

# COOL COW ICE CREAM SHOP

## Program Overview



### PROJECT ORIGINS

Cool Cow Ice Cream Shop was the brainchild of Brock Youth Centre (BYC) staff Emily Morrison and Barb Smith. Emily's primary focus at BYC was the delivery of entrepreneurship programming at local high schools through business pitch competitions. Barb was the BYC's Outreach Coordinator responsible for building new connections in the community. As an entrepreneur and a former founder and owner of an ice cream shop in Lucknow, Ontario, Emily was keen to connect her previous experience with her current focus on youth entrepreneurship programming. The idea was to connect the business and entrepreneurial mentorship from the pitch competition with a hands-on application: an experiential learning opportunity for youth running an ice cream shop in Downtown Beaverton, Ontario. When Emily and Barb put their heads together, Cool Cow Ice Cream Shop was born.

### HOW IT WORKS

At the Cool Cow Ice Cream Shop, youth learn entrepreneurship and job-readiness skills through hands-on experience. They are engaged in all aspects of running the shop - from marketing to customer service training to hiring employees to purchasing supplies - while getting paid a competitive wage as employees of the business. Throughout the summer months, the sale of ice cream at the downtown storefront is enough for Cool Cow to be a self-sufficient business.

Important to note: this model does not require a focus on ice cream or even food sales. Other business models can be used, though the essential component is the focus on hands-on learning opportunities and on-the-job training.

### THE EVOLUTION OF COOL COW

When the idea of Cool Cow was first presented, and the Brock Youth Centre decided to move forward with the programming, they were in need of a location and began reaching out to downtown building owners. Cool Cow's first season began in a vacant storefront in downtown Beaverton. The storefront, located on "the shady side of the street" had been empty for seven years and was in need of upgrading.

Together with the help of youth and neighbouring business owners, the new Cool Cow team began cleaning, patching the walls, painting and installing the equipment they would need for the business. They also made improvements to the streetscape, taking over a side alley to build seating for their clients.

Their enthusiasm was contagious. All the activity along the main street of Beaverton boosted morale in the community and fostered support from other local businesses who began contributing to the building makeover through donations that ranged from paint to ice cream coolers to skilled labour.

By the time the business opened its doors, the community had already rallied behind the story of a youth-run business in the heart of their community. There was a wealth of support from full-time residents as well as seasonal cottagers on nearby Lake Simcoe.



Interestingly, since the inception of Cool Cow, there has been renewed interest in the downtown. The Cool Cow building was recently bought by a local couple who have turned the space into a gallery for local artisans. The new owners are very supportive of the Cool Cow program and have made space for the ice cream shop in the back of the building, in what is to become a market for a variety of local artists and artisans.

While this is a great progression for downtown Beaverton, it also poses new challenges for the Cool Cow team. They're now looking to re-invent their marketing, to ensure longstanding customers know they're still in operation, and to bring customers back from the street.

Fortunately, in keeping with the spirit of this experiential learning enterprise, the students have the opportunity to get creative and come up with solutions to their new challenges. At the end of the day, no entrepreneur has an easy journey and nothing works out exactly the way it was envisioned. Every challenge that comes up for Cool Cow is a valuable learning opportunity for its young staff.

## IS THE COOL COW MODEL A FIT FOR MY COMMUNITY?

Does your community have:

- An existing focus on youth entrepreneurship?
- Sufficient downtown traffic to support a business?
- An existing focus on downtown revitalization?
- Supportive local stakeholders?
- An energetic, engaged local champion?
- Vacancies in downtown storefronts?
- A missing niche in downtown retail/food/services?

### COOL COW TEAM

- **BYC Staff** – Program administration and oversight
- **Student Staff** – local high school students interested in entrepreneurship and business ownership.
- **Head Manager** – responsible for managing all the young employees through the day-to-day aspects of running a business
- **Assistant Head Manager** – hired to support the head manager and take the management lead during the head manager’s days off.



