



Elaine Owen, chair of the Northwest Women's Enterprise Forum

"Women represent an amazing, relatively untapped, resource and could play a big part in driving the North West economy if many of the potential entrepreneurs among them are encouraged to take the first steps," says Elaine. "Since the NWWEF was established, it has taken great strides in empowering women to become successful business people, but there is still more work to be done."

Business Link Northwest is working hand-in-hand with the NWWEF to support women starting out, or in established businesses, help that that Elaine thinks is vital.

**"Business Link has listened to the needs of female entrepreneurs and has responded accordingly," says Elaine. "When I started out I wouldn't have dreamt of approaching an organisation like Business Link, but now more and more women are taking up the service, which is testament to the good work that is going on."**

A key part of that work is encouraging women to see the value of networking and engaging with the plethora of support groups that are available.

"As well as providing networking opportunities, these organisations can be a great source of support for women and open up many opportunities. Times are changing and while once women rarely made it to director level, now more are standing shoulder to shoulder with men on the board. But the forum is not aiming to prioritize women's needs over those of men; men and women can learn a lot from each other in business."

For Elaine, the forum will have been a true success when it is no longer needed. She concludes: "That time will come when women are no longer a minority group in the world of business but are equal in every sense of the word. There is a lot of work to be done but I strongly believe it can be achieved and the North West economy will reap the benefits."

To access the new dedicated women in business pages on the website log onto [www.businesslinknw.co.uk/womeninbusiness](http://www.businesslinknw.co.uk/womeninbusiness)

## ➤ Leading the Way for Women

Elaine Owen is an **award-winning businesswoman** and an inspirational figure in the region's women's enterprise arena.

The mother-of-three runs her own IT and learning development company. In her role at the Northwest Women's Enterprise Forum (NWWEF), she is striving to unlock the potential of many other women so that they can follow in her footsteps.

Elaine left school at just 16 and while running her own business was not her first choice for a career, she was given the opportunity after being made redundant.

"Running your own business can be a lonely place, because not many of your peers are in the same position," explains Elaine, "but the support is out there and women should trust in the fact that they have many qualities that make them excellent business people."

Elaine, who is the current holder of the Prowess Award for Business Mentor UK, spent two years as vice-chair of the NWWEF before taking over as chair in April this year.

The NWWEF was established by the Northwest Regional Development Agency in 2004 and is made up of local female entrepreneurs and stakeholder representatives.

The forum gathers opinions from a range of different organisations to learn about the issues affecting women's enterprise. This intelligence is used to push for change where it is needed.

Elaine's vision is to drive the already successful forum forward, working with stakeholders to help its members to achieve their best.

# It's a Woman's World

Ellen Kerr is on a mission to increase the number of **female entrepreneurs** in the region as she knows the value women can bring to the North West economy.

There are over one million self-employed women in the UK<sup>1</sup> and around 600,000 female-led businesses which equates to 14% of all enterprises.<sup>2</sup> Women make a **£45 billion annual contribution** to the gross value added by businesses<sup>3</sup> but are the largest under-represented group in terms of participation in enterprise.



As Business Link's Women's Enterprise Adviser, Ellen works with women across the region who are setting up or growing their businesses. Ellen has a strong track record of working with women. Sixteen years ago she set up the Women In Business Network accessing European funding to start a networking organisation that was specifically targeted at women.

Ellen explains: "My experience with the women's network is that often women don't see Business Link as necessarily relevant for them. It is important to provide a service that women can identify with and feel they could approach. My role is often about building their confidence and their support network, as well as providing business advice.

"We've also developed women's pages for the website which offer help and support tailored specifically for women. The pages have been very well received. Women tend to run their businesses

around the family and they often become self-employed because they need the flexibility or extra income.

They can contribute a lot to our region, not only in economic terms but also as employers. Women often have a creative, innovative approach to enterprise but may need extra support to build their confidence as well as their business."

