



CASE STUDY: IS THERE A NEED TO SUPPORT WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS?

FCM INTERNATIONAL

The Case of the Women’s Enterprise Centre of Manitoba

BACKGROUND

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) is a federal government department with a mandate to promote the development and diversification of the Western Canadian economy as well as to advance the interests of the West in national economic policy. The department focuses on innovation, business development and community economic development in both urban and rural areas of Western Canada.

In the early 1990s, a Manitoba woman entrepreneur submitted a proposal to WD suggesting that there was a need for a centre devoted to helping women start businesses. The proposal prompted research to assess whether women entrepreneurs had special requirements and/or were underserved by existing supports. There was also research into the existence of gender-specific entrepreneurship centres in Canada and the U.S. The research led to the development of an advisory board comprised of women entrepreneurs, researchers and government representatives. These women were tasked with evaluating the need and ultimately proposing a structure for an organization that would work within the Western Canadian context.

In 1994, the Women’s Enterprise Centre of Manitoba (WECM) was established by WD as a non-profit

organization to assist women throughout the province successfully start, operate and grow their own businesses. Several members of the original advisory committee were appointed to the first Board of Directors. Operations and loan funds were provided by WD. Over the years, the Centre has accessed additional project funds from the government to develop initiatives related to youth entrepreneurship, business technology adoption, planning for growth based on financial statement analysis, and strategic planning, among others. Through loan

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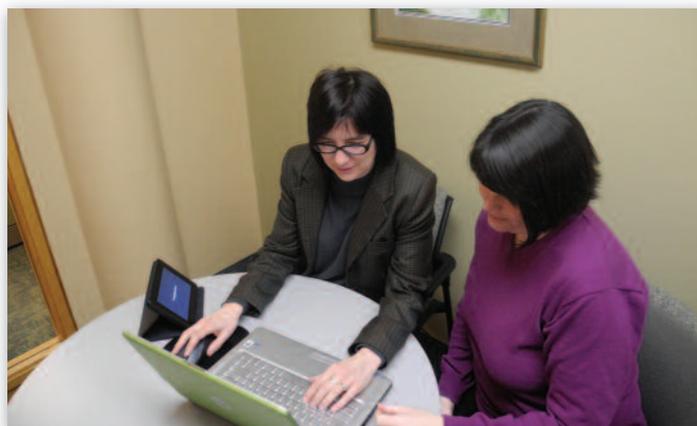
repayments, interest payments and administrative fees, the original loan fund is self-sustaining.

Today, the Centre works with women at all stages of their businesses and in a variety of economic circumstances. The years of experience in this very specialized arena has resulted in a comprehensive set of best practices related to the Centre's three core services: one-on-one business advising; business training; and financing up to \$150,000 to start, expand or purchase an existing business. Since the beginning, the Centre has worked with each client on an individual basis to answer their questions and help them determine the steps to make their businesses successful.

While the original mandate of the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba to help women successfully start, operate and grow their businesses remains, there have been several positive outcomes that have benefited both clients and the local economy. Between 1994 and March 2013, the Centre has:

- Received 2,857 business plans;
- Approved \$19.6 million in loans;
- Leveraged \$21.8 million with other financial institutions and private equity sources;
- Helped to create 1,600 full-time job equivalents;
- Helped clients further develop their business, management and/or interpersonal skills;
- Increased client access to other programs and services;
- Increased access to financing or capital from other sources;
- Increased the confidence level of women entrepreneurs;
- Helped women develop a more strategic focus.

Combining relevant and successful aspects from business service centres around North America, **the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba was the first organization of its kind in the country.** In the year following the launch of the Manitoba centre, similar organizations



were established in the remaining three Western provinces. The four organizations are collectively known as the Women's Enterprise Initiative (WEI). Each WEI operates independently of the others and at arm's length from WD, is governed by their own board of directors, and responds to the different economic and social conditions within their province.

