



Relief fund to benefit HELIXers at Seneca

Total of 22 awards at \$2,000 each

May 21, 2020

A relief fund has been established at Seneca to help entrepreneurs and startups affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to support from CIBC and contributions from donors such as Mike Shaver, Tazwiz and Global Innovation & Skills Development Canada, the HELIX Emergency Relief Fund will benefit 22 HELIXers in the ACCELERATION Strand with awards of \$2,000 each.

“Entrepreneurship is a hard path at the best of times and this can really make a big difference for a startup in these times,” said Mr. Shaver, a former member of Seneca’s Board of Governors. “I’m honoured to be able to help HELIX help founders as they adapt to operating during COVID-19, and in the world coming after.”

There are currently 60 HELIXers in the ACCELERATION Strand at HELIX, Seneca’s on-campus incubator. Due to COVID-19, some ventures are not able to get their products or services to market and they may not qualify for emergency government funding or employment insurance either.

Tamara Goddard, who launched Cupcake Creations with the help of HELIX three years ago, is one of the entrepreneurs struggling to keep afloat her fledgling business.

“Before COVID, my business was doing pretty well — I’ve had a good customer base for some years now,” said the final-year student of Business Administration – Entrepreneurship & Small Business advanced diploma program (/programs/fulltime/BAS.html). “I was planning to branch out, do some pop-ups and then get a retail space and start corporate catering for conferences after my graduation. I had a few corporate events and meetings lined up but they all fell through. All events have been put on the backburner and I’m trying to figure out how to navigate this and what to do next.”

Ms. Goddard says if she gets timely financial aid, it will prevent her business from going under as she’d be able to pivot and strengthen her online presence with a good website and stronger marketing.

According to a report from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), entrepreneurs and small business owners are among those who have been hit the hardest by COVID-19. Nearly half of the Canadian small businesses have reported a drop in sales due to the pandemic and a quarter of those surveyed by the CFIB said they won’t survive a month if the pandemic continues to significantly cut their income.

Seneca graduate Parth Patel is one of the luckier entrepreneurs who has found ways to not only pivot his business but also to help others.

As President and CEO of Tazwiz, an online marketplace developed at HELIX, Mr. Patel recently launched an online platform to help address staffing shortages in long-term care facilities during COVID-19. In addition, he and his team also launched the *TazwizCare Aid* program to help startups and entrepreneurs with financial support and resources.

"It's hard for entrepreneurs to survive in the current crisis," Mr. Patel said. "Keeping this in mind, we decided to donate to the HELIX Emergency Relief Fund to help our fellow HELIXers."

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