

# BiZz Theatre School

Business Gateway worked closely with performing arts worker Lorna Cottam to bring her innovative idea of setting up her own theatre school to fruition. After months of preparatory work, BiZz Theatre School was launched in Aviemore in October 2010 and immediately attracted 40 youngsters aged from four upwards.

## Well suited to self-employment

Forty-year-old Lorna, from Dundee, was looking after her toddler son and working as a part-time performing arts lecturer when she first approached regional development officer for Badenoch and Strathspey Lloyd Cornfield early in 2010 for advice. Lloyd assessed her idea and felt it stood a good chance of success, given Lorna's experience and background. He also felt she was well suited to self-employment.



## Relevant qualifications

As well as a degree in Community Education from Dundee University and a postgraduate qualification from the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, Lorna has nearly 20 years' experience in the performing arts. After completing a two-year, in-house community drama apprenticeship with Dundee Rep, she took up a post as a drama worker with Eden Court Theatre in Inverness. She left Eden Court on her marriage to artist Daniel Cottam, moved to Speyside and began lecturing at Inverness College UHI.

## Do not be daunted

Lloyd initially held two face-to-face advisory sessions with Lorna at her home in Kinraig and encouraged her to be positive and not to be daunted by running a business and bringing up a young family – at the time she was expecting her second child. Lorna says: "The process of talking it over with Lloyd helped me to crystallise my ideas and gave me the confidence to go ahead." The two then maintained a regular e-dialogue with Lloyd continuing to give advice and feedback – for example, he suggested that Lorna's original choice of Limelight Theatre School as a name for the business was too long and that it should be shorter and snappier. Lorna also took up the opportunity to go on a Business Gateway marketing course and also a bookkeeping course.

## Schools offered taster sessions

Lloyd guided Lorna as she assessed the scope of her market and looked for suitable premises. She promoted her new venture by offering free "taster" sessions to local schools. Business Gateway provided her with an outline business plan and financials which Lloyd, who formerly worked as an accountant, reviewed on her behalf before they were finalised.

### **No drama divas**

BiZz Theatre School meets every Saturday during the school term in Les Enfants, a nursery in Aviemore. There are three classes according to age and the pupils are taught singing, dancing and drama. Lorna says: "BiZz is not a big, glitzy drama school that produces drama divas. We are very much about looking at social skills and raising self-esteem and confidence. We work creatively in little groups and provide a stimulating environment. The school has already held its first show, an abridged version of Macbeth, and are planning a full-scale musical production in June 2011.

### **Double the numbers**

Lorna's goal for 2011 is to double the numbers attending the school in order to boost her profit margins which are presently low. She plans, with Business Gateway support, to carry out more marketing - again targeting local schools and to set up a website. Lloyd has encouraged Lorna to enter the Business Gateway's Dragon's Den Competition as it attracts a great deal of media interest and would raise her profile as well as give her the chance to win £5000 to grow her business.

### **Business Gateway comment**

Lloyd says: "I feel Lorna is a great example of how determination can overcome many of the obstacles we encounter in life. Lorna has had a dream she is now turning into reality through hard work and dogged determination. This is usually the perfect recipe for success and we look forward to further supporting the business as it grows."

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