recycled Bag Project has been successfully creating and marketing bags and purses of all sizes since May of 2007. We have had a revolving door with many of the women going onto other venues after having developed the confidence and skills to sell independently, work for another small business, or start the process of exploring the development of a reclaimed and recycled textile cooperative. We have successfully helped women build their self esteem as well as develop the professional skills needed to create a quality product, market it and enter the community as productive members who are able to keep a small environmental footprint, keep the cost of production down and stimulate the economy. This is an ongoing project with new women entering the project on a regular basis and is a great win-win, small community economic development project which serves the women, the community, local business and the environment.

At this time in the project, we are moving into the 2nd tier of development after having written a business and marketing plan, (funded by ENP) and have an accurate assessment of what is currently needed. The following goals, objectives and action plan will help to clarify this process and need for funding to support this level of development. We are not moving ahead with a social purpose enterprise at this time as the women need more ongoing personal, professional and business development.

Goals:

- 1) Provide women with opportunity to learn the needed skills to grow personally and professionally to allow them to develop self confidence and stronger self esteem need to create a workable sustainable life.
- 2) To provide a means of earning an income through the creation of a beautiful quality product and the space, materials and skills needed to do so.
- 3) Provide opportunities to interact in the community at large through outreach, advertising and marketing.
- 4) Keep a light footprint on the environment. (Keep the textiles out of the land fill and not promote the creation of new material which can be toxic to the environment during its production.)
- 5) Provide the women involved in the project the support and leadership skill development and opportunity to teach and help other women develop these skills.
- 6) Function as a business incubator.

Objectives:

- 1) Create on going work forums where the women learn effective communication and conflict resolution skills which help develop a sense of confidence and self esteem.

- 2) Model and teach decision making process to help the women work cooperatively with a diverse group.
- 3) Provide the space, the material, technical and emotional support to the women while they develop the sewing skills needed to produce and market beautiful, high quality bags and other products out of recycled textiles.
- 4) Market and keep records of work done and sold.
- 5) Use the textiles donated to us from the community and local organizations.
- 6) Create a template for other similar projects to be created in the district.
- 7) Offer the opportunity for the women to share and model leadership and business skills to other women who may be attempting to build more sustainable lives.

Action Plan:

1. Share and involve the women in the vision and development of this 2nd tier for the project participants.
2. Involve the women in the project through having them participate in creating the timeline for the needed workshops, meetings and skill development.
3. Support the women in every aspect of this project to promote success socially and economically. Emotional support, sewing lessons, focus on quality control, record keeping, marketing techniques and practice, including on the web.
4. Involve older participants in working with newer women on the best practices for quality sewing and marketing and developing other business skills. Invite outside consultants to share their stories and skills.
5. Insure that there is accurate and efficient record keeping and that all the women participate in this process as a part of the skill development and use for building a resume as well as project evaluation.

Community support:

The community support we have received is extensive.

The bags are being sold locally with the support of the following businesses: Kootenay Country Coop, Still Eagle, Natures Way, Cottons, Phat Angel, Street Clothes Named Desire, Love of Shiva, Kootenay Art Gallery (Castlegar). We have been supported with material from countless women who have emptied out their unused or redeemable material or clothing, or their mother's or grandmothers unused material and sewing notions from as far as Castlegar, Kalso and New Denver. We also receive material and used clothing from WIN, IODE, SHARE, and The Salvation Army. We have had support from the OSPREY Community Foundation and the Nelson & District Credit Union. The latter provided us with the funding to renovate the basement at the Centre to move our free clothing store into which opened up an upstairs room for a designated sewing space. This enabled the women to sew throughout the week and not just on Thursdays. Several not for profit organizations allow us to sell and present at various events they hold included United Church, International School of the Kootenays, ANKORS, Advocacy Centre, Habondia Lending Society and the local market for the Eco Centre. The community is supportive and excited by this project as it serves everyone to have the material used to create beautiful functional items and keep it out of the landfill as well as to have the women of this community be able to earn some money which then gets spent in the community in their stores.

We received funding in 2009 from Enterprising Non Profits to write a business and marketing plan and to access at what stage the project is. What became clear out of this study, (available for you to see if desired), was that the women were ready to grow through more training in personal development as well as in marketing. The need to have a key person set up, lead and direct the process through which this could happen is paramount to the success and growth of the women involved and the project.