

Start Your Business - Increasing skills to avoid the bills

A mental health nurse is taking time out from his day job to teach people to tile in order to meet a rise in the popularity of DIY. John Atkinson now cares for patients at Middlesbrough's St Luke's Hospital on a part-time basis after launching The Teesside Tiling School at Southland Business Park.

The inspiration for the business came to him during an episode of the BBC's *Homes under the Hammer*, which identifies the potential and pitfalls of buying auction property, which often requires renovation work.

John explained: "Even during increasingly tight economic times, people will still want to improve their properties, but instead of paying someone else to do the job, they are trying to save money by doing it themselves. By providing intensive tiling courses, I can help people save money and complete their home improvements sooner."

John had no previous business experience to turn his dream into reality, so he contacted Business Link for support in getting started.

"They were absolutely brilliant," he enthused. "I had no experience of business and they helped me to put together a business plan, source premises, secure funding and they also put me in touch with professionals who helped me create promotional leaflets and flyers. Without Business Link and the business team at Middlesbrough Council, Teesside Tiling School would still be a pipe dream."

After launching in July, John runs courses beginning every two weeks and is hoping to increase the number of courses as they become more popular. His tiling school offers training for up to six people over four days and he is currently in talks with higher education colleges in Teesside to provide training to their students.

John hopes to have the course accredited next year which could help participants seek employment in the tiling industry on completion of the course.

Business Link account manager Stephen Gibson worked with John. He said: "It has been a pleasure working alongside John to turn a challenge into a business opportunity."

"John identified an increase in public appetite for DIY during difficult economic times and Business Link has helped him turn this dream into reality, through drafting a business plan, securing suitable financial support and marketing his business."

The Teesside Tiling School website was launched earlier this month and further information about the courses John offers can be found at www.teessidetilingschool.co.uk