

Huron-Kinloss Business Incubator Report

The Hub

June 23, 2023

Background

The Hub opened in October 2020 and is 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, training, events, and office and meeting space for rent. The Hub's mission is to provide entrepreneurs with a space to connect, network, grow and support their business ideas.

Business Support

Since opening, The Hub has provided entrepreneurs support through business consultations, connection to resources, business training, and networking events. To date, The Hub has been contacted 231 times by 72 entrepreneurs looking to schedule a business consultation, book a private office, 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 that has been provided most is starting a business, digital marketing, and information on available grants.

Space Usage

The Hub offers meeting and office space for rent. The private office has been rented eight times, and a co-working desk has been rented four times. The Ripley Business Community also uses the space to host their monthly meetings.

Partnerships

The Hub has worked with a variety of partners since opening. 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. 71 people have participated in these programs.

Contact North Grey-Bruce housed a desktop computer at The Hub from October 2020 – July 2023. This computer was 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 has partnered with Business to Bruce to host a Re-Opening Ontario event with the Ministry of Labour, a Bridges to Better Business event, and an Agricultural Business training series.

The Hub partnered with Catapult Grey-Bruce and the Grey County Business Enterprise Centre to host 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. Wednesday Warm-Up hosted 17 sessions and had over 100 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 has partnered on International Women's Day and Small Business Week events. For International Women's Day in March 2022, the Ecosystem hosted a virtual mentoring and networking event. 33 female entrepreneurs registered to hear from a keynote speaker and network with one another. For Small Business Week in October 2021, the group hosted a virtual week-long webinar series with 296 registrants and an in-person networking event in October 2022 to celebrate small businesses at the Bruce County Museum with over 100 entrepreneurs in attendance. The Ecosystem has 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

Since opening, The Hub has offered virtual and in person events for regional entrepreneurs. A variety of events have been hosted including two Wellness Series to support our entrepreneurs and their wellbeing, digital marketing workshops, and a

youth entrepreneurship night. The Hub has also worked with facilitators to host a variety of marketing and business training events.

The Hub hosted a monthly in person networking event that started in March 2022. 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 has hosted or co-hosted 102 networking and business training events with 1,048 registrants.

Programs

The Hub has led the Digital Main Street 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0 programs since 2020 in partnership with the Kincardine BIA, and from 2021-2023 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 for eligible businesses. To date, 340 businesses have been supported through the program, and \$282,500 in grant funding has been received.

In April 2022, 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. At the beginning of December, Amber moved her business to a storefront in Wingham. From April to June 2023, Jamie Miller from Shop Dire participated in the program. Shop Dire is an eco-friendly product store that was established first as an online business. From July to September 2023, Lily Conley will participate in the program and set up her business, Lily By Design, a homemade candle and personal care product business.

In November 2022, 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 received a bursary for their participation through the Early Investment in Education and Skills Funding Program.

Analytics

Since opening October 1, 2020:

The Hub's website has had 4,362 site visits.

The Hub's Instagram has reached 491 followers.

The Hub's LinkedIn page reached 143 followers.

The Hub has shared the Do Business in Huron-Kinloss Facebook page with the Business & Economic Officer, which has reached 2,422 likes.

The Hub's email newsletter has reached 57 subscribers.

The Hub uses 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 has worked with a variety of new and existing businesses, making connections and partnering with regional business support organizations to host events and provide resources to the business community. The success of our initiatives is built upon the connections and efforts made 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 training, The Hub has been there for our regional business community since opening in October 2020.