

When Tammy Osborne went to Community Futures to begin planning her business 10 years ago, her vision was small. Her love for animals had pushed her to fill a need in the community she felt was lacking — someone to help people take care of their pets, walk them daily, babysit them when needed and board them when owners went on vacation.

“When I was working at a pet store, there were so many people asking ‘Do you know anybody...’ So, I thought, ‘I’m just going to do it,’” she said.

She took her idea to Community Futures to start her business plan and ten years later she runs a full boarding facility in Knutsford that accommodates close to 100 animals, TLC for Pets.

Community Futures Thompson Country (CFTC) is a federally registered not-for-profit corporation that promotes community economic development by providing small businesses access to information training and business advisory services.

Osborne entered the CFTC’s self-employment program, which helps clients develop a business plan over ten weeks. The CFTC then offers counselling and mentoring for a year afterward.

They will do site visits, monitor financials and offer consultation as well as work to anticipate any potential problems with the business. The CFTC also grants loans of up to \$150,000.

“I think it gives the businesses a bigger leg up, especially if they have never been in business before” said CFTC loans manager Shelagh Pemberton. “They have professionals that are counselling them on things. If they are in their business and we see future problems on the horizon we can talk to people about that.”

After completing the self-employment program Osborne received a loan which helped her get a canopy for her truck so she could transport the animals she was caring for. In the beginning she also did children’s birthday parties, bringing anywhere up to 15 animals to play. She ran TLC for Pets out of her home for a few years before the eight baby gates became too much of a hassle, at which point her and her husband, Denis Lessard, moved the business to a two-acre Knutsford property in 2007 where it is today.

Now TLC for Pets will board around 70 dogs, as well as several other animals. Three years ago Osborne started hiring staff to help with her growing business. She now has six to eight staff year round.

“You like what you do and you like your job or you actually really love your job, like it’s what you’ve been wanting to do your whole life,” Osborne said.

After 10 years Osborne returned to Community Futures to get another loan — this time to build an expansion to accommodate more animals.

“They were quite happy when I came back,” Osborne said. “They’ve helped me both times so I highly recommend it.”

The CFTC self-employment program takes client referrals from WorkBC and caters to people who have relied on employment insurance or been on maternity leave within the last five years. Pemberton said they see a wide range of businesses, from the accountant who wants to start his own business to the stay at home mom who wants to do esthetics out of her basement.

“I think one of our benefits is, unlike the bank, we can look at people that really need a leg up, they may not have a lot of money in the bank, they may be just coming off disability or a sickness. We have the ability to be able to help them just get to the next step,” Pemberton said.

Community Futures will work with businesses even after their one-year mentoring period. Pemberton said the overall feedback from clients is the business planning and consultation afterward is invaluable. Statistics show that the businesses the CFTC work with have a good success rate, she said.

“When Tammy came through her vision was very small,” Pemberton said. “It’s just kind of snowballed and over the last ten years has really become a vibrant, growing business.”