While each provincial organization develops its own targets and reports directly to WD, information and best practices are regularly shared among the organizations and Pan West activities have been developed and supported. A 2008 Impact Study of the Women's Enterprise Initiative showed that:

- \$1 of operating funding resulted in \$19.30 in client revenues attributed to WEI (20:1 ROI)
- \$22.9 million in loans by WEI generated \$660 million in incremental revenues (30:1 ROI) and 8,000 person years of employment
- 98% of WEI clients remain in operation after Year 1; 75% remain in operation after 5 years

IS THERE A NEED FOR GENDER-SPECIFIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMS?

A variety of research sources indicate that **the number of women-owned businesses in North America is growing at a rate more than twice that of men.** In Canada, as in many other countries around the world, there are very successful women entrepreneurs who have achieved success on their own terms. This leads one to ask whether there is a need for specific programs for women entrepreneurs.

While some women have achieved business success, the experiences with Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba clients support the outcomes of studies that purport:

- **The competence of a woman entrepreneur is more likely to be challenged than that of a male entrepreneur.**
- There are systemic differences in the way men and women are treated by business support professionals including accountants, financiers and business counsellors.
- Women-owned businesses are perceived to have low credibility in the financial markets which restricts access to start-up and expansion capital.
- Women do not start businesses with the depth and breadth of management experience that are exhibited by men.
- Women often lack access to information, contacts, networks and mentors.
- Family responsibilities continue to remain the primary responsibility of women and must be managed in addition to work outside the home.

In addition to these challenges, women tend to start low-risk/ low return businesses that generally fall into areas such as sales, service, crafts, management or the professional sector. While these opportunities create a job for the business owner, they often don't create additional employment opportunities or have growth potential. Rather than become an asset that can be sold or passed on to a family member, the business ceases to exist when the owner is no longer involved.

Gender-based studies have shown that while successful male and female entrepreneurs are similar in many ways, there are gaps that limit women entrepreneurs from reaching the same level of success as men entrepreneurs:

- Women's learning and communications styles are different from those of men so they find themselves at a disadvantage when participating in learning situations developed for and by men. When women are comfortable in their learning environment, they are better able to ask questions which in turn increases their confidence.
- Women need learning opportunities that support their social nature, expose them to good female entrepreneur role models, and allow them to see how the skills and knowledge relate directly to their own situations.
- Many women are attempting to balance their business requirements with their family responsibilities. Learning environments that recognize these demands are advantageous for women entrepreneurs.
- Social supports are critical for women entrepreneurs. Mentors and/or coaches provide women entrepreneurs with opportunities to receive input on key decisions and act as sounding boards.
- Men and women have different definitions of success.
- Services provided to women entrepreneurs need to be directly aligned to their personal needs and make use of their own data.



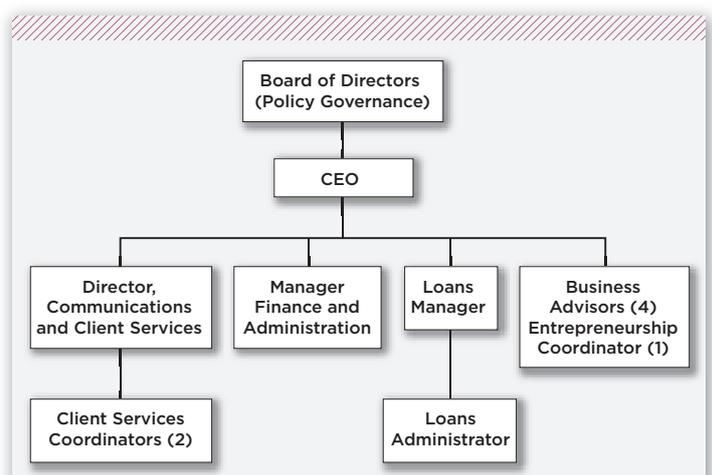
ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

The Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba continues to be governed by a Board of Directors comprised of community representatives, usually women entrepreneurs and women who provide support to entrepreneurs such as bankers, accountants and lawyers. The board members represent both urban and rural communities. In 2011, the board began the evolution from an operations-oriented model to one centred on Policy Governance®. It is now entirely focussed on the strategic direction of the Centre, leaving the day-to-day operations to the CEO and her staff. The CEO, management team and business advisors are seasoned business professionals who have entrepreneurial experience and/or business education.

