



Staff Report

Report Title: 2022 The Hub Year End Report

Prepared By: Lauren Eby, Business Development Coordinator

Department: Business & Economic Development

Date: Jan. 16, 2023

Report Number: BED-2023-01-3

File Number: C11 BED 23

Attachments:

Recommendation:

That the Township of Huron-Kinloss Committee of the Whole hereby receives for information Report Number BED-2023-01-3 prepared by Lauren Eby, Business Development Coordinator.

Background:

The Hub Year End Report provides information to Council on behalf of the Business Development Coordinator.

The Hub opened in October 2020 and is a space in Huron-Kinloss to co-work and grow business. A regional business supports centre where entrepreneurs can access resources, events, and connections they need to succeed in starting or expanding their business. The Hub provides online programming which includes Start a Business, Business Expansion, Quick Start Entrepreneur, Youth Entrepreneurship and Selling Beyond the Farmgate, which are free and self-paced business courses. Services offered include business consultations, trainings, events, and office and meeting space for rent.

Discussion:

The Hub had another great year in 2022. Although the year began in a lockdown, business support was still available virtually. During the lockdown period, when in person meetings and events were restricted, The Hub moved locations from 46 Queen Street, to 84 Huron Street in February. Moving to the new location provided dedicated office spaces, adding to the services offered by The Hub. In March, it re-opened to the public, allowing for in person meetings and events to resume with health and safety precautions in place to do so.

The Hub's mission to provide entrepreneurs a space to connect, network, grow and support their business ideas was met through the various events, training, and support offered throughout the year.

Business Support

The Hub provided entrepreneurs support through business consultations, connection to resources, business training, and networking events. In 2022, The Hub was contacted 97 times by 49 entrepreneurs looking to book a private office, schedule a business consultation, or ask questions pertaining to their business. Many businesses contacted The Hub more than once, returning for multiple meetings or reaching out with additional questions. The support provided most was in starting a business, digital marketing, and information on available grants. It was a great year meeting with new and existing clients.

The Hub was contacted and met with businesses:

1. In person 28 times
2. Over the phone 20 times
3. Over email 41 times
4. Over Zoom 8 times

Space Usage

The Hub offers meeting and office space for rent. The private office was rented three times, and a co-working desk was rented four times. The Hub also provided office space for the Women in Carpentry Program Coordinator and Heritage Coordinator throughout the year. The Ripley Business Community used the space to host their monthly meetings.

Partnerships

The Hub continued to work with partners established in previous years. These include Santa Clara University, Contact North, Business to Bruce, Catapult Grey-Bruce, Grey County Business Enterprise Centre, and members of the Grey-Bruce Entrepreneur Ecosystem.

Santa Clara University provides The Hub free online business programs through their My Own Business Institute (MOBI). These programs include Start a Business, Business Expansion, and Quick Start Entrepreneur, which are available on The Hub's website for access. 27 people participated in these programs in 2022.

Contact North Grey-Bruce houses a desktop computer at The Hub. This computer is available to their clients as a satellite location, and is a space for the local Online Learning and Recruitment Officer to meet with their clients. Contact North is a distant education and training network.

The Hub partnered with Business to Bruce to host an Agricultural Business training series in November, with presenter Scott Kelland of New Terra Farms. This training was facilitated over three sessions, with 15 registrants who learned how to start and grow their agricultural business.

The Hub partnered with Catapult Grey-Bruce and the Grey County Business Enterprise Centre to continue Wednesday Warm-Up, a virtual entrepreneur networking group that was established in March 2021. On the last Wednesday of the month, participants met virtually to hear from a guest speaker and connect in breakout rooms to discuss the guiding topic. Wednesday Warm-Up was a great space for entrepreneurs throughout the Grey-Bruce region to connect and network with one another. In 2022, Wednesday Warm-Up hosted 9 sessions and had 60 registrations, with an average of 15 participants each session.

The Hub has been part of the Grey-Bruce Entrepreneur Ecosystem since 2021. This is a group of regional business support organizations that collaborate to share resources and partner on events. The group partnered on an International Women's Day and Small Business Week event in 2022. For International Women's Day in March, the Ecosystem hosted a virtual mentoring and networking event. 33 female entrepreneurs registered to hear from a keynote speaker and network. For Small Business Week in October, the group hosted an in-person networking event to celebrate small businesses at the Bruce County Museum. It was an excellent evening of networking and connecting with regional entrepreneurs in person, with refreshments and entertainment provided. The event had over 150 registrations, and over 100 in attendance. The Ecosystem also partnered on the production of a map that illustrates the different business support organizations and their locations throughout Grey and Bruce County. The Hub meets with this group quarterly to discuss updates on programs, events, and partnership opportunities.

Events

The Hub offered virtual and in person events throughout 2022. At the beginning of the year, an Instagram Workshop Series was hosted with 26 registrations. Additionally, digital marketing and website development webinars were hosted by the Digital Service Squad team.

