

Women's Rural Entrepreneurial Network (WREN)

Project Goal

WREN is, "Dedicated to improving lives and livelihoods, WREN's mission is to inspire, create and connect through economic, educational, personal and community development."

Brief Description

The Women's Rural Entrepreneurial Network (WREN) is a membership-driven organization for makers, artists, tinkerers, producers, entrepreneurs and DIY'ers that inspires possibilities, creates opportunities and builds connections through community. Their work connects people with one another, provides access to resources that many couldn't afford on their own, offers learning opportunities including entrepreneurial business training and technical assistance, and creates and supports markets for entrepreneurs. WREN's members benefit from and support WREN's many initiatives and resources that include Local Works, the Gallery at WREN, the Local Works Farmers Market and Outdoor Marketplace, their WINGS program, and their office incubator office program and their public access technology center.



WREN began in 1984 as an 8-month training and support program to assist 12 very low-income women. Three women wanted to help empower other women so that they could improve their own lives and livelihoods. The goal was to help them achieve their dreams of business ownership. Before WREN the only opportunities of jobs for women in similar situations were often minimum wage jobs. This program was proven to be a success when, by spring of 1995, the WREN pioneers were operating their own enterprises. Due to that success, the pioneers began building a WREN Community, which offers many benefits for its members. WREN has grown to have nearly 1400 members of both men and women, with almost half of those members currently operating their own business. They have assisted more than 1850 business owners over their 20-year history.

WREN was first started with a small grant. They are a unique example of a non-profit organization because they generate 60% of their income and only get 40% from grants. They are working on becoming as self-sustainable as a non-profit organization as possible.

The possibilities for WREN moving forward are endless. They are opening a maker studio in Berlin in spring 2015, which will replicate WREN's model for economic development in another community. WREN is great for communities who have seen an economic decline, such as Berlin, New Hampshire, after its mills closed down. The maker studio will be open to members and the public, and will include public access to free technology space, with comfortable seating, laptops, and free Wi-Fi. The members will have access to new technology such as 3D printers, laser cutters, and CNC machines to further the ability to make and create in the Rapid Prototyping Studio. It will also include an art and fiber studio, a media studio, a large classroom, and a clay studio. These studios will have classes and teachers to explain the safety and use of the materials.

Lessons to Share

WREN provides many benefits to the community through their Local Works store, the Gallery at WREN, Local Works Farmers Market and Outdoor Marketplace, their Wings Program, and their incubator office program and public access technology center. One of their great successes is giving people the opportunity to learn about how to start a business. WREN has brought the community together, and has given the community members a common place to go. WREN's local works marketplace is a retail store that features the products of nearly 300 vendors. This allows their members a market access point to sell their products. The gallery at WREN displays works of a wide variety of artists, and usually attracts hundreds of people. They display work of both beginners and experienced artists. This has become a main attraction in the town of Bethlehem. Every month they place a new exhibit on display, which has been a huge hit.

WREN has started a Local Works Farmers' Market, which provides local farmers, growers, artisans and crafters a place where they can come together. They provide the community with high quality, fresh produce and crafted products. It takes place in an easy accessible area and creates a place where the community can shop and get the community feel. WREN offers a Wings Program that is for girls and boys ages 8-14. Their incubator office program is great for start up businesses. It includes an all-inclusive cheap space with utilities, Internet, and access to all of WREN's spaces. That space is often used by the start up businesses until they grow to large. White Mountain Science, Inc. (WMSI) is one example of business using the incubator space. They share their science technology teaching skills and hands on work in 3D printer technology with local youth. They encourage art, engineering, and math education through fun interactive summer camps, workshops, and classes.

WREN has also faced some challenges and adversity throughout its history. For the most part the community is very supportive of the work that they do. However, there have been some unsupportive people. When WREN asked the town for money there were people who didn't believe that a non-profit organization should do that. Another problem they face is that most of their members are older, and they have had trouble attracting younger people. This has a lot to do with the demographic of the area, since there is a large older population. WREN has found that most of their members are second-tier entrepreneurs, meaning that they do it on the side to make extra money along with their

other career. This could be due to the fact that WREN is located in a rural region lacking exposure and access to a large consumer base.

For More Information

WREN

Snail Mail Address:

P.O. Box 331

Bethlehem, NH 03574

Email: wrencentral@gmail.com

WREN Central

22 Park Ave

Bethlehem, NH 03574

Phone: 603-869-9736

Fax: 603-869-9738

Office Hours: Monday thru Friday, 9am

– 5pm

Email: wrencentral@gmail.com

Local Works Marketplace

2011 Main St

Bethlehem, NH 03574

Phone: 603-869-3100

Hours: Open daily, 10am-5pm

The Gallery at WREN

2013 Main St

Bethlehem, NH 03574

Email: gallerywren@gmail.com

Hours: Open daily, 10am-5pm

WREN in Berlin

117 Main St

Berlin, NH 03570

Phone: 603-752-0060

Email: lauralocalworks@gmail.com

The Community Served: Coos and Northern Grafton Counties, N.H.