



2015/2016



BUSINESSLINK
Alberta's entrepreneurial hub

ANNUAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **GORD SAWATZKY**

Stronger together

The past year saw some exciting developments, focused mainly on the areas of client service and strategic partnerships. Our goal is to be flexible to the needs of our clients, ensuring that they can access our support when and where they want. We've moved towards this goal by switching our training to an on-demand format, and forming strong collaborations with like-minded organizations. These partnerships, such as the ones we have with AMA and Momentum, build on the philosophy that we can do more to support an entrepreneur when we work together than we could ever possibly do alone. These relationships are designed to provide the most impact possible.

We were also excited this year to re-establish a presence in Calgary so we could better serve entrepreneurs in southern Alberta. We are also proud to continue our delivery of targeted services to the Aboriginal community, support in navigating of business regulations, as well as providing valuable connections and advice to startups. The profiles shared in this report highlight just a small fraction of the entrepreneurs we've supported in their journey towards starting a business.

On behalf of my team, I'd like to thank the Government of Canada, Government of Alberta, our Board of Directors, partners and volunteers for the role they play in helping our entrepreneurial community succeed. As we enter our 20th year, we look forward to furthering our mandate to foster entrepreneurship in Alberta.



Executive Director
Gord Sawatzky



SAM CHOW HOBLIT

Finding fun local learning experiences- made easy

When we first met Sam in the fall of 2015, we could see that he was a driven young entrepreneur with a clear vision for solving a simple problem he encountered – accessing affordable practical learning from local professionals. After returning from a vacation, Sam was dismayed at the quality of his photos and sought to improve his photography skills. He soon discovered there were few courses available that were affordable for him. He quickly saw an opportunity to connect people who wanted to learn a skill and professionals willing to teach at a reasonable price. This is when the idea of Hobblit was born, a website connecting people looking for fun learning activities. His company has since grown and he now has three employees.

Sam came to us mainly because he wanted to pick someone's brain about his ideas. Our Calgary team offered Sam non-judgmental advice and helped him to explore different angles for his business. He also found support from other entrepreneurial service providers including Innovate Calgary and Startup Calgary.

We asked Sam to share his story and experience on starting a tech-based business in Calgary.

How did we help you?

"I spoke to Bev [from the Calgary team] and she connected me to other people. She was one of my first mentors. When I first started, I had no idea what I was doing, so [she'd say]: 'here's some good resources, here's someone to talk to, I'll connect you, ask me any questions you want.' She did a phenomenal job with what she offered."

Sam also commented that he made some great connections through our monthly networking events in Calgary, many of which he still works with. When we asked what has had the biggest impact for him, he commented, "The networking [opportunities] for sure- meeting key players that we still work with."

Are there any challenges you've encountered?

"Raising money for tech companies in Alberta is extremely difficult. Investors are looking for overturn right away. Tech is more about building users. It's a big investment up front and then you're praying to God it takes off, and so the biggest challenge is raising capital."

Are there any tips you would give to other entrepreneurs?

"Get started and fail fast. It's all about learning and you're not wasting time if you fail because you're going to fail, you'll make mistakes. If you're afraid of mistakes, you're going to paralyze yourself. Obviously, make an informed decision on whatever you do, but at the end of the day no one executes a business without any mistakes."



Get started and fail fast. It's all about learning. No one executes a business without mistakes.



SOPHIA FAIRWEATHER

DECALS BY SOPHIA

'Kidpreneur' makes the world prettier with every decal



Finding manufacturers and customers for my business. It's pretty hard to find them. You have to go find someone that knows about distributors and then you ask them if they can make your product.

We have the pleasure of working with a lot of creative, innovative aspiring entrepreneurs, but it's not often that our clientele is under the age of 18, let alone under the age of 10. This past year, that all changed when we met Sophia.

At the age of seven, little Sophia was already a serial entrepreneur, working on her third business venture. After just a few minutes speaking with her you can tell that she is a kid who isn't afraid to talk to people about how her innovative product is better than what's on the market. Her third business, "Decals by Sophia" was sparked when she noticed her father using an unsightly piece of VELCRO® on his dashboard to hold his phone in place. Sophia was determined to design a more appealing product that could be used to hold not only your smartphones, but your clothes, tablets, and binders too.