### COOL COW – SEASONAL TIMELINE

As a seasonal venture operating only during the summer months, each year the Cool Cow program needs to get ramped back up following the winter break.

#### *Pre-Season – Preparation for the Season*

In its first year, the Cool Cow program took much more planning than it does today. Currently, the time required is minimal thanks to the Employee Handbook, a resource document developed and updated over the years, full of all the necessary administrative components like job descriptions, employee orientation, etc.

### *Peak Season – A Typical Summer Week*

While the summer season lasts for months, exploring a typical week of operation is the best way to understand the ins and outs of the business.

#### **Hours of Operation**

The Cool Cow Ice Cream Shop is open 7 days a week, 12-8 PM. There are usually about two ice cream orders that take place each week, depending on sales, managed by the head manager.

#### **Employees**

During the hours of operation, employees are responsible for scooping ice-cream, cleaning and organizing the workspace, attending to washrooms and assisting customers with any other needs they may have. Where possible, employees receive additional training and mentoring from the on-site managers or BYC staff.

#### **On-site Managers**

While managers have younger employees scooping, they are able to take time each week to write up reports for the board, evaluate items that need improving, schedule employee shifts, and the ordering, purchasing and pick-up of ice cream.

The manager is also responsible for cash management – counting cash and balancing the register is a daily task, and all employees get the chance to count money and get comfortable with the process. The Cool Cow team have developed a template for all employees to follow, and any shortages or overages are discussed at staff meetings.

#### **Staff Meetings**

There is a staff meeting each week where the whole staff team and managers review the operation of the business. During these weekly staff meetings, BYC staff will come in to scoop ice cream so all employees can be in attendance. Meetings are also scheduled around the shifts of those employees who live furthest away to avoid an additional commute in to the shop and to ensure participation of all employees. At these meetings, day-to-day operations are discussed to ensure the highest quality of customer service is continuing to be delivered and that any weaknesses are being addressed.

Another important component of these meetings, and of the overall educational component of the Cool Cow program, is the entrepreneurship training that takes place. During each meeting, the managers and BYC staff try to coordinate a guest speaker to touch on a new topic of entrepreneurship. The types of topics and speakers include:

- **Ice breaker meeting** – kids talk about themselves and get to know their managers
- **Customer service** – this is an ongoing topic that is emphasized among the young employees
- **Business liability insurance with a local insurance broker** – what is insurance, what is business liability, and why do businesses need it?
- **Health regulations with the local health inspector**
- **Fire safety inspections with municipal fire officials** - check to make sure the business is in compliance, why this is important, and what employees need to do in the event of a fire
- **Brainstorming and breakdown of marketing strategies for the business** – all ideas are explored in the context of Cool Cow to test for effectiveness

### ***BYC Staff***

BYC staff will periodically check in throughout the week to assess cleanliness, and flag important details for the young employees to pay attention to. For example, ensuring the sidewalks are weeded and swept provides a positive first impression for customers entering the building. This is something that the young employees don't know inherently, and sometimes need to see first-hand.

In addition to training for Cool Cow, BYC staff devote a couple of hours each week to come out and meet with the employees one to one. This is an opportunity to have another level of mentorship, and to provide the opportunity for any issues to be raised. It's also an attempt to better engage with the young employees and connect them with future opportunities and programming available at the BYC. These meetings exist to help build young champions of the BYC and the programming that is available for their peers.

