

Summer Company program has student dreaming big of landscaping success



When students are asked this fall how they spent their summer vacation, some will talk about holidays, camp, or what they learned their first summer job.

But for Majaahid Karim, it might be a matter of how he laid the foundations for upcoming business success.

Karim, a resident of Aurora's southwest, was just one local high school student to receive a 2024 Summer Company grant from the York Small Business Enterprise Centre, a program supported by the Provincial Government.

The Summer Company program provides students between the ages of 15 and 29 with at least 12 hours of business training, one-on-one mentoring and grants up to \$3,000 to start a full-time business. Over the past five years, the program, delivered through Small Business Enterprise Centres, has helped launch over 1,700 businesses across Ontario.

Karim, who will begin Grade 12 at Dr. G.W. Williams High School this September, used his grant to launch GreenWave Lawn and Pool Care.

The business describes itself as "a premier local business dedicated to transforming outdoor spaces into beautiful, functional and sustainable environments. We specialize in comprehensive landscaping services and pool maintenance for residential properties committed to delivering high-quality craftsmanship and exceptional customer service."

Karim says he first heard about the program from a relative who was part of the program "a few years ago." When he applied for the grant, he initially eyed starting up a swimming school in his back yard, but the timeline of the program didn't allow him to get the proper permits on time.

He deftly shifted gears to pool maintenance and landscaping, a side hustle he had to earn a "some extra money as a kid," and the grant helped him take things to the next level.

"The program actually gave me a lot of guidance," he says. "They have different mentors who would help us at different steps. They taught us how to market on Instagram, Kijiji, and door-to-door marketing, which I have been doing quite a bit, as well as word of mouth.

"The first couple of weeks, I struggled because I did have a few clients, but it wasn't enough for me to be getting the hourly rate, fill

up my day, and make the money I wanted to make. As I went, I made mistakes, I fumbled the bag here and there, but you adapt and almost evolve to a sense where you understand what you need ? rights and wrongs ? and from there I started getting better at attracting customers. From there, I started building a bigger clientele base and I hope to keep expanding to add a few more people as contractors and maybe start a big business.

?It's a really good start-up.?

Going forward, Karim says a key measure of success will be the number of clients he has on his roster by the end of the summer.

?If I have enough of a clientele range, especially those who are willing to sign with me in the following summers, that would for sure [make me consider] continuing the business and put more money into it. Everybody with a household, especially in the York Region area where the vast majority will have grass or a garden, there's work to be done. If people are busy, they need it to be done and it's a market that is not so niche. Everybody will need it at some point in their life.?

As he begins his final year at Williams, Karim says the experience has been ?huge? in helping him consider his post-secondary options.

?I have become especially better in talking and communicating with people. I was very nervous around people, I was always worried about what others thought. As you grow and learn and you talk to your customers and clientele, you learn certain skills that I didn't have when I was younger,? he says. ?As well, the fact when I apply for universities or other jobs, it will really spice up my resume, especially if I can expand this business because, hypothetically, if this business keeps going in the direction it is going, I can maybe make it instead of being a side hustle it can be my main job!?

Asked for advice for students who might consider applying for the program in the school year ahead, his reply was simple: ?Don't be scared.?

?If you have a thought and you want to complete it, you want to start a business in this kind of way, you should just go for it,? he says. ?You're going to fail in many businesses before you actually have a successful one. The fact this is my first business and it is going well, it is pretty lucky, I can't lie ? but if you really have the motivation to do it, you should go for it! It is a really supportive community. You have these mentors you can communicate to on a daily basis. There are meetings they have every week ? there are also [occasions] where they help you showcase your business and there is lots of support around the whole summer.?

By Brock Weir