We first learned about Sophia's business from one of our partners who was in contact with her dad, and was struggling to find support for the young entrepreneur. When Sophia's dad connected with us, we learned that they needed help with obtaining market research data, as well as information on manufacturing and intellectual property. Later on, we even helped Sophia prepare for her pitch on CBC's Dragon's Den, which she auditioned for.

We asked Sophia to share a few comments on her business, challenges she's faced and what advice she would offer other entrepreneurs. Here's what she had to say:

What significant milestone have you reached?

"I've met so many people because of AWSM (Alberta Women's Science Network) and Business Link. They introduced me to people that can help me, like global manufacturers to build my product."

Are there any challenges you have had to overcome?

"Finding manufacturers and customers for my business. It's pretty hard to find them. You have to go find someone that knows about distributors and then you ask them if they can make your product. Not a lot of companies can make my product. I found a manufacturer in China through another manufacturer."

When we asked Sophia about what tips she had for other entrepreneurs like herself, we saw her independence shine: "don't let your mom and dad get into it too much". She also stresses the importance of making a good first impression: "...shake hands when you meet with people." Wise words for a young entrepreneur.



PARTNERSHIPS WORKING TOGETHER FOR ALBERTA'S ENTREPRENEURS

*"Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much"*

– Helen Keller

We believe that working collaboratively with other organizations that assist small business is a vital component of supporting the entrepreneurial community. For nearly 20 years, we've partnered with numerous organizations to service the small business ecosystem. This past year, we developed two significant partnerships to better reach clients where they are. This allowed us to be more efficient and effective in our client service delivery.

26

Partnerships
with other
organizations



AMA

In the fall of 2015, we established a partnership with Alberta Motor Association (AMA) to enhance their Small Business Services by providing on-site business advisory services at their Kingsway branch in Edmonton. The collaboration has been mutually beneficial, as the new service provides a value-added service for AMA's members, and for us providing support to startups early on at the point of registration.

"18 months ago AMA launched a new Small Business Services concept in partnership with Business Link. They have exceeded our expectations in terms of their professionalism and knowledge. We are confident that the future phases of the partnership will be equally beneficial for AMA members who own businesses in Alberta."

Greg Demuyck,
Director AMA Registry Services

MOMENTUM

Our partnership with Momentum in Calgary has allowed us to re-establish a presence in the region while partnering with a highly regarded organization that supports community economic development. We've been able to deliver face-to-face support to entrepreneurs in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible by having a shared resource in-house at Momentum.

"Our partnership with Business Link has created an environment where the services of both organizations are interwoven, maximizing resources available within the community. This results in being able to more effectively meet the needs of emerging entrepreneurs in the Calgary market. We're stronger together than operating as two separate entities."

Erin Melnychuk,
Business Development Manager, Momentum



PATH TO STARTING YOUR BUSINESS



**Business
idea stage**

60%

of our clients are
potential
business owners.



**One-on-one
support**

Common types of assistance
we provide (approx. %):

Startup steps **40%**

Financing **20%**

Business planning **15%**

Business regulations **15%**

Market research **10%**



**Comply with
regulations &
license your business**

Total number of inquiries and clients:

2,638

inquiries related
to regulations,
permits & licenses.

1,161

people
participated in
our training.



**Gain business
skills through
training**

Community Outreach

reached **9,014** people
in the small business & Aboriginal communities.



**Revise &
complete
business plan**

1,630

financing inquiries.



**Explore
financing
options**

We are Alberta's entrepreneurial hub

YOU'VE GOT THE INNOVATIVE IDEA AND THE MOTIVATION TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP. NOW WHAT? WE'LL GIVE YOU THE TOOLS TO MAKE YOUR BUSINESS IDEA A REALITY, AND CONNECT YOU WITH THE MOST RELEVANT SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCES TO HELP BRING YOUR IDEA TO LIFE.



