

For Immediate Release

June 29, 2020

Design Challenge Winner Focused on Youth Mental Health Private Donor Raises Challenge to Food Accessibility

Beecuz, a nonprofit organization founded by Lena Schreyer, has been announced as the main recipient of the \$20,000 Recovery & Rebuilding the Region Design Challenge Two.

Established in 2019 by a young female entrepreneur, Beecuz offers innovative, skill-based workshops and educational curricula to support youth with the tools they need to proactively address and care for their mental health.

This critical need has emerged as youth and children are disproportionately affected by mental health challenges due to COVID-19, referenced in this [article](#) by Children’s Mental Health Ontario, along with new [data](#) shared by the Canadian Mental Health Association predicting a serious mental health crisis following the impacts of COVID-19.

In addition to the \$20,000, the successful applicant will receive a personalized suite of business advisory, financial coaching and community impact services presented by **Libro Credit Union, Pillar Nonprofit Network** and **TechAlliance**. Both Design Challenges are co-presented by Communittech, in Waterloo Region, and WEtech Alliance, in Windsor-Essex.

“It’s hard to believe that it’s only been a year since Beecuz was incorporated. So much has happened in such a short time! This is an important and exciting milestone for our organization,” said **Lena Schreyer, Founder and Director of Beecuz**. “Now that we’ve won this Design Challenge, we can grow our classroom model to an online platform, increasing accessibility of our services beyond Kitchener-Waterloo and London with the potential to bring mental health programming to all schools across the province.”

This [report](#), authored by the Mental Health Commission, speaks to how marginalized groups are harder hit by social determinants associated with mental health and economic difficulties in the face of COVID-19.

That’s why Lena Schreyer, who has a background in neuroscience, positive psychology, and mental health advocacy, hopes to use the coaching supports from the Design Challenge partners to ensure Beecuz continues to be inclusive, diverse, and accessible for everyone.

The social media buzz of the Design Challenge sparked interest from a private donor who contributed \$5,000. This was awarded to [The Working Centre](#) located in downtown Kitchener, who the partners felt would benefit from the support and recognition.

The Working Centre has been responding to unemployment and poverty in downtown Kitchener since 1982. The Design Challenge funds will be used to support [Project 4000](#), a collaboration between engineers, horticulturalists, and community leaders to apply tech innovations in agriculture to grow 4,000 servings of produce in two shipping containers, create new jobs in the region and create profit to support their community rebuilding efforts.

“Over the past few months, we watched the negative economic impact of COVID-19 cause families in our community to make decisions between eating healthy or paying for rent. We see the ability to more efficiently produce microgreens and seedlings as a necessary step towards increasing our production of local nutritious produce. This contribution from the Design Challenge allows us to accelerate the project while offsetting our environmental impact.” **Joe Mancini, Director of The Working Centre.**

These collaborative solutions selected by the Design Challenge partners will work towards rebuilding the region from the impact of COVID-19 on jobs, food accessibility and mental health.

Design Challenge One announced [Go Fog It](#) as the recipient of \$20,000 and wrap-around supports from partner organizations, in a [release](#) on May 6.

We would like to thank all of the applicants for their interest and innovative ideas. All of the partners involved in establishing the Recovery and Rebuilding the Region Design Challenges welcome unsuccessful applicants to explore opportunities directly for business advisory, financial coaching, and community impact services.

Lori Atkinson, Regional Manager Advice and Service Delivery, Libro Credit Union, said:

“Once again, we were thrilled with the response to the Design Challenges, this time with a focus on collaborative solutions and rebuilding. It is impressive that in a short time *Beecuz* has already reached over 1,500 students in the London area and Waterloo region. With the coaching supports from all of the partners involved, Lena and her team will be able to expand to reach far more youth in other areas of southwestern Ontario and beyond. We’d also like to thank the private donor for supporting this initiative. The additional funding provided allowed us to recognize *The Working Centre’s* project, which aims to create employment and improve food accessibility. Two key areas of focus that Libro continues to make strides in. Both recipients are very deserving, congratulations.”

Andre Vashist, Director of Social Innovation, Pillar Nonprofit Network, said:

“As we rebuild for the future, we need to address the inequality inherent in our society. These inequalities have been brought to the forefront through the effects of COVID-19, exasperating mental health, food insecurity and other challenges faced by underrepresented and undersupported communities. This Design Challenge invited our community to consider how we can better collaborate towards a just economic recovery, and we are proud to announce *Beecuz* and *The Working Centre* are striving towards that goal.”

Christina Fox, Chief Executive Officer, TechAlliance, said:



“When we envision the next steps for Southwestern Ontario, we see passionate innovators collectively leading the charge of the rebuilding process. To receive diverse responses to Design Challenge Two that address inequities deepened by changes in the world indicates that many do not want to return to "usual", and the innovative solutions on the horizon are more promising than ever before.

“It's emerging female founders like Lena who make us confident in a future where mental health services are made accessible through digitization, an essential component to the Future of Learning. We are also inspired by Joe, whose IoT technology-enabled food accessibility project supports community prosperity. Making an investment in these two initiatives catalyzes change that will span generations.”

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We warmly welcome interview opportunities. For more information, please contact:

Libro Credit Union

The largest credit union in southwestern Ontario and a certified B Corp, Libro Credit Union serves 106,790 Owners – the customers who all own a piece of the company, including 9,566 businesses. Libro has more than 700 employees, 36 locations and a wide range of digital services, all supporting Owners as a full-service financial institution.

In existence for more than 75 years, Libro is also run as a cooperative, in which the customers are the shareholders, electing the Board of Directors. All of Libro's profits stay in southwestern Ontario and everything Libro does is aligned with its social purpose of growing prosperity for everyone in the region.

Liz Arkinstall, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager

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Pillar Nonprofit Network

Pillar Nonprofit Network strengthens individuals, organizations and enterprises invested in positive community impact.

We support more than 610 nonprofits, social enterprises and social innovators by sharing resources, exchanging knowledge and creating meaningful connections across the three pillars of nonprofit, business and government.

Pillar Nonprofit Network believes that a connected network sparks collaboration and a willingness to lean on each other to help build an engaged, inclusive and vibrant community.

Andre Vashist, Director of Social Innovation

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TechAlliance of Southwestern Ontario

TechAlliance is the place for dreamers, innovators, and world-changing ideas. We launch new startups and accelerate growth for established tech companies through our Venture Growth & Corporate Innovation, early-stage incubation, and GROW Accelerator.

We create an entrepreneurial culture across Southwestern Ontario that attracts, connects, and retains the next generation of tech talent, building community through experiences, and creating access to capital.

We advocate for startups and fast-growing technology companies, connecting all levels of government and industry to create an environment for businesses to start, grow, and innovate.

Christina Fox, Chief Executive Officer

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