Innovate for Impact

Ignite ideas, spark change, transform the Kootenays.

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM

IMPACT REPORT

Winter 2026 Cohort

Community Futures East Kootenay | IMPACT TOOLBOX | KAST

OUTPUTS AT A GLANCE

6 community mentors and educators trained

100 youth involved

25 innovative projects developed

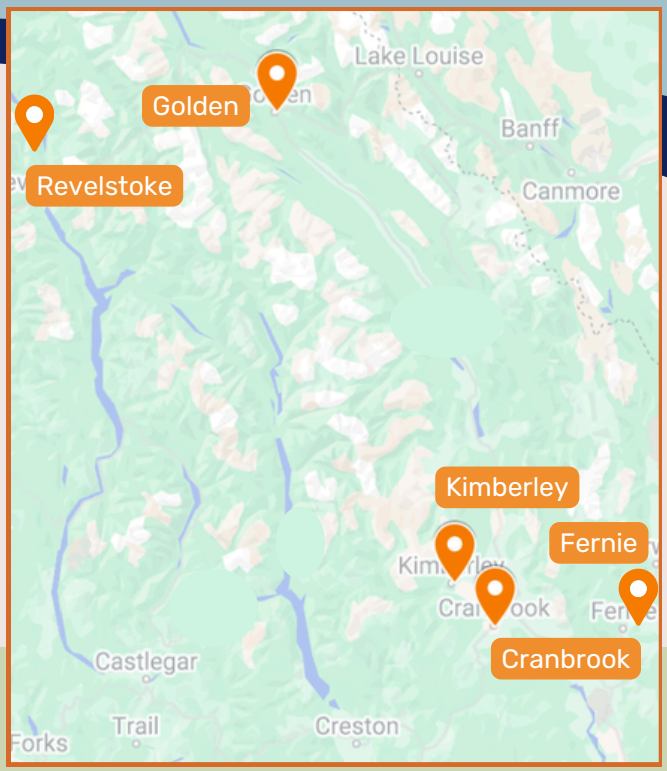
5 regions engaged across the Kootenays

$4,000

in Business Seed Funding, with with two youth teams receiving $1500 each to bring their ideas to life and their mentors receiving $500 to support ongoing efforts

$3,000

in Mentor Stipends (6 mentors at $500 each)



Final Showcase

Winning Project 1

Shark Side of Life - Revelstoke: An initiative that funds global shark conservation and drives community ocean awareness through the sale of handcrafted, upcycled merchandise.

Winning Project 2

Connectopedia - Kimberley: inclusive esports spaces for women, girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals featuring gaming tournaments, skill-building workshops, and mentorship.

WHY YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP MATTERS

Youth entrepreneurship is a powerful catalyst for community resilience and social innovation, yet young people in rural, geographically dispersed regions like the Kootenays face systemic barriers. Affordable business coaching and hands-on guidance are often out of reach for youth and educators in smaller communities. This gap restricts economic opportunity and leaves young people without the real-world toolkits needed to tackle local challenges.

To address this, the Kootenay Association for Science and Technology (KAST) partnered with Impact Toolbox to deliver the Kootenay Youth Build-A-Business (BAB) program early in 2025. The impact was undeniable: the cohort engaged **167 youth** who generated **39 innovative social enterprise ideas** across **6 regions**, with **100% of surveyed mentors** reporting that this experiential approach directly equips youth for future employment and local careers.

Recognizing the profound impact of the BAB pilot, this educational model was expanded and built into the broader **Innovate for Impact (I4I)** initiative. Today, the **I4I Youth Entrepreneurship Program** is delivered through a regional collaboration between Community Futures East Kootenay (CFEK), KAST, and Impact Toolbox. The program bridges structural geographic gaps by acting as an accessible, low-stakes launchpad for youth to dip their feet into entrepreneurship through practical, action-oriented learning. We **trained and supported teachers, youth leaders, and community educators** to guide students through this journey as **mentors**. Working in teams, students developed innovative ideas for social enterprises tackling local or global challenges. By pairing structured mentorship with tangible support, we fuel local innovation and empower Kootenay youth to turn their raw passions into viable, community-driven ventures.

THE PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Program Timeline:
January - May 2026

Delivery method: Virtual curriculum delivered by mentors within their physical spaces to their youth, which featured bite-sized video content and hand-on exercises and activities.

