

# YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMMING

## Overview

## INTRODUCTION

Many rural communities are placing increased emphasis on youth as they look at building a thriving ecosystem for entrepreneurship. Youth entrepreneurs can be important contributors to sustaining current businesses, growing local economies and building community vitality. Some of the reasons youth are being looked to for economic and community development include:

- 1. A changing work environment:** As communications technologies become more advanced, there is an increasing shift towards freelancing professionals – individuals managing their own projects, reporting to a list of clients as opposed to one employer. Given the right technological infrastructure, freelancing shows great potential to allow more people to live and work in rural communities. Entrepreneurial skills will thus be increasingly important for more and more people in the future.
- 2. Succession planning and workforce development:** A large number of business owners are exploring, or will be exploring, retirement in the years to come. These business owners will be relying on a new generation of entrepreneurs to take over. For rural communities who rely on local businesses for jobs and services, and who are seeing youth leaving home in increasing numbers, succession planning will be an important challenge to address. Communities are exploring how youth entrepreneurship and youth engagement might help retain youth while creating connections to prosperous careers.
- 3. Community development and citizen engagement:** An important component of entrepreneurship is the entrepreneurial mindset or attitude – this manner of understanding and interacting with the world. Entrepreneurs are often problem solvers – they find a collective need and build a business around solutions. While this entrepreneurial mindset may often breed successful businesses, it is also valuable to nurture as it breeds community builders - those who focus their attention outside of the economy on important needs in the community.

The following case studies are examples of communities and/or organizations embracing youth entrepreneurship in the work they do.

### STUDENT START UP (SSUP) NORFOLK

#### **BACKGROUND**

Student Start Up (SSUP) Norfolk is an award-winning youth entrepreneurship program, with accolades from both the Economic Development Council of Ontario and the Economic Development Association of Canada. Norfolk County has been running the Student Start-Up Program (SSUP) for the past three years, a program designed to encourage local high school students to consider entrepreneurship as an alternative to traditional employment streams.

#### **PROJECT ORIGINS**

SSUP Norfolk was first introduced in 2016, adapted from a model of youth entrepreneurship development in British Columbia. The initial goal of the program was to shift students' thinking around the possibilities of starting a business, to provide enough support and guidance to help students step outside their comfort zone and pursue entrepreneurship as a viable job opportunity. The program was built on the notion that introducing youth to entrepreneurship from a young age would help to normalize the idea and demonstrate that it need not be a scary, intimidating endeavour. At its core, the SSUP program combines start-up funding with business mentoring and access to market to help students move forward with their entrepreneurial goals.

#### **THE EVOLUTION OF SSUP NORFOLK**

The focus in the first year of program development was to garner widespread participation from as many youth as possible. The first intake saw a total of 86 student applications, of which 40 students received funding to start their businesses.

In the first year 12 Norfolk County businesses sponsored this program to build a budget of \$8,850 for grant funding. In years two and three, interest in the program grew, along with support from sponsors. To date, in three years of operation, the program has received 371 applications, and administered close to \$25,000 to help fund 173 student-led start-ups.

While this program is now firmly rooted in the community, given feedback from sponsors, participants and municipal staff, some changes are being proposed. The focus of the program will shift from quantity of students to quality of applicants selected. Funding per business will be increased, though funds will be contingent on participation in mentorship sessions, marketplace participation and quality of final report.

The mentorship component will be strengthened through increased partnerships in the community. When students come in with questions, they will have access to a wide variety of professionals in the community who can provide guidance.

If students have legal questions there will be a lawyer. If students have financial questions, there will be an accountant. The relationships with local professionals who have agreed to offer in-kind mentorship to youth will enable this program to teach the nuts and bolts of entrepreneurship in a more serious way.

### **SSUP NORFOLK STAFF-TIME COMMITMENTS AND PROJECT COMPONENTS**

#### Program Design

This process takes part-time staff commitment over the course of four months, November to March.

This stage involves tailoring the concept of a youth summer entrepreneurship program to the needs of the community. For example, some communities may have specific thematic focuses (food, arts & crafts, automotive).

If a community decides they want to implement this program, they need to develop the terms of reference and policies to govern the program – how do you ensure it's a level playing field, how do you ensure equity, what's the policy around use of images, indemnification of the county, permission from guardians (under age youth) to participate?