Market
research

740

inquiries
related to
market
research



Business
planning

539

inquiries we
supported
with
business plan
development.

8,785

Client inquiries

4,306

Clients

193

appointments booked with
various guest experts like
lawyers and accountants to
get one-on-one support.



Expert
advice



Build your
entrepreneurial
community &
network

1,176

entrepreneurs attended
our networking events.



Launch
business!

*all statistics based on 2015-2016 data



BUSINESSLINK.ca
1-800-272-9675

JACQUI GROBLER

STREATSIDE CUISINE

Combining passion for food and community



A few years ago Jacqui had a great dream – starting a food truck. But it's more than just about cooking for her, it's about building community. Jacqui's passion for food is identical to her devotion to her community:

"I want to be part of a community and promote community and give back."

Her desire to share her love of international travel and cuisine via a mobile food experience, allows her to bring a little piece of the world to the masses. She launched Streatside Cuisine in Calgary two years ago after 25 years in the food industry. Streatside offers delicious international food, catering to those seeking unique and exciting flavours.

What are you most proud of?

"Taking that leap...and letting go and just believing in the dream and taking the risk... I've learned to make friends with the hurdles."

What has been your biggest challenge?

"In my business social media is a huge component, [as well as] building your website and managing it. [There is a lot of] time needed to invest in it. I've learned so much."

How did we help you? Have you gotten support from other organizations?

"I approached Business Link and shared my concerns. They were very prompt in getting back to me and [empathized] 'we recognize what the challenges are'. They put me in touch with the people I needed to be in touch with."

Our team connected Jacqui to a website company that supplies a limited number of free sites, which she was able to take advantage of. She expressed that this was a "huge leap forward for me." We also introduced her to ATB Alberta BoostR crowdfunding platform, where she developed her own campaign. Through that campaign, Jacqui met more people from different organizations to help her in her journey.

Any tips you can share with people who want to start their own business or people who have?

"Take time to do a business plan and be honest with yourself and critique it, and have other people critique it too. Go out and network with people. People are out there willing to help."

**Take time to do a business plan and be honest with yourself and critique it, and have other people critique it too.
Go out and network with people.**

People are out there willing to help.





AARON AUBIN

AARON AUBIN CONSULTING INC

Building more than business relationships

After 20 years of working with a large consulting firm, Aaron decided he wanted the freedom to pursue his passion so he could give back to his community. He was fuelled by the desire to create his own path, rather than relying on others to make decisions.

Being a proud and active member of the Aboriginal community, he decided he wanted to launch his own consulting company, working closely with Indigenous communities, land developers, industry and all levels of government. As a registered professional planner, his consulting company focuses on Indigenous and stakeholder engagement, community development, strategic planning and capacity building.

Aaron is known for integrating his passion and interest in the Aboriginal community in his business. He's a sought out speaker for conferences and symposiums across Canada and also internationally.

Aaron shared his entrepreneurial journey with us and some advice for new entrepreneurs.

How did we help you?

"You helped me understand what was involved in pursuing a business plan and how to secure potential funding. There was one contract that I needed to have reviewed and you guys reached out to your network and provided a review of an important client contract. Through your services you provided a good foundation of knowledge and helped me navigate the various programs and services offered. We explored what licensing I would require as a home-based business and you also helped me investigate Aboriginal financing, connecting me with the right people that could help."

Are there any significant milestones you have reached?

"I think one of the more significant milestones has just come in the last few weeks where I just signed a three-year contract with one of my clients. I have been working closely with this client for over three months, providing advisory services and building a new relationship. From that relationship, I successfully won the bid, beating out five other competitors. Through this opportunity, I was able to identify and assemble the right team for my client and deliver needed services. I also proved to my client that a small Indigenous firm can provide the same services of a big firm."

Are there any other tips you have for fellow entrepreneurs?

"Start with what you're passionate about and build a business around it. Build your life around what you're passionate about. Don't do something just for the sake of doing it. When the late hours come, that passion will drive you to success."



