

# Aboriginal Entrepreneur Program Offers Launching Pad

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Flexibility is built into an aboriginal entrepreneurship program that is designed to offer business basics and individual support to participants.

"It is very user-friendly," said Jay Silverberg, the Synergy Management Group Ltd. consultant who runs the program for the Victoria Native Friendship Centre.

**"Entrepreneurship is a very personal journey. It is different for every individual. We recognize that and embrace that."**

**About 20 businesses have started up since it began in 2016,** said Silverberg. There is no cost to participants and there are no academic requirements.

The course is interactive as people are encouraged to get to know and support each other. **"It helps the indigenous community we serve access opportunities in self-employment,** provides a solid business foundation, and gives them a chance to be role models for others who may want to explore entrepreneurship," said Lani King, the centre's director of career, employment and education resources.

Participants get involved and contribute to the workshops. An actor, Lex Dunn, comes in to help them play act to learn how to present themselves. "We have a lot of fun," Silverberg said.

**Participants represent a diverse group of interests and ages — from late teens to elders,** he said.

Ventures include construction, aboriginal art, fashion and coaching. Some have already founded businesses, while others want to learn how set up and run a firm. Others are just curious about what a business life would require.



The course includes indigenous content, Silverberg said. Speakers who have run their own businesses share their knowledge. Unlimited mentoring is offered, Silverberg said. It is available before, during and after signing up.

The program covers what he calls “hard” elements such as developing a business plan, marketing and accounting. Its “soft” elements have participants considering risks and rewards of going into business, understanding how to develop an idea and the impact on family and friends because running a business is a time-intensive endeavor, said Silverberg.

**Each program attracts between 50 and 60 participants and the graduation rate is 70 per cent,** said Silverberg. The course covers potential funding sources. Silverberg worked with Vancity credit union, which offers microloans for aboriginal businesses.



Course graduate Earl Magnussen, 62, a journeyman carpenter, is running his own construction-renovation company that works exclusively on reserves. With four or five years of working life ahead, he figures that he can introduce younger people to the industry and also give back to aboriginal communities through home renovations. He has hired graduates from the program. Magnussen has nine houses to renovate, work that he expects will keep the company busy for almost a year. **He praised the Victoria Native Friendship Centre’s program, calling it a “great tool.” It gives participants “in-depth knowledge of what it is going to take for their particular business to get off the ground and running,”** said Magnussen.

People say they would like to have their own business. “But it is a lot of work and you’ve got to be doing the right things at the right time to make it happen,” he said. The program covers potential pitfalls and how to deal with them. **“It’s almost a must for anybody who is thinking about opening a business who hasn’t opened one. Absolutely.”**



Another graduate, Tina Savea, said the program helped her map a strategy to embark on her clothing business, Chahoo Threads, specializing in indigenous designs and promoted on Facebook. She is showcasing the work of indigenous artists on T-shirts, and will expand to other clothing. Savea’s husband is from Samoa, which is known for tattoos with elaborate designs.

**Savea called Silverberg “amazing,” saying he outlined the steps she needed to take and has continued to provide advice. “I’m actually doing it. I’m actually making it happen,”** she said.

### **Program basics - Indigenous Business Training Program: Hello I Am An Entrepreneur**

- A total of 12 evening workshops, one per week. Next program Sept. 20 to Dec. 6.
- Each workshop runs from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Victoria, Native Friendship Centre, 231 Regina Ave.
- No cost to participants. Graduates receive a certificate of completion
- To enroll, contact **Jay Silverberg at 250-619-3450 or email [helloiamanentrepreneur@gmail.com](mailto:helloiamanentrepreneur@gmail.com)**