The staff team is comprised of 12 individuals. The CEO, hired by the Board of Directors, is responsible for hiring the remaining staff. When special project funding is acquired by the Centre, staff responsibilities may be redefined for the period of time it takes to achieve project outcomes. If the project budget permits, specialized contract staff may be hired for the duration of the project. Contract staff generally report to the CEO.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) — Provides overall leadership toward achievement of the organization's philosophy, mission, strategy and long-range and annual objectives through the management of financial, physical and human resources. She works in conjunction with the Board to develop strategic goals and objectives for the organization and oversees their implementation. She is the interface between the organization and community.

Director, Communications and Client Services — Manages the Centre's communications strategy and programs related to branding, regional contact, media relations and corporate partners. She also oversees the client training program and is involved in the development of the strategic direction of the organization. As part of the Management Team, she works to evaluate Centre operations, implement new strategies, and provide administrative advice and support to the CEO.



Manager, Finance and Administration — Manages the financial and administrative requirements of the Centre, including human resource, payroll and premises. She supports the Board Audit Committee and as a member of the Management Team, assists in the evaluation of Centre operations, implementation of new strategies and provides financial and administrative support to the CEO.

Loans Manager — Manages the loan portfolio in accordance with the Centre's Loan Policy and in a manner that is supportive of the needs of women entrepreneurs in Manitoba. She chairs the Loan Committee which is comprised of the CEO and a business advisor to evaluate loan requests. The Loans Manager advises clients of the lending decision and is responsible for ensuring loan criteria and legal requirements are fulfilled. In addition to managing the loan administration budget, she oversees the disbursement of loan funds and the collection of loans in default. She is a member of the Management Team which evaluates Centre operations and implementation of new strategies.

Business Advisors (3 F/T, 1 P/T) — Work directly with clients in the development of business plans related to start-up, expansion and/or purchase of an existing business. They evaluate business plans to assess the viability and feasibility of the business idea by analyzing the concept, operations plan, marketing strategy and financial information. The Business Advisors make recommendations to the loan committee and provide loan aftercare to clients. They also deliver business training to women entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship Coordinator (P/T) — Meets with clients who are at the preliminary stage of business start. In addition to introducing them to the Centre's programs and services, she provides them with information about other relevant business programs within the community. The Entrepreneurship Coordinator delivers the monthly Welcome to Business seminar that introduces women to the concept of entrepreneurship and answers frequently asked questions.



Loans Administrator (1 P/T) — Provides day-to-day administrative and clerical assistance to the Loans Manager and Manager of Finance and Operations. She maintains all information related to the Loan portfolio.

Client Services Coordinators (1 F/T, 1 P/T) — Deliver exceptional customer service at every point of contact with clients, funders, partners, and the public. They direct client inquiries to the appropriate person within the organization, schedule meetings with the Business Advisors and register clients for seminars and events. In addition, they provide clerical support to ensure the efficient operation of the Centre.

ISSUE AND APPROACH: TRAINING, LENDING AND BUSINESS ADVISING

Women entrepreneurs have a profound impact on the economy. Not only do they create jobs for themselves and others, they are also very likely to make significant contributions to their communities. In order to help women build successful businesses, all of **the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba programs and services are crafted with women's learning and communication styles in mind.**

Training sessions range from introductory classes that help women explore the concept of entrepreneurship and its appropriateness for them at a certain life stage to business plan sessions that guide participants through the process of developing the plan and assessing the feasibility and viability of their ideas. More advanced sessions provide information that can be directly applied to the operation of the business. Sessions for seasoned entrepreneurs focus on strategic planning, optimal management and the development of growth opportunities. **The Centre recognizes that time and accessibility issues affect a woman's ability to participate in classroom sessions,** so there is an increase in the use of video conference, webinars and online sessions that provide flexibility, accessibility and convenience.