In her role, Ellen works closely with the Northwest Regional Development Agency and the Northwest Women's Enterprise Forum to ensure information is shared and experiences are collectively recorded. ■

#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Economic and Labour Market Review, [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk), Nov 2007
- <sup>2</sup> The Annual Survey of Small Business' Opinions 06/07, BERR, Feb 08
- <sup>3</sup> BERR, 2009



## Women in Business – a Female Perspective

According to the Office for National Statistics 1,048,780 women in the UK are self-employed and a large percentage are in the public admin, education, health or service sectors.

Interestingly, 21% of women cite family commitments as a reason for setting up a business compared to 2% of men<sup>1</sup> and 80% of women-owned businesses are in the service industry.<sup>2</sup> Women based in rural areas are nearly twice as likely to become business owners as their urban counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

However, this is set to change according to figures from Business Link Northwest. There has been a 58% increase in pre-start enquiries in the first quarter of 2009, when compared to the same period in 2008, which shows increasing interest in enterprise from women across the region. As well as start-up guidance, women have been using the service for advice on running their businesses. Between January and May 2009, 3,395 women contacted Business Link Northwest seeking support and of those, 331 have received intensive one-to-one support from an Adviser.

Donna Edwards, Operations Director of Business Link Northwest said: "Women are an essential part of the region's economy and Business Link has recognised the important role they play. It is essential that we stimulate women's enterprise and we are working with our partners across the region to look at ways we can work together to promote enterprise to women and support them on their business journey. The interesting news is that women seem to be grasping the opportunity provided by the current economic climate and considering setting up their own business. Women inspire other women, so highlighting the great businesses in our region led by female entrepreneurs is essential and we should celebrate their success." ■

#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Promoting Female Enterprise, DTI 2005
- <sup>2</sup> The Annual Survey of Small Business' Opinions 06/07, BERR, Feb 08
- <sup>3</sup> Stairways to Growth: supporting the ascent of women's enterprise in the UK, GEM/Prowess 2006
- <sup>4</sup> The Annual Survey of Small Business' Opinions 06/07, BERR, Feb 08

Only 12% of businesses in the North West are majority-owned by women, while the UK average stands at 14%.<sup>4</sup>



**Company:** Reading Bee  
**Location:** Bolton  
**Established:** 2008  
**Sector:** Digital and Creative  
**Type of Business:** Magazine  
**No of Employees:** Two

#### Background

Journalist and teacher Gulnaz Parveen had always dreamt of launching her own magazine so at the start of 2008 she made it her New Year's resolution to finally take the plunge. Gulnaz turned to Business Link Northwest to help get her idea off the ground and has found her Adviser a constant source of support.

#### Glittering Ceremony

Gulnaz launched Reading Bee at a glittering ceremony at the House of Lords in April 2009 and the magazine went on sale in WH Smith the following day. Behind all the glitz and glamour a lot of hard work has gone into the business side of the magazine and it is in these areas that Business Link Northwest has provided help and guidance to Gulnaz.

Gulnaz says: "Since being put in touch with my Digital and Creative Adviser, Yusuf Musa, I have never looked back. He is always there for me with technical knowledge and expertise that I can rely on. For example, I wasn't sure how to go about having the magazine printed and Yusuf provided me with a list of printers that had the experience and ability to deliver on my requirements."

#### Business Plan

One of the key areas Yusuf has helped Gulnaz with was the creation of a business plan, for which he

enlisted the help of MBA students at Lancaster University Management School.

Yusuf says: "The students created a business plan for Gulnaz as part of their degree, which has not only helped her, but also scored them top marks for the module."

**"I also brokered Gulnaz on to the Northwest Regional Development Agency High Growth programme, a three-year business coaching initiative aimed at high growth businesses and entrepreneurs and she was accepted."**

**Yusuf Musa**

Gulnaz, who also has the support of her Chief Editor, Anami Gour, is now working on issue two of Reading Bee, which goes on sale in September. She is also liaising with five star hotels in India and contacts in Dubai about launching the magazine there and Business Link Northwest has helped by brokering her on to a Passport to Export course. ■



**Company:** Jan McDermott & Co Chartered Accountants  
**Location:** Birkenhead  
**Established:** 2005  
**Sector:** Business and Professional Services  
**Type of Business:** Accountants  
**No of Employees:** Six

#### Background

After 15 years in accountancy, Jan McDermott, a qualified chartered accountant, decided the time was right in 2005 to set up her own business. Jan's practice now prides itself on providing a first-class accountancy service that particularly understands the needs of start-up businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

#### It All Adds Up

When Jan was setting up she contacted Business Link Northwest and was put in touch with Adviser, Alan Dinwoodie, who helped her tap into funding from a business programme running at the time to part-fund the creation of a professional website.

