



BERNnet: Berne English Resource Network

English-speaking professionals launch a new network in Berne.



BERNnet members working on their web pages: (l-r): Erica Holt Hämmerlin, Kali Tal, Jazibe Molina, Robin Bartlett Rissi, and founder Jeannie Wurz

It started as a way to pass along work we couldn't handle. The Berne English Resource Network (BERNnet), formed in November 2009, comprised mostly American women working free-lance as editors, proofreaders and translators out of their homes in and near the city of Berne. A PDF file with member profiles was sent by e-mail to potential clients, and members who had too much work shared it with members who didn't. We informed each other about job opportunities, and met once a month to sample homemade baked goods and talk about working as an English-speaking foreigner in Berne.

Soon, our aspirations grew. Why restrict ourselves to editing? And why not publicize our services via the Internet? "A website makes us immediately accessible to clients, helps create our brand, and allows us to share resources with each other," says Kali Tal, a BERNnet member with experience in web design.

One year later, BERNnet has a website (www.bernnetwork.ch) and active members from the United States,

Canada, Great Britain, Switzerland and Mexico who offer a range of English-language services. The original focus on editing and proofreading, translating and interpreting, and reporting and writing has been broadened to include relocation, English instruction, graphic design, web design, architecture, and interior design. As new members with new skills join, the list of offerings expands.

A few qualifications are required of all BERNnet members: fluency in English, a university degree, and residence in the Berne "metropolitan area" in order to be able to attend meetings. Members are asked to determine that they are eligible to work in Switzerland. Otherwise, pretty much anything goes.

Some members are new to Berne; others have lived here for decades. Some work free-lance while raising children; others hold part-time jobs, or own businesses. Men are welcome in addition to women. Because our experience varies, so do the hourly rates we charge. Members speak a variety of second, third and fourth languages, and have lived in a range of

countries. We're united, however, by our desire to use our English language skills as free-lance professionals.

"I joined BERNnet because I recently graduated from the University of Berne and am looking for work," says Robin Bartlett Rissi, who earned a master's degree in Political Science and Environmental Studies in 2009. "I thought that I could combine my degree with my mother tongue English and work as a freelance proofreader, editor and translator while looking for a job and in between jobs."

From a group of American women sitting around a table on a dreary November afternoon, BERNnet is developing into an intercultural professional network of English speakers interested in serving the Berne community. BERNnet's membership roster is continually changing. Already in the group's first year, a number of members have found permanent jobs, and others have moved away from Berne. In order to emphasize the networking aspect of the group, members who don't currently have the capacity to take on free-lance work are welcome to belong as passive members, and to post profiles on the website when they're ready to.

The Berne English Resource Network is still in the process of defining itself. With the creation of our website we hope to increase awareness of the group and our services. We welcome new members and ideas. If you're a Berne-area English speaker with a talent, skill or resource you'd like to offer through BERNnet, send me an email at bernnet@bernnetwork.ch. Our next meeting is just around the corner. We'll save you a chair and a scone.



Jeannie Wurz
is an American writer, editor, and reporter who moved to Berne from Chicago in 1992. She's interested in medicine, ethics, intercultural issues, and Swiss politics.