The Centre's business advisors are skilled, knowledgeable and efficient, allowing them to assist clients in a wide range of areas and levels of complexity. As experienced business people who understand entrepreneurial challenges, they are able to relate well to clients but also provide a reality check that comes from experience. This is a key factor in knowing when to discourage a foray into self-employment for someone who is not suited or is ill-prepared for sustained entrepreneurial activity and risk.

Financing is an important part of any business and many businesses fail because they are undercapitalized at the outset. The loan program sets the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba apart from other business centres that provide supports but don't have capital that many women entrepreneurs require in order to successfully start or grow their businesses.

Each loan application at the Centre is evaluated on its own merits. While assets and credit history are considered in lending decisions, viability of the business idea and the personal qualities, passion and competencies of the entrepreneur also factor heavily in the loan process.

The Centre's goal is to help clients launch or expand their business successfully while at the same time provide them with an honest assessment of the situation so they can decide whether there is sufficient potential in the business idea to continue pursuing that particular path. Once a woman receives a loan, ongoing aftercare by the business advisory team includes site visits and financial statement reviews to help the client quickly address challenges and to spot opportunities. The Centre also works closely with other financial institutions, not only to provide clients with financing options but also to leverage additional funds for larger projects.

ISSUE AND APPROACH: ONGOING FUNDING

At inception, the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba signed a five-year operating agreement with Western Economic Diversification Canada that included an annual operating budget and a \$5 million dollar loan fund. Following the expiration of the first five-year agreement, two more five-year agreements were signed. Since 2009, the Centre and WD have been entering into one-year funding extensions. The lack of long-term commitment has negatively impacted the Centre's ability to plan strategically. Management of the Centre would use longer-term funding agreements to address a number of issues and experiment with initiatives that have a long range focus and outcomes that can only be measured via longitudinal studies.

The issue of funding continues to be a challenge for the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba. While the annual core funding and loan fund provided by Western Economic Diversification Canada ensure the day-to-day operation of the Centre, the amount has not kept pace with inflation. As a result, additional revenue sources are continually sought to supplement the shortfall between the level of service that can be delivered with existing funding and the level of service that clients have come to rely upon.

While there has been occasional sponsorship for special events from provincial and municipal governments, there has been no operational support even though substantial resources are utilized in accessing and supporting rural clientele. Similarly, it is difficult to make a case for private sector sponsorship dollars for a federal government-supported organization.

A significant amount of time is devoted each year to seeking and securing special project funds that are made available by a number of federal government departments. The challenge lies in aligning the goals of the Centre with the funds that are available from these

departments. Over the years the Centre has established supportive and respectful relationships with Status of Women Canada and the National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistance Project (NRC-IRAP).

As an organization that supports entrepreneurs, the Centre must also be entrepreneurial in its approach to revenue generation. Nominal registration fees are charged for seminars and events. However, in cases where a client does not have the resources to pay, the fees are waived. Requests to eliminate fees are examined on a case-by-case basis.

A more substantial contribution to the Centre's coffers has come from the delivery of industry-specific business training at two local trade schools. It is very likely that the graduates of these schools (massage therapy and hair styling/aesthetics) will become self-employed at some point in their careers. Using existing curriculum as the foundation, Centre staff have modified the content and incorporated industry examples for each of the schools to make the learning relevant for the students.

LESSONS LEARNED

In the early days at the Centre, work was primarily concentrated on start-up businesses. Over time, there was recognition that there was still a gap in services to support businesses as they grew. Since growth businesses make significant contributions to the economy, there had to be services that help them thrive. **Recent programs and projects have targeted growth-oriented businesses to further the Centre's mandate of real economic impact.**

Women's organizations continue to have credibility issues in the mainstream business community and there are some who don't see the Centre as a legitimate economic development agency. It is a slow process but the retention of skilled and qualified staff and the implementation of innovative programming, not to mention a history of client success are helping to change perceptions.



The needs of entrepreneurs change and evolve. The Centre must remain flexible in its approach to service delivery so that it can quickly respond to client needs. Ongoing dialogue with clients and constant evaluation and refinement of all programs is necessary in order to remain relevant and effective.

