

Fashion forward to power washers, students find success in entrepreneur program



Amanda Lum has always had a passion for art and "spreading joy in everyone's lives" and, this summer, she was able to combine her two passions while learning valuable business lessons through the Ontario's Summer Company Program.

Administered locally by the York Small Business Enterprise Centre, a part of the Regional Municipality of York, nine high school and university students from across York Region received grants to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams this summer, helping to bring new ideas to life and provide services to the community.

"This program provides mentorship, training, as well as a grant of up to \$5,000 to get their businesses started and [students] get a lot of value in that," says Vivian Ho-Tam, Small Business Consultant with York's Economic Development Strategy Office. "It's not just a matter of here you go, go start a business; there's guidance along the way, mentorship along the way, and if you don't have the finances, are some resources to help with that."

Several of this year's grant recipients had the opportunity to promote their businesses last Thursday in a showcase held at Newmarket's Upper Canada Mall. Among them was Amanda, whose Smol Art By AL shop has been able to thrive on such platforms as Etsy and Instagram.

"I was really interested in creating a business like this because I am passionate about art and spreading joy in everyone's lives," she explains. "I decided to do my art in a physical form and thought what better way to do it than creating art prints you can decorate on your wall or put stickers on your pencil case or your notebook so you can see it every day."

"I just want to spread some positivity through colourful drawings. I don't even know if I would be able to start a business without a grant. It gave me the confidence as well as the financial ability to be able to create high quality prints and I would be afraid of the financial risk that would come with it. I was able to come up with many different ideas, many different products using the money from the grant."

Amanda's art incorporates what she describes as "cute animal characters" with different personalities, arranging them into different poses. Her art also encompasses her "love of food and cute desserts" and these can either fly solo or share space with her animal characters.

While tapping into new audiences this summer thanks to the grant, Amanda has balanced this with planning her post-secondary career. This September, she will attend the University of Waterloo to study Life Sciences Biology "but no matter what the future has in store, she's determined to keep her business, and her passion, going strong."

"I really enjoyed selling these art prints and stickers throughout the summer, so I will be definitely continuing this whole year," she says. "I think especially in university, people would be interested in having stickers to decorate their school supplies."

One entrepreneur who still has another year to decide what they want to after high school was Suleman Shah, a Grade 12 student in East Gwillimbury, who used his grant to start a unique clothing line.

After finding out about the grant program from his guidance counsellor, he enrolled not only to get his line of t-shirts, the designs of which he says "emphasize Islamic morals", off the ground but "learn the many fundamentals of business management and accounting" skills that I never learned by myself.

"I really like fashion and the ability to dress yourself according to your personality type," he says. "I chose clothing because it can be used as a more creative medium and I also saw a lot of clothing brands that don't typically follow Islamic morals and I wanted a business that actually follows them instead of going along with the herd."

By Brock Weir
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