Throughout February and March, the second Wellness Series was hosted to provide mental health support to our business community. Five sessions were offered and included topics on the importance of maintaining wellness in entrepreneurship, a yoga class, the importance of sleep, time management and organization, and wellness tools and resources. A total of 45 participants registered.

In May, The Hub provided a Find Your Niche marketing training series with Charlotte Chinn from Rural Brand Guru. Charlotte facilitated six sessions, educating on the importance of niche marketing. A total of 18 participants registered.

In June, The Hub hosted a Youth Night, which invited youth in the area from Grades 7-12 to learn more about entrepreneurship and hear from local entrepreneurs on their journey to owning their own businesses. Sadie Al and Nicole Ireland, both business owners in Kincardine, came to speak to the four youth in attendance. Jenelle Bannon from Bruce County, and Kim Reid from Fanshawe College were also in attendance to speak to grants and business programs available to them to support their entrepreneurial goals in the future. This event also highlighted the Youth Entrepreneurship program, which is free, self-paced, and available online on The Hub's website, provided by Youth Employment Services.

In September, The Hub hosted a copywriting and messaging training series with Carley Donaldson from Route Two Communication. Three sessions were provided to discuss how to craft clear brand messaging, with 10 registered participants.

Throughout the year, The Hub hosted a monthly in person networking event. Beginning in March, on the last Thursday of the month, entrepreneurs were invited to The Hub to connect and network with one another. A theme was chosen to discuss as a guiding topic with those in attendance. Over the 9 sessions offered, the total number of attendees was 26.

In total, The Hub hosted or co-hosted 52 networking and business training events in 2022, with a total of 461 registrations.

Programs

The Hub led the Digital Main Street 3.0 program into 2022 in partnership with Kincardine, Brockton, South Bruce, Arran-Elderslie, Saugeen Shores, South Bruce Peninsula, and Northern Bruce Peninsula to service Bruce County. This program provides businesses one-on-one support in their digital marketing and online presence, with the opportunity to apply for a \$2,500 grant if eligible. When more funding became available, The Hub applied to continue the program through this County wide partnership. In May 2022, \$160,368.40 was applied for and received to continue the 4.0 program. Three new Digital Service Squad members were hired, with one from the previous round returning. To date, over 130 businesses have been supported in the 4.0 program with 38 grants received, totaling \$95,000 in digital marketing funding back to our business community. This 4.0 program will continue until March 31, 2023.

In April, The Hub announced a program called The Homestead, which was designed for entrepreneurs to test out their business idea and reach a new market in a physical location with low risk. A section of The Hub was provided as retail space for a business to operate from. Amber Alexander from The Craft Shack applied to run her Cricut supply and craft store, having already started her business online. The Craft Shack was in the program from July to November and had over 70 customers visit the store. At the beginning of December, Amber moved her business to a storefront in Wingham.

In November, a youth entrepreneurship program called Sprout was launched. Created by the Manager of Strategic Initiatives, Business & Economic Officer, and Business Development Coordinator, Sprout was an eight-week business foundations program for youth from Grades 7-12. Two youth registered, and met weekly throughout November and December to learn more about entrepreneurship. Topics included business basics, financial management, marketing, emotional intelligence, and sales. One participant already had a business, and the other had a business idea, which they used to apply the session information to. Both appreciated the program and opportunity to learn about business ownership and receive a bursary for their participation through the Early Investment in Education and Skills Funding Program.

Analytics

The Hub's website had 2,126 site visits, a 72% increase from 2021.

The Hub's Instagram reached 426 followers, a 57% increase from 2021.

The Hub's LinkedIn page reached 99 followers, a 130% increase from 2021.

The Hub shared the Do Business in Huron-Kinloss Facebook page with the Business & Economic Officer, which reached 2,398 likes, a 16% increase from 2021.

The Hub's email newsletter reached 44 subscribers.

The Hub used social media platforms, a website, and email newsletter to advertise programs, services, resources, and events to the regional business community. These platforms continue to grow in followers, site visitors, and subscribers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, The Hub continued to see growth in working with new and existing businesses, making new connections, and partnering with regional business support organizations to host events and provide resources to the business community. The success of our initiatives in 2022 was built upon the connections and efforts made in previous years to establish The Hub as a place for entrepreneurs to have access to the resources they need to succeed in their business. Whether booking a business consultation, asking a specific question, networking, renting a desk, or participating in business trainings, The Hub was there for our regional business community in 2022.

Financial Impacts:

Funding is provided through the Rural Economic Development Fund and The Nuclear Waste Management of Ontario Resource Funding Program.

Strategic Alignment / Link:

The information provided in this report is consistent with and in keeping with the Municipality's Vision & Mission. The recommendations contribute to the goals in achieving a prosperous community.

Projects in this report assist staff in achieving the following projects in the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan Action Plan:

P2.2 Business Incubator

Respectfully Submitted By:

Lauren Eby, Business Development Coordinator

Report Approved By:

Mary Rose Walden, Chief Administrative Officer