Partnerships and collaborations are significant factors in the Centre's success. With limited budgets, it is necessary to know what other services are offered in the community so that there isn't a duplication of effort and the best interests of the client are met by referring them to an appropriate agency. In addition to the positive relationship with funders and co-lenders, the Centre has also been able to generate some sponsorship dollars to support special programs.

REPLICABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

While strong entrepreneurial activity is vital to creating and sustaining a healthy economy, many communities have challenges that affect the ability of women entrepreneurs to be successful. Important elements are necessary within the community to have a successful and lasting women's enterprise centre.

1. Political support — recognition by politicians at all levels of government that entrepreneurship is vital to the economy and therefore in the creation of policies and programs that support business development. Financial support is also very important for the operation of the organization.



2. Business expertise — having access to knowledgeable and successful business people. These may be staff members or consultants. It is important that they are able to share their experiences and insight with women who are starting and growing their businesses.
3. Relevant services — scanning the environment to see what already exists and where there are gaps. Talking to women to find out what they need and asking experienced entrepreneurs what programs and services would have facilitated their business start-up and growth.
4. Seed capital and operating capital — most businesses require an investment to start and ongoing capital to operate. Identify the sources of funds.
5. Entrepreneurial staff — these may be business owners or staff with a creative and entrepreneurial mind set. Staff who are passionate about business and are willing to take some risks. It is important for them to be able to relate to the clients.
6. Reputation — operate with integrity and honesty. Become known for the expertise and quality of services. Be visible in the community. Get involved in the business community, volunteer to judge business awards programs, assist students with business plan development and evaluation.

WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE TO SUPPORT WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS?

If the development of a centre that is devoted to providing various supports for women entrepreneurs is not realistic, existing services can be enhanced so that women receive relevant and timely assistance.

Experience at the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba has shown that women are anxious to help other women. Finding women with business experience who are willing to share what they have learned with government representatives and existing/potential entrepreneurs will be vital.

While business financing can have significant impact on the successful launch of a business, it isn't a guarantee of success. There are ways that entrepreneurs without access to loans can be prepared for business start:

- Develop seminars and workshops to help the entrepreneur develop a comprehensive business plan and acquire skills that will help in the operation of the business. Tap into knowledge and expertise at local universities and colleges or incorporate business curriculum into existing vocational training programs.
- Establish mentorship programs that link experienced business people (both male and female) with new entrepreneurs.

- Showcase successful women entrepreneurs who are willing to share stories about their entrepreneurial journeys.
- Create a hub or database that will make it easier for entrepreneurs to access all the necessary licenses and permits that they will require to operate.
- Provide opportunities for women entrepreneurs to get together to share experiences and learn from each other.
- Continue to identify and interact with successful female entrepreneurship centres that are willing to share best practices.

Wherever an effort is made, that work will ultimately engender success and building on that success may, finally, result in a greater initiative that provides full services to women in business. The contribution of women entrepreneurs to the economy, local or national, deserves our attention and our continued support.



A YOUNG KIM **Eye Define Optical**

Starting a new business as a woman entrepreneur can be daunting enough. But for A Young Kim, that was only one of the many challenges she faced since recently emigrating from Korea with her husband Nam.

“I had a dream to learn English when I was young. When I first came to Winnipeg as an international student at Red River College, I didn’t know how to speak it at all. I thought it was a good time to learn another language and learn about another country,” says A Young.

After graduating in 2005, Kim returned to Seoul to organize the couple’s immigration. She returned to Winnipeg two years later with Nam, a qualified optician in Korea.

Coming from a family with a background in the optical industry in Korea, opening an optical store seemed like a good fit. But where to start?

“I walked by the Women’s Enterprise Centre of Manitoba and was curious about what they did. I’ve since met with them many times and they’ve helped me put together my business plan. It is a really awesome organization for women wanting to start a business and they’ve been very helpful.”

A Young and her husband opened Eye Define Optical in September of 2012 and word of the company’s products, services and the determination of these newcomers to become a Winnipeg success story have helped the business to grow.