20

**Aboriginal
jobs created**

15

**Aboriginal
businesses
created**



2015-2016 BUSINESS LINK TEAM

We are Alberta's entrepreneurial hub



BUSINESS LINK STAFF

LEADERSHIP

Gord Sawatzky, Executive Director
David Bayda, Business Services Manager
Bev DeSantis, Director, Calgary & Southern Alberta
Cherie Klassen, Marketing Manager
Aaron Poirier, Projects Services Manager
Lori Todd, Contoller

BUSINESS SERVICES

Jim Coulson, Business Services Specialist
Ricardo Flores, Business Services Specialist
Sabrina Grover, Business Development Facilitator
Jean-Jacques Mitakaro, Business Services Specialist
Kari Morton, Business Services Specialist

BUSINESS ADVISOR SERVICES

Jorge Gonzalez, Senior Business Advisor
Heidi Hoover, Senior Business Advisor
Sheila Shand, Senior Business Advisor
Dart Wooden, Business Advisor Team Lead

ABORIGINAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Angela Carifelle, Program Specialist
Krista Burdeyney, Program Specialist

MARKETING AND ONLINE RESOURCES

Brittany Prout, Webinar and Marketing Coordinator
Barry Yewchuk, Website and Marketing Coordinator

ADMINISTRATION

Amber MacMillan, Finance and Administrative Support
Conan Wong, IT Specialist

ABOUT BUSINESS LINK

Business Link is Alberta's entrepreneurial hub. We are a non-profit organization that helps people start their own businesses. We provide one-on-one support and guidance, market research, access to experts, training and networking opportunities, and specialized support for Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

Proudly supported by:

Canada 

Alberta  Government

member of the
Canada Business Network

"Our team is driven by your success. Nothing gives us greater pleasure than seeing your business idea come to life. We're proud to be part of your entrepreneurial journey, and providing the best resources available to help make your startup successful. Meet our small, but mighty team."

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD CHAIR

Angus Ng, Barrister and Solicitor
 Alberta Motor Association

VICE CHAIR

Chad Saunders, Assistant Professor
 Haskayne School of Business
 University of Calgary

SECRETARY TREASURER

Janet Plante, Co-Owner and Senior Consultant
 Blue Collar Consulting

David Allwright, Dean

Chiu School of Business, Bow Valley College

Ryan Jackson, President

RAMECO Inc.

Scott Kennedy,

Senior Organizational Effectiveness Consultant
 NPO Zero

Bob Marshall, Operational Director

TEC Source, Entrepreneur Development
 TEC Edmonton

Michael Reid, Manager

Corporate Social Responsibility, Statoil Canada

Carmen Vincent,

Conseillère en emploi / Employment Counselor
 Accès-emploi Northeast

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

Sharon Jackson, Manager

Business Development & Partnerships
 Western Economic Diversification Canada

Karen Wronko, Executive Director

Entrepreneurship and Regional Development Alberta
 Innovation and Advanced Education Government of Alberta





2015-2016 BUSINESS LINK FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Statement of Financial Position

as of March 31, 2016

Assets	2016	2015
Current Assets	\$ 601,172	\$ 770,059
Tangible Capital Assets	46,805	115,078
	\$ 647,977	\$ 885,137
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Current Liabilities	\$ 340,406	\$ 642,008
Other Liabilities	16,234	34,645
Net Assets	291,337	208,484
	\$ 647,977	\$ 885,137

Statement of Operations

year ended March 31, 2016

Revenue	2016	2015
Federal Funding - Core	\$ 851,407	\$ 851,407
Provincial Funding - Core	775,876	744,252
Project Funding	723,853	986,062
Amortization of Deferred Contribution	18,411	536,354
Other	28,135	65,714
	\$ 2,397,682	\$ 3,183,789
Expenses		
Salaries and Benefits	\$ 1,397,900	\$ 1,225,008
Occupancy	351,813	351,407
Client Outreach	77,499	25,588
Amortization	76,325	98,266
Travel	62,986	64,580
Other	348,306	1,037,636
	\$ 2,314,829	\$ 2,802,485
Excess of Revenue over Expenses	\$ 82,853	\$ 381,304



WE ARE ALBERTA'S ENTREPRENEURIAL HUB