

RBC Social Enterprise Accelerator

BY KERRI SAVAGE

A mobile escape room, recycled denim yoga mats and science education. These are a few of the offerings from the wide range of startups that participated as part of the first RBC Social Enterprise Accelerator Program.

The RBC Social Enterprise Accelerator (SEA) is a six-month program for Calgary-based startups for whom the combination of social impact and profitability is core to their mission and business model. Innovate Calgary delivers the program that focuses on accelerating impact, profitability and technology. There is no cost for participants as SEA is generously supported by RBC.

“Social entrepreneurs are innovative game-changers, focused on creating businesses that blend sustainability, profitability and social impact,” says Jeff Boyd, regional president, RBC. “We believe we have a role to play in creating an environment where social enterprise can thrive.”

Each startup was matched with a business adviser from within Calgary’s innovation ecosystem. These mentors bring decades of business, technical and entrepreneurial experience to the accelerator and help address specific business challenges, with the goal of increasing impact and growing revenue.

“At the start of the program, most of the entrepreneurs have a very clear understanding about the social impact they are creating but aren’t aware of how to turn it into a viable, profitable business,” says Peter Garrett, president of Innovate Calgary. “That’s fundamentally what this program is about – creating viable businesses that have that strong social impact. It is important to come together and help these companies build, grow and deliver their social mandates.”

A demo day held on June 13 saw the companies pitch their products and services to RBC executives, investors, potential customers and high-profile entrepreneurs from the Calgary community. Participants included: Calgary Sexual Health Centre’s WiseGuyz program; Enable; Green Event Services; Mindful Mental Training; Mobile Escape; Nomad EcoProducts; and STEM Learning Lab.

“When I joined the accelerator about seven months ago, we were trying to figure out the coating on our machine-washable, recycled denim yoga mat,” says Zachary Champoux, founder of Nomad EcoProducts. “Since then, we’ve expanded our product line and we have received the green light to employ at-risk women from the Calgary Dream Centre to teach a skill. Providing a vocation is a huge developmental factor in people who are recovering. It’s not just about yoga mats; it is about sustainable markets and sustainable labour.”

Pam Krause from the Calgary Sexual Health Centre’s WiseGuyz program has her eyes set high after experiencing the benefits of the accelerator. “We started out in this program wanting to learn about business planning, IP and legal, and with all the support, we are on our way to having a trademark and implementing our business model canvas. Our dream is to create a training institute and take this across Canada [to] provide this program to boys within their local area. We can provide a very strong curriculum and evidence and research to support the program. We know this could greatly impact society.”

RBC will continue to champion social enterprise and innovation with support for a second accelerator, planned for the fall. Visit innovatecalgary.com for details on how to apply. **B**