“For now it’s step by step. I love the business here. It’s a different kind of business here than in Korea. Marketing is totally different ...almost everything is different! We’re focusing on a multicultural market and many of our customers are Canadians with a Chinese, Thai or Asian background. Now our customers are bringing their family and friends to see us.”

A Young is training to be an optician with the Opticians of Manitoba and is excited about what the future holds. She continues to view her language skills as her biggest challenge, but like all entrepreneurs, is persistent in her efforts to learn. “I study every day and go online so I’m improving all the time.”



NANCY VARDALOS GINAKES

Kinsight Ltd.

If necessity is the mother of invention, then it’s easy to understand the genesis of the Safe-2-Go child safety harness and backpack created by entrepreneur Nancy Vardalos Ginakes.

With three active toddlers at home, Nancy was looking for a product that would help keep her children safe and close by when the family ventured out to busy places. Says Nancy, “I had a vision of the kind of product I needed, but couldn’t find one.”

With a degree in Textile Science, Nancy designed and made her first prototype. It was a unique design and others quickly took notice. Nancy recalls, “Friends would ask me to sew one for them and when I was out at the zoo with the kids, we couldn’t believe how many people stopped to ask about it.”

After conducting market research and refining the product, Nancy approached the Women’s Enterprise Centre for information on trademarks and patents. She secured a manufacturer in China to produce the harness in the shape of a stuffed animal. The animal’s tongue or the monkey’s banana is a retractable tether that connects the child and parent.

In 2008, Nancy teamed up with Heather Campbell-Dewar, designer of the Baby Sherpa backpack, to attempt global marketing of their products. As often happens, one thing led to another and in late 2012, NASCAR officially licensed Safe2Go to produce backpacks of Jimmie Johnson’s No. 48 car and Jeff Gordon’s No 24. In addition, Safe2Go backpacks are available at several U.S. zoos, in 200 retailers across North America and online at amazon.uk and target.com.

Nancy attributes her success to perseverance and confidence. “If I really didn’t believe in the product I would have stopped a long time ago. Something tells me that there’s nothing like this that is as dignified for children and it’s going to really appeal to buyers.”



SHEILA TAN

Di Erbe

Often the best business ideas come from creating a solution for a personal need. That was the case with Sheila Tan who participated in a soap-making workshop in Toronto as a way of finding a product that would work on her young daughter with eczema.

“The product worked well for her and I started giving samples to friends and family. Then they started asking for more so I started making soaps in my kitchen and selling them,” recalls Sheila.

She continued to refine her processes and her products but it wasn’t until she returned to Toronto for another workshop that she began to seriously consider it as a full-time business idea. “At the workshop I was ‘teaching the teacher’ because I had developed some tricks for things like pouring lip balm without the hole in the middle. I thought I was ready to open a store.”

She set a target for her first year and told her husband: “If I can’t double my sales in the first year then I’ll go back and get a full-time job!” That was in 2009.

Fast forward and Di Erbe (pronounced dee-err-bay) is a thriving shop in St. Boniface that offers a full range of body and skincare products that are made from all natural and organic ingredients with no animal by-products. One of her best sellers remains the product line she developed for people with eczema. “People come for the dry patch cream that I have developed for my daughter. My philosophy is if I’m not going to use it on my children, I’m not going to sell it. I have a real passion for what I do and it’s contagious when you believe in your product.”

Like many small business owners, Sheila’s biggest challenge is time and finding the right balance between family and work. “I need more than 24 hours in a day,” says Sheila laughingly. “But relationships are important and I’ve learned how to ‘call it a day’ and then get back to it the next day.”

Now with plans for 20–30% growth in the coming year, Sheila plans to introduce her products and custom blends into more spas and hotels across the country.

“Sometimes I’m still surprised by what hard work can create. Starting the business was the best decision I ever made.”

SOPHIE WILD

Chez Sophie

A glance at a bulletin board at the Chamber of Commerce in the Alsace region of France was the catalyst for a new entrepreneurial adventure for husband and wife Stephane and Sophie Wild.

