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**Sent:** Wednesday, November 08, 2023 10:08 AM

**To:** Donna Stennes <[Donna.Stennes@nanaimo.ca](mailto:Donna.Stennes@nanaimo.ca)>

**Cc:** Tanya Assaf <[Tanya.Assaf@viu.ca](mailto:Tanya.Assaf@viu.ca)>

**Subject:** Letter of Support for VIU Program for Youth with Disabilities and Other Barriers to Employment

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Hi Donna

Thanks for speaking with me today. As mentioned, we are seeking a letter of community support from the Mayor and/or Council for the following grant application project proposal:

**Grant Program:** The Youth Employment and Skills Strategy Program (YESS Program) aims to provide funding to organizations to deliver a range of activities to support young Canadians (aged 15 to 30) to develop the skills and gain the experience they need to find and keep quality jobs. Programming focuses on youth facing multiple barriers to employment. This includes a focus on inclusive skills and employment programming for youth with disabilities.

**VIU Proposed Program:** This proposal is requesting to be considered for funding under both the Youth Facing Barriers to Employment Projects and the Youth with Disabilities Focused Projects. Over the next 4 years, VIU aims to equip 64(16 per year) youth from across Canada with disabilities or those furthest from employment with the skills, tools, information and work experiences needed to transition into the labour force as self-employed or as an employee of an entrepreneurial business. Alternatively, it will support their return to education to acquire the specialized skills required for self-employment.

This program is an imperative component of the ESDC initiative because our focus is on youth with self-declared cognitive or physical disabilities, as well as those confronting various employment barriers which include, but are not limited to, discrimination, early leavers from high school, possession of a criminal record, mental health challenges, residence in remote areas limiting job prospects, and lack of access to essential amenities such as transportation or childcare. The primary objective of this program is to bridge an evident gap in employment preparation training, emphasizing self-employment and vital business management skills. To underscore the importance of self-employment, consider that in 2018, 15% of all workers in Canada were self-employed. This employment mode isn't just a mere statistic; it plays a critical role in the labor market dynamics and has consistently proven to be a substantial contributor to employment growth (Statistics Canada, 2019). A significant number of individuals with disabilities or other employment barriers have a strong desire to work. Still, they face considerable hurdles in securing traditional employment. Consequently, many see self-employment as a viable pathway to economic contribution, bypassing the need for dependency on social assistance and conforming to traditional employment which does not work for them (Tihic, 2019; Boellstorff, 2018; Columbia, 2019).

In our ambitious project, youth can become self-employed, join entrepreneurial ventures as employees, or even opt into further their education, targeting specific self-employment skills. The urgency and significance of this initiative stem from a simple truth: without such targeted programs, many youth facing employment challenges might find themselves permanently reliant on social support systems. They'd miss out on tailored training designed to cater to their unique employment aspirations. Our

actions to achieve this transformative vision is multi-pronged: Intake Mechanism, University Training, Community Partnerships, Work Experience and Individualized Wrap Around Supports Additionally, this program will be offered online to which will be essential to the success of the program being offered locally, regionally and nationally. Online learning is particularly suitable for youth with barriers for the following reasons:

- **Accessibility and Convenience:** It removes physical and transportation barriers, allowing youth to learn from any location and at any time, which is essential for those with disabilities or residing in remote areas.
- **Local Applications:** provide a unique and powerful avenue for students to learn business concepts and directly apply them within their local communities, without the need to relocate or disengage from their current environment. The integration of academic learning with immediate real-world application forms a symbiotic relationship between education and community development.
- **Safe Learning Environment:** For youth facing social barriers or personal insecurities, online platforms can provide a safe, less intimidating environment to learn and express ideas freely.
- **Development of Digital Skills:** As the program is online, students inherently improve their digital literacy—a key skill in the modern entrepreneurial landscape. **Networking Opportunities:** Online programs can connect youth with peers and mentors globally, providing a broader network than what might be available locally.

Our deadline is Nov 21. I know that this is tight because the council meets on Nov 20 but I have my fingers crossed.

Thank you so much for your assistance and let me know if any further details are required for this request.

Warm regards  
Amy

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Matter Here

The VIU community acknowledges and thanks the Snuneymuxw, Quw'utsun and Tla'Amin, on whose traditional lands we teach, learn, research, live and share knowledge.

