



## Business Mentoring brings success to northwest SME's

The Business Mentoring programme was launched in September 2009 by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) to help SMEs develop their leadership and management skills. It is provided on a one-to-one or group basis, and is tailored to meet the needs of individual small business owners. The programme, which is free, is aimed at small businesses that have been trading for a minimum of 1 year and turning over less than £2 million.

To date, over 1100 individuals have registered for the programme. Of these, over 500 have been successfully matched with a one-to-one mentor, and 150 have started group mentoring, with the balance awaiting induction or allocation to a mentor or group.

One of the participants in the programme, Steve Smith, MD of ScanCapture in Rishton, Lancashire says: *"This programme has made my working life a lot easier and I feel I am more confident to try new things. I would recommend this service to anyone from small business owners to CEO's and MD's; it is a real eye opener!"*

*"After initial meetings, I have already seen the benefits to myself and my business",* adds Terrie Johnson of Fruit to Suit, a company based on the Wirral. *"The matching process was obviously very thorough as the match between my own personal needs and my mentor is excellent. Setting up and running your own business can be a very lonely and frustrating experience. It's fantastic to be able to talk with someone who does understand, as they have already been through the problems and issues themselves."*



Liz Howard, from the Sensory Toy Warehouse in Wallasey affirms *"My mentor helps me to focus. She makes me look at everything, from planning & forecasting, to staff delegation. It can be extremely lonely being in business by yourself, and Cathy acts as a sounding board for all my ideas."*

Since being on the business mentoring programme, Liz has employed two additional members of staff to help her in the business and has expanded her sensory toy business to global markets.

The latest addition to the programme is group mentoring, where smaller companies can meet up in facilitated discussion groups to share their business challenges. To date, more than 20 groups have been set up across the region. There have been unexpected spin-offs from the group meetings, with participants networking and creating potential joint ventures with complementary businesses.



Surprising partnerships have developed within the groups. *"I wouldn't have believed that I could learn management techniques from a hairdresser",* claims one of the participants who runs a letting agency. *"It's great to meet with like-minded people who inspire you",* adds Sharon of Busy Bee in Liverpool, who has recruited 3 new staff members since starting the mentoring programme.

## PRESS RELEASE

Lis Smith, Director of Skills & Employment at the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) observes: In just a short time the Business Mentoring programme has started to develop the next generation of leaders in the region, nurturing, guiding and developing talent in small businesses across England's Northwest.

"We've had a tremendous response to since the programme and hope the knowledge shared will boost the local and regional economy."

The programme has also attracted almost 400 high calibre business mentors, including current and former leaders of some of the best known companies in the northwest.

Evidence suggests that becoming a mentor and inspiring other small businesses can be extremely rewarding on a personal level. One of the mentors in the Manchester area, Jon Stopp, has over 20 years in business consultancy, having previously worked with IBM, Prudential and Direct Line. He states *"I like to see businesses & people progress. I particularly enjoy using my experience in consultancy to offer support to other businesses, who respect your advice & opinion. It is very rewarding to see people benefiting from your experience & to see their confidence growing. Especially when they go on to be successful."*

**To find out more about Business Mentoring, please contact Business Link Northwest on 0845 00 66 888 or at [www.businesslinknw.co.uk/mentoring](http://www.businesslinknw.co.uk/mentoring)**

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### **Notes to editors:**

The Northwest Regional Development Agency works to deliver economic success in England's Northwest by building the competitiveness of businesses, people and places. Our activities deliver real opportunities for the region's seven million residents by increasing workforce capacity and encouraging development of the skills needed to match the region's economic ambitions.

The Northwest Development Agency's £4.9 million Business Mentoring programme is part of its Leadership & Management Framework for Action. Part of the Government's 'Solutions for Business' portfolio, the Business Mentoring scheme is the largest of its kind dedicated specifically to meeting the needs of small businesses in the region and delivers high quality mentoring in accordance with a regional quality framework.

Business Mentoring allows an SME to optimise business growth and achieve success. It enables SME leaders and senior managers to have access to a real business owner and/or qualified mentor to discuss and share challenges and helps to support business success, productivity and improved performance. The business mentoring programme is being delivered across the region by a network of experienced providers. Over the three year period more than 3,000 relationships will be supported through the programme either through one to one or group mentoring.