TABLE 1.0 – DESCRIPTION FOR A TYPICAL SUMMER WEEK AT COOL COW ICE CREAM SHOP

**PRE-SEASON PREPARATION**

February	Job Postings – student employees, head manager, and assistant head manager	The job postings are ready to be posted from the Employee Handbook.
Early mid-March	Review resumes and schedule interviews	This is the greatest draw on BYC staff time for this project. Aside from this early preparation, additional staff oversight is minimal.
March Break	Interviews and hiring of Cool Cow student staff	
University/ College Reading weeks	Hiring of Head Manager and Assistant Head Manager	
May	Skilled Training Sessions	
Early May	First Ice Cream Order	In preparation for season opening
Week prior to May long weekend	Soft Opening – Student Staff Training	This training session helps customers to feel a part of the kids’ training because they can physically see how nervous they are and how hard they’re trying to do a good job. Customers are asked to give constructive feedback on their experience.
May long weekend	Grand Opening	The Grand Opening is a time to bring out the whole community and celebrate the start of a new season. Creating a sense of occasion during this event is important for building community support.
Spring Season	1:1 Staff Mentoring	In the spring season, the Ice Cream Shop is open on weekends and after school Thursday and Friday. Staff work with the manager in a 1:1 setting. As it is typically quieter during the end of May and month of June, this provides an opportunity for staff to get to know the manager and get a feel for the day-to-day requirements of the job and to voice any concerns they may have.



## PEAK SEASON

July 1 – Labour Day	Open 7 days/week, 12 – 8 PM	Student employees work 4-hour shifts Head manager works 8-hour shifts, 35-40 hours/wk Assistant head manager provides relief for manager Staff training – see “Typical Summer Week”
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## POST SEASON

The manager does a final report following each season – what worked well for them and what might be changed or done better. This has allowed the BYC to develop a handbook to help implement this program year to year.

During the off season, BYC staff looks to leverage Cool Cow employees to strengthen the impact/reach of other BYC programs in the high schools, supporting the young employees to be leaders and champions of the BYC.

## LESSONS LEARNED & CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

### *COMMUNITY CHAMPION*

It is very important for the community to have a champion. From the outset of Cool Cow, this was BYC staff. The community champion is there to research the feasibility of this program, market the concept, share the story, bring together partners and help get the storefront secured.

For the Brock Youth Centre, the community champion was a staff role, but in any community this could be an EDO, BIA staff, volunteer – someone who understands the principles of entrepreneurship, experience working with youth and an understanding of who the local stakeholders are who can support this program.

### *LEAD SUPERVISOR*

The lead supervisor is hired for the ice cream season to help in hiring youth, scheduling shifts and the day-to-day oversight of the business. They are the point of contact between the lead organization (Brock Youth Centre) and the youth employees.

While the youth employees are there to learn many of the skills it takes to run a business, having one consistent manager on site has been important to ensuring consistency in the business. Further, it is a requirement that for employees under 18 that someone over 18 is present.



The lead supervisor could be anyone in the community, however, in keeping with the educational component of the business, BYC has decided to hire young adults (roughly 18-25) in this role, as this in itself is a valuable learning opportunity for older prospective business owners. **Important to Note:** having another employee as relief for the lead supervisor is important so they are able to take some time off.

### ONGOING BUSINESS TRAINING AND HANDS-ON LEARNING

The business training is a crucial component to the educational component of the Cool Cow model. Through the focussed workshops, the young employees have the opportunity to learn more valuable skills from experts in their respective fields. The list of topics is endless, though some important skills that BYC tries to impart each year include:

- Customer service
- Food handling
- Marketing
- Scheduling
- Payroll
- Purchasing and inventory management

To create a positive learning environment, it is important to strike a balance in the work that is entrusted to be carried out by the young employees. They need enough autonomy to learn and make mistakes, with enough guidance to stay on track and learn from those mistakes in a positive way.

### SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY

As is the case with many community development projects, it has been important for Cool Cow to involve the whole community, and this is the primary role of the community champion. Local BIA's and business owners can help assess the feasibility of a proposed business. Local high schools and youth serving organizations have existing connections with local youth who can eventually sustain the business. Local business owners can provide business mentorship, training and promotion. Community leadership and municipal staff can help navigate the necessary zoning bylaws and may be able to provide some initial funding.

### ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENTS

The administrative components of the Cool Cow Ice Cream Shop initially took time to develop, but as the seasons have gone by all of this material has been collected and refined to be used again the following season. The Cool Cow handbook has generously been made available for any community interested in trying a similar project in their community.

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