

Two local organizations get \$63,000 in grants to attract investment

Written By Sam Odrowski

Two organizations in Dufferin County received a boost in funding from the federal government's Investment Readiness Program (IRP), totalling \$63,000.

The Dufferin Board of Trade (DBOT) and Branching Out Support Services (BOSS) are two of 270 grant recipients through the program, which doles out \$50 million across Canada each year. The grant money helps charities, non-profits, co-ops and for-profit social enterprises attract investment and social financing.

"We are so pleased that two of our local organizations were successful in receiving these grants. Social enterprises are a real catalyst for good, as their mission is to invest profits into helping people and improving community well-being," said Michele Fisher, Executive Director of Dufferin Community Foundation.

The Dufferin Community Foundation assisted local organizations in applying for funding, Branching Out Support Services receives \$25,000 BOSS is a social enterprise that provides services to adults with disabilities. It's founder, Kimberly Van Ryn, said a portion of the \$25,000 grant for investment readiness will help BOSS grow its granola business through a market analysis.

Flavoured granola is produced, packaged and sold to customers by people with developmental differences or neurodiversities that receive support through BOSS's programming.

The market analysis on the Granola Project at BOSS will help promote the business to reach more people, boost its output and attract investment.

"The more granola we can sell, the more neurodiverse people are employed, and that's really the objective of the entire grant," Van Ryn said.

BOSS has partnered with the Taphouse at 34 Mill St. to sell bagged granola, and BOSS staff are at three different weekly farmers markets throughout the area to generate sales all summer long.

"Our push throughout the summer is that we're market ready, with a new flavour ? hot caramel," said Van Ryn.

The new roasted oatmeal product is locally sourced and peanut free, the same as the maple-kissed flavour that the Granola Project originated with in March 2022.

Van Ryn noted some of the advantages of operating as a social enterprise versus a not-for-profit when working with people who have disabilities.

"We think it really changes how people with neurodiversities are seen and experienced in the community, in that they are not charity, they are employees of a business, which is a very normalized role to have," she said.

"That's really what we strive towards in all of our projects, is that we're really seeing people who may have differences, operating and making a living ? if that's their choice ? in a social role that any of us could access.?"

To help BOSS attract an investor, in addition to the market analysis for the Granola Project, the IRP's grant provides the social enterprise with money to become certified as a B Corp (Benefit Corporation).

"That's a worldwide accreditation that social enterprises can go after," said Van Ryn of B Corp certification. "It really sets

businesses up around their philosophy, their ethics, their social impact, and puts us on a world player stage as far as social enterprise is concerned," said Van Ryn.

She added that BOSS is working with a social enterprise agency to develop a "Theory of Change." This will give BOSS's leadership team and staff clear direction on the type of change it aims to make in the world and Dufferin County.

This work is geared towards acquiring outside financing to expand the Granola Project and help more people with disabilities gain employment.

"Once investors are attracted, we have the opportunity to employ more people who have massive employment barriers. It will show a community, a region, the province and the country what can be done with real food and huge human potential," Van Ryn said.

Dufferin Board of Trade granted \$38,000 DBOT received a \$38,000 "Stabilize and Build" grant to take its social enterprise, the Dufferin Biz Hub, to the next level of investment readiness.

The Dufferin Biz Hub, which also benefited from an IRP grant in 2020 when it was just starting up, provides professional workspace and support to local businesses and non-profits.

The current grant will be used to develop an evidence-based social business model, conduct a sustainability analysis, and increase the products and services offered by the Biz Hub.

"We empower rural business leaders, entrepreneurs, new Canadians looking to start businesses, and local non-profits by providing the resources, innovations, and connections they need locally," said Diana Morris, executive director of DBOT. "This project will help us determine the most-needed products and services we can offer to the community moving forward."

Dufferin Community Foundation's Involvement.

The Dufferin Community Foundation helped promote the IRP program in Dufferin County and evaluate grant applications through the Central South-Western Ontario Region HUB.

The HUB included three other Community Foundations - Waterloo Region, Centre Wellington, and Guelph, as well as five local organizations driving social change - Communitech, GreenHouse, LiftOff, Lyle S. Hallman Foundation, and Region of Waterloo.

Community Foundations of Canada (CFC), working alongside the Foundation for Black Communities, in partnership with the Government of Canada, distributed IRP funding in 2019 and 2023.

"The Investment Readiness Program has been a catalyst for communities across the country," said Andrea Dicks, president of Community Foundations of Canada.

"From coast to coast to coast, social purpose organizations are showcasing bold leadership and rethinking how revenue generation can work alongside increasing community impact."