The program lead also needs to prepare a report to council to secure municipal permission. This report should highlight all the important areas of concern for the county, beginning with the questions identified above. Further, councillors will be concerned with questions like:

- > What percent of the program budget is tax levy vs. opposed private sector sponsorship?
- > What portion of the budget will be administration vs. program spending?
- > What are the program's anticipated impacts and why does the community need this?
- > How do you measure success?
- > What is the target number of participants?

#### Pre-Program Promotion & Planning

This stage of the process takes part-time staff commitment over the course of four months, March to June.

The program promotion is a work-intensive process for communities just getting started with such a program. It involves soliciting sponsorships from local businesses, meeting with teachers, school boards, Chambers of Commerce, BIA's, boards of trade, business associations, etc., to build community support.

Program promotion involves advertising through social media, radio, newsletters and finally, recruiting student participation.

>Promotion through local schools takes place early March (four months prior to end of school)

Note: As this program has been running in Norfolk County now for three years, students and teachers know about the program already and promotion is more of a reminder. In the early days of the SSUP Norfolk program, the early weeks of promotion took a large amount of time as they would cover all 13 high schools in-person. Today they are able to send communications to schools to enable them to promote on their own, saving a significant amount of time. As such, the time requirements for promotion have declined over the years (now 10-20 hours).

> Student applications are open for three weeks leading up to the end of the schoolyear  
> Applications are evaluated by staff and final selections are made

### Early Summer - Program Launch

Staff Commitment (20-25 hours): Early summer involves mostly program administration. Successful applicants are announced and staff need to ensure students get their seed money. Once this is out of the way, much of the program sustains itself. Some attention to student businesses and connections with mentors is required on an ongoing basis, but is not a significant amount of time.

- Waiver forms are required (guardian waiver and model photo release).
- Successful applicants are notified by the end of June.
- Successful student businesses receive funding through pre-paid debit cards, in the following installments:
  - o \$100 initial seed money to buy supplies and get business started
  - o For every festival, marketplace, farmers market attended, students earn \$50 building to a maximum of \$300.
    - § Remuneration based on effort encourages increased participation in learning opportunities and entrepreneurship specific experiences
- County curates a series of festivals, events and marketplaces.

- There are seven established “marketplace” events, at no cost to the student. Students may participate in any or all of these events:
  - Norfolk Ram Rodeo
  - Lynn Valley Lions Ice Cream Festival
  - Venture Norfolk Marketplace
  - Port Dover Silver Lake Market
  - Port Rowan Farmers Market
  - Waterford Farmers Market
  - Simcoe Farmers Market
- Additionally, students participate in two mentorship sessions: One in early July, one in mid-August.

### Mid-Summer - Student Marketplace

The mid-summer student marketplace is a community event in August for the students to display their wares. The event is coordinated throughout the summer, requiring coordination with media, Venture Norfolk, students, parents and community members. Everything is coordinated for the students, including the tent space they need and their lunch for the day - students arrive with their products and have a table ready to go. It's a bit of a celebration each year, and the whole community knows it's coming. The local radio station and newspapers all come out to interview and congratulate students about their businesses. This event takes roughly 20 hours of staff time.



### End of Summer - Wrap Up

- A bonus of up to \$100 can be received if the student submits a comprehensive final report by the end of August.
- End-of-summer staff commitment is 10-20 hours for collecting and reviewing final reports.

### **LOCAL PARTNERS**

From promotion to mentorship to sponsorship, this program is a community effort.

#### **Some of the local community partners include:**

- **Venture Norfolk - Community Futures Development Corporation**
- **Local Schoolboards**
- **Local Business Sponsors**
- **Local Professional Mentors**
- **Brantford Brant Resource Centre - SBEC**
- **Workforce Planning Board**

### **LESSONS LEARNED & CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS**

An important realization for the Norfolk County team was how much the local business community endorsed the program. While the primary focus is entrepreneurship, this program acts as a bridge between the students and local businesses. Local businesses have seen value in the program, many of whom have actively called staff over the years to see how they might get involved and support SSUP program.

The whole community celebrates the efforts of the students throughout their summer season, and local businesses want to be a part of that. At the end of the day, a fundamental component of this program's success has been the public celebration of the student's efforts – when you celebrate it, everyone wants to be a part of it – teachers, students, businesses, community organizations and local residents.

