



Lacey Koughan is living proof that you can become an entrepreneur at any age. Her own mental health journey was a catalyst in changing her life around and creating her own dance studio in the process. "I always trained in dance, and I always knew that I wanted to own a studio, I just didn't think it would happen so young. I had just turned 17 when it opened and now I'm 22" she explained. Just a high school student at the time, she initially started 24Dance but later closed that company due to the burnout from juggling a growing business with high school and being a teenager. However, this bump in the road just made her more resilient as she then opened 24Strong a few months later. 24Strong had a slightly different focus than her previous venture and actually began as a girls empowerment program where she held confidence building workshops as well as published monthly E-Magazines. A few years into 24Strong, dance surfaced once again into the business plan as it had always been Lacey's way of building her own confidence growing up. Lacey wanted to share that experience with other youth. "The dancing took over and now it is primarily a dance studio, but it is based on the foundation of being confident in whatever you do" she explained.



Currently, the studio offers hip hop, jazz, a technique class, musical theatre, and tap in both recreational and competitive settings. 24Strong also offers home school dance classes during the day and a partnership program with the Mount Academy, a private school in Charlottetown, where students can pursue a dancing career while maintaining their academics. Moreover, a career focused stream called 24Talent was established to prepare youth for the industry. Within this stream, they receive professional training in acting, singing, and dancing. Lacey was able to start offering all these classes in 2020 when her business really took off. Suddenly, she had gone from having 30 students to now having 300. For this reason, she began hiring employees and now also has seven other dance teachers and four admin personnel.

This rapid growth spurt also pushed Lacey into renting her own location, as the company had originally been operating out of various spaces in the community. To help with the much-needed renovations in her new facility, Koughan applied for the Atlantic Impact Loan through the CBDC and received funds to install floor to ceiling mirrors as well as professional sprung dance flooring called marley. "Without the loan we would not have been able to grow as we did because we wouldn't have had the funds to accommodate it...I will definitely consider re-visiting CBDC" she explained.

Classes have now reached capacity, so Lacey is looking to continue in expanding the business. Firstly, by extending her current floor plan to include more studio space. But she also hopes to start her own child talent agency because she wants "islanders to be recognized for their talents" and provide PEI dancers with the opportunities she had to travel out of province for growing up. Today, Lacey is still in awe with the fact that she gets to work in her own studio every day. "I can picture myself as a little girl wanting this so badly but not really knowing if it will really happen. I am living my dream and sometimes I ask myself, is this real?" she exclaimed. Most importantly though, she is proud of her success in which she herself defined as "knowing that I am positively influencing the next generation to be confident leaders, on and off the dance floor" because ultimately, she wants to "create a studio that empowers dancers not just creates the best dancers".