

New Practice Firm now on PEI

by Heidi Riley

“You need experience to get a job, and you need a job to get experience,” says **Mike Gillis**, Director of **Abilities Inc.**, the new Practice Firm to be located in Charlottetown.

“This unique employment program provides participants with relevant real-world experience that will help them get their first job or get back into employment,” says Mike.

A Practice Firm is a simulated business run by participants which upgrades their skills, widens their network of contacts, and put into practice effective job search skills. Over 7,500 Practice Firms operate in over 40 countries around the world.

“They develop and market a variety of products or services by taking on all aspects of a local company structure and running it in a simulated fashion,” says Mike.

“Firms do business with their counterparts around the world. Participants develop knowledge of the expectations of the workplace, and improve their employability and knowledge of business operations.”

Promotional material, purchase orders, bills, and even cheques circulate throughout the Practice Firm network. Participants get real experience with virtual production, delivery of the product, and the investment used for the transactions.

As participants gain skills, they also learn job search strategies. “We want them to know how to market those skills to be able to get back to work,” says Mike.

Benefits of being a business mentor

A Practice Firm is modeled after an existing business. Mike is in the process of approaching local companies to use as a model and to mentor the participants.

“Participating businesses help unemployed and underemployed people gain skills, and they get to see the development of people who become very familiar with their product lines and the way they do business. In other Practice Firms, many participants have become a valuable addition to a mentoring business.”



The Practice Firm on PEI: Abilities Inc.

It will be incorporated as a for-profit social enterprise under the ownership of the PEI Council of People with Disabilities.

The first cohort of 12 begins in the spring of 2017. There are plans to bring on about 48 people in the first year of operation. There will be continuous intake as participants leave the Practice Firm to go on to employment.

There will be two paid staff members. Mike is overseeing the development of Abilities Inc., and works with its steering committee. His role also includes job search coaching and networking skills.

An Operations Manager will be hired to take on the accounting, administration, and sales, as well as the day-to-day supervision and training of the participants. “We are looking for someone with a good business background,” says Mike. “Employment or career counselling experience would also be an asset.”

Who can participate?

Abilities Inc. is open to anyone unemployed or underemployed who may have professional experience and needs to update their knowledge and skills, or is starting a new career and looking for relevant work experience.

Mike Gillis is spreading the word about the new Abilities Inc. Practice Firm by speaking with people interested in joining and with businesses interested in becoming mentors.



Some examples of who might consider entering the program

- Newcomers who don't have Canadian work experience.
- Recent graduates from community colleges and universities.
- Anyone who does not have work experience in their field of study.

Core skills needed

Participants need to have education or some previous work experience in office administration, accounting, purchasing, or sales and marketing.

Skills in IT, social media, graphic design, and Human Resources will also be considered.

How to apply

Applicants for the 12-week program can apply directly or be referred by an employment assistance service provider. The cost of tuition is \$4,000.

To apply, contact **Mike Gillis** at **902-218-3114** or **mggillis@gmail.com**

For more about the **Canadian Practice Firms Network**, visit **www.rcee-cpfn.ca/en**



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