## LAUNCHPAD YOUTH ACTIVITY AND TECHNOLOGY CENTRE (LAUNCHPAD YATC)

Launchpad YATC's I'm the Boss! program provides similar youth entrepreneurship experiences as SSUP Norfolk, though LaunchPad is also able to build on existing youth programming offered year-round through their youth centre located in Hanover, Ontario.



LaunchPad YATC is a drop-in youth centre with a specific focus on skill-building and job-training opportunities. Each of the activities offered in LaunchPad's curriculum are intentionally connected with local businesses which allows them to train youth in locally relevant job skills, while also providing opportunities for enriched learning through hands-on connections with other local entrepreneurs.

Some of the amenities and program opportunities available to youth at LaunchPad YATC include:

- Welding Shop – Welding courses for various abilities (101, 102, 201, 301)
- Commercial Kitchen – culinary and catering courses
- Fully Equipped Wood Shop – wood-working basics and working with shop equipment
- Technology Lab – photography, music recording, robotics, 3D printing, computer programming courses
- Recreation Space – music, art classes, etc.

### *I'M THE BOSS*

LaunchPad's I'm the Boss program is designed to support and inspire local youth to test their potential as entrepreneurs for a summer. Through this program, any young person with a good idea can take the summer to explore how they can build their own business. LaunchPad facilitates access to market for the youth by providing a collectively run market space at the local farmer's market. This provides a safe environment for budding young entrepreneurs to take risks, be creative and make mistakes. LaunchPad staff are also on hand to provide guidance with building a business plan, customer service and marketing. At the end of the day, they help kids have fun, build positive experiences and learn from their mistakes. While this program is in its early stages, it is an excellent complement to the existing LaunchPad programming, moving local youth from the skills they've learned at LaunchPad into building their own business.



## *BACKGROUND*

The Kidpreneur program was developed to introduce entrepreneurship to local youth, kids in grades 6 through 8, to empower them to think in an entrepreneurial way. The program focuses on providing youth with the skills and inspiration to pursue their dreams in the future. It enables these individuals to be able to make choices in the future as to whether they should work for someone else, or create their own employment through entrepreneurship.

Tracey Snow is the Economic Development Officer with the County of Lennox and Addington, and works as a business coach to prospective and current entrepreneurs. For Tracey, entrepreneurship is not a start-up piece. “To me it’s a mindset”, says Tracey. “It’s an attitude, its perseverance, its creativity, its risk taking, its reward, its struggle.” For Tracey, entrepreneurship support needs to focus attention on introducing and fostering this entrepreneurial mindset. While Tracey remembers a time where entrepreneurship was not discussed as a viable career path, she is encouraged by recent shifts towards opening this conversation and creating new opportunities for today’s youth.

## *HOW DOES IT WORK*

The Kidpreneur program is designed to demonstrate the opportunities students have to start businesses, to showcase the potential they have in themselves to be entrepreneurs and to inspire other students to explore new business ideas.

Kidpreneur is an entrepreneurship fair, like a science fair, put on in partnership with the County Economic Development team and the local school boards.

The Kidpreneur program gives elementary school students (grades 6-8) from Lennox and Addington County a framework for brainstorming and developing their own small business plans.



Leading up to the competition, each elementary school is visited by a member of the Lennox and Addington Economic Development team, as well as a local entrepreneur. The students participate in a 45-minute fun, informative and dynamic presentation about entrepreneurship to help get things started. Each school is provided with a Teacher Information Package to assist with planning, as well as access to a team member from the County Economic Development office for any questions.

Students interested in participating in the Kidpreneur fair develop a business plan and draw up a storyboard to help pitch their business idea. Each student needs to demonstrate all aspects of their business. They are required to do market research, determine startup costs, expenses and revenue and develop a marketing plan. The County Economic Development team recruits judges to evaluate the students' submissions from each school. The top business plans move on to a County-level competition, where local invited politicians, media outlets and high school teachers, are invited to come see the students' business ideas.

Teachers in the schools are excited by the applicability of this program with their own curriculum goals and are strong supporters of the initiative in their classrooms. The Kidpreneur program has resulted in a positive classroom learning experience and helped to ignite the entrepreneurial flame for many of the students that have participated.

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