**"Alan has helped us with a number of issues including one of the most vital communication tools we have; our website. I felt it was absolutely vital to create a website that represents our business. We want to focus on how to solve our clients' problems, not simply crunch numbers."**

**Jan McDermott**

#### The Value of Good Advice

Jan adds: "Business Link Advisers are very experienced and I would say that in the business world, they've seen it all before. If I have a question and am not sure who could answer it, I always contact my Adviser, who can point me in the right direction to answer the question as quickly as possible."

Business Link Northwest Adviser, Alan Dinwoodie, says: "When I first went to see Jan, I carried out a business diagnostic to assess the areas in need of attention. Jan already had an excellent business plan and a strong client base. With these essential factors in place, I helped her focus on getting that message out to potential new clients through the website and looking at new networking opportunities that she had perhaps not considered."

In May this year, Jan was elected Deputy President of the Liverpool Society of Chartered Accountants. The organisation is the oldest of its kind in the country and Jan is only the fifth woman to take on this prestigious role. ■

# Steering Through Challenging Times Together



Since it launched eight years ago, Sefton Women's Business Network has **provided an opportunity** for female entrepreneurs to share their experiences, pick up **business tips and meet new people**. The group has grown significantly since its inception and now has more than **200 members** from all over the North West, operating in a diverse range of sectors.

Chamber of Commerce, Pat currently runs PPBA Limited, a Southport based training and development company.

When the recession hit, Pat was keen to organise an event that could actively help women in business to steer their companies through these challenging times. She turned to Business Link Northwest for support in planning an event with relevant and useful content that would be of genuine value to its attendees.

Pat says: "I had the idea of running a speed networking event, bringing together new and experienced businesswomen and representatives from some business services too. I took my idea to Business Link Northwest and was delighted when they agreed to support the event with ideas, some sponsorship and also by having a presence there on the day."

---

**"Sefton Women's Business Network is a well-run and popular group. We're always looking for opportunities to work in partnership on initiatives that support businesses and raise awareness about how Business Link can help them."**

**Lynne Wood, Regional Relationship Manager**

---

At the event, Lynne explained how the new Business Link Northwest micro site supports women in business directly. Business Link Advisers also attended, joining in with the speed networking and providing the entrepreneurs with the opportunity to ask questions and pick up advice. ■

The initiative was launched by Pat Parry a year after she started her own business when she recognised the benefits that bringing like-minded women together could bring. A former chair of Sefton

## ➤ Women in Business in Oldham

Lorraine Sutter, Relationship Manager for Greater Manchester at Business Link Northwest is the **latest businesswoman** to throw her weight behind the recently launched **Women in Business in Oldham** networking group.

Women in Business in Oldham was launched earlier this year to bring female entrepreneurs in the town together through a series of networking events and workshops.

Lorraine is in good company, as she joins Paula Jones of the Royal Bank of Scotland, Barbara Miller of Miller's Florists, Chantelle Tupman of Clough Manor Hotel, June Smith of Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) and Carol Hopkins of Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, who have been the driving force behind the group.

The Group attracted over 100 local businesswomen to its launch earlier this year and subsequent events have included a marketing workshop and a wine-tasting evening.

Carol Hopkins, Local Manager for Oldham MBC says: "The networking events have been really well received by Oldham's female business community and we have some ambitious plans for the future.

"Business Link's Skills and Business Advisers have made a valuable contribution to our events, raising awareness of the service and the support it offers, which has been well received by attendees.

---

**"We're delighted that Lorraine has cemented Business Link's commitment to the group. Her involvement provides us with vital links to the business support landscape in the area and will make the organisation more accessible to women business owners in Oldham."**

**Carol Hopkins**

---