“There was an ad that said they were looking for people who wanted to open a French business in Winnipeg,” recalls Sophie. “We called the number and flew to Winnipeg for a week in the middle of winter to check out the opportunities.”

The winter weather was a shock, but the opportunity looked promising and the Wilds bought Aladdin’s Pizza, a 30-seat restaurant in the heart of St. Boniface. Over the years, they’ve transformed it into the French-inspired bistro Chez Sophie.

The couple laughingly jokes that in the beginning everything was a challenge. “We could barely speak any English, the culture is different in that people eat at a different time here, and what people are open to eating is also different than in Europe. So we adapted our recipes and learned as we went.”

But the move has paid off as the restaurant continues to flourish and the couple has adapted to their new home. “We really fell in love with the people. People are more relaxed here and there are more open spaces and green spaces than in Europe,” says Sophie.

Over a year ago, the Wilds wanted to renovate their restaurant and approached the Women’s Enterprise Centre of Manitoba for a loan. “It was because of WECM that we were able to ‘glamour up’ the little bistro. The space used to be a bit more eclectic but now it’s very charming with the chandeliers and wallpaper — much more suited to our clientele.”

The couple is now planning their next adventure — a new French restaurant that will open on the Esplanade Riel bridge in June 2013. “It will be a restaurant, lounge and boutique. It will still feature French food but it will also have a bit more of a glamorous, upscale feel.”

For a couple open to new experiences and hard work, this may be just the beginning. “We have lots of ideas and see many opportunities for us in Winnipeg.”

**WENDY WATERS****Out of the Blue Inc.**

"I value time and money and if you're really smart, maybe you can have both. But if I had to choose, then I find time to be the most valuable for me."

That quest for more time and control over her lifestyle was the motivating factor for Wendy Waters when she opened Out of the Blue, a new and vintage inspired clothing shop in 1992.

"The early days were really fantastic and I had wonderful staff that stayed with me for ten years. That allowed me to spend more time at home when my kids were young," recalls Wendy.

Now that her kids have graduated, Wendy is working towards expanding the business and adapting to meet the changing world of retail. "The lines between what a department store and a boutique offer used to be very clear. Now those lines are blurring as department stores offer boutique lines and consumers have become much more price sensitive."

She's currently focusing on becoming more technology savvy, a skill she believes will help drive new marketing efforts. "Now my biggest challenge is technology and social marketing. It's really critical to my growth and I will become irrelevant if I don't get on board and master that."

Wendy has also spent time learning more about finances and credits the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba for helping her understand how to work with her money. "I grew up at a time when we didn't have women role models who would talk to us about handling our finances. WEC has developed some great programs that have helped me understand key financial indicators and learn the language of finance. That's been critical for me in moving forward in this economy."

Business guidance, training and financing for women.

Business Advice

Starting, operating and growing a business requires planning and resources to put viable ideas into action. Our experienced business advisors draw on their education, knowledge and entrepreneurial expertise to help you acquire the information and skills that will be necessary for your business success.

The Centre provides free, confidential, one-on-one guidance to Manitoba women at every business level and stage.

Business Financing

When we evaluate your loan application, we place emphasis on the business concept but also consider your assets and credit, personal qualities, competencies and commitment. Female/male partnerships are welcome provided the woman owns at least 50% of the company and is actively involved in its management. Our loans terms are favourable for women-owned businesses:

- Loans in any amount up to \$150,000
- Financing for start-up, expansion or the purchase of an existing business
- No monthly fees
- No costs or penalties for early repayment
- Terms for up to five years

Business Skill Development

Over the years, we have developed a variety of training options that address the unique needs of women entrepreneurs. There are classroom sessions delivered regularly at the Women's Enterprise Centre in Winnipeg, and upon request in various locations throughout Manitoba. There are also on-line sessions that can be accessed at the time and place most convenient for the entrepreneur.

All of the sessions are interactive and provide information that can be immediately applied to the start or operation of your business.

In addition to these core services, the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba team delivers a variety of innovative programs to assist women entrepreneurs in our province grow and develop their businesses. Check our website regularly to find out about our current offerings.

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