Curriculum overview:

1. **Lesson One:** Entrepreneurship and the Social Entrepreneurial Journey
2. **Lesson Two:** Exploring the Impact You Want to Make
3. **Lesson Three:** Problem Identification & Analysis
4. **Lesson Four:** Identifying Your Innovative Solution
5. **Lesson Five:** Developing Your Innovative Solution
6. **Lesson Six:** Developing Your Business Model
7. **Lesson Seven:** Action Planning & Budgeting
8. **Lesson Eight:** Storytelling & Crafting Your Pitch

IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES

The post-program feedback survey for mentors and youth provided clear evidence of program success and impact. The surveys were completed by 3 mentors and 10 youth.

MENTOR FEEDBACK HIGHLIGHTS

Metric	% Scoring 4 (Agree/Useful) or 5 (Strongly Agree/Very Useful) OR % who said yes (for last two rows
Confidence and capability boost in teaching social entrepreneurship	66.7% felt the program improved their confidence and 100% felt it improved their capability in teaching students about entrepreneurship
Program Relevance	66.7% felt that the program met a need within the community
Impact	100% felt that this program allowed them to make a positive impact on the youth in their community.
Mentor Retention	100% said they would mentor again
Program Advocacy	100% said they would recommend the program to other educators.

YOUTH FEEDBACK HIGHLIGHTS

Clearer Understanding of Social Enterprise	90% felt that they gained a better understanding of social entrepreneurship and social impact
Action Planning	80% felt that they gained skills in developing a plan to put an idea into action
Communication and Pitching	80% reported gaining skills in effectively communicating and pitching an idea
Collaboration	66.6% felt that they gained skills in collaboration and working in groups
Leadership	100% felt their leadership and decision-making skills have improved.
Confidence in Pursuing Social Entrepreneurship	50% feel more interested in pursuing social entrepreneurship
Career and Education Readiness	60% feel better prepared for future employment or education.
Continuing Impact	40% plan to continue working on their project or business idea.

EMERGING OUTCOMES: **SHOWCASE & FUNDING**

The program culminated in a Showcase event, demonstrating the growth of the youth and providing seed funding for the youth to bring their ideas to life. A total of **$4000 in funding** was distributed to two winning teams: **Shark Side of Life and Connectopedia!**

Overview of Featured Teams:

SNACK
(Safe Nutrition Awareness and Convenient Knowledge)

Region: Fernie, BC
An initiative that provides healthy meals and delivers accessible nutritional education to students through school partnerships and social media campaigns.

Connectopedia

Region: Kimberley, BC

A mission-driven social enterprise establishing safe, inclusive esports tournament circuits and mentorship networks specifically for women, girls, and LGBTQ+ gamers.

Students Help Students

Region: Kimberley, BC (Selkirk Secondary School)

A free, low-pressure peer tutoring network run entirely by students to help high schoolers catch up academically and rebuild confidence after falling behind.

NVYBE

Region: Kimberley, BC (Selkirk Secondary School)

A social enterprise reducing student loneliness and social isolation by matching peers through hobby surveys and connecting them at themed real-life lunch events.

The Shark Side of Life

Region: Revelstoke, BC

A youth-run business creating and selling handcrafted, upcycled shark-themed merchandise to directly fund global shark conservation and spark local ocean awareness.



Photographed are one of the two winning teams, Shark Side of Life

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

The feedback from both mentors and youth highlights that the Innovate for Impact Youth Entrepreneurship Program successfully filled a vital community gap, significantly boosted participant confidence, and offered an easy-to-navigate framework. Mentors noted that there were previously "no other entrepreneurship courses or offerings for high school students in our community", and 100% of youth reported that the program expanded their leadership, business, and social interaction skills.

The responses to the qualitative questions have allowed us to develop concrete directions for future refinement:

Technical Platform Obstacles

The most widespread issue voiced by the youth involved fillable PDF documents failing to save progress. Multiple participants noted frustration with having to restart work several times.

Our Improvements - Options for Cloud-Based Worksheets: Create editable cloud documents (e.g., Google Docs or Word Online) to reduce the risk of unsaved progress and lost work.

Time Crunches and Pacing

Some mentors and youth felt rushed. One mentor shared they felt "very crunched for time" with busy student schedules, while another noted the program ended during "THE MOST BUSY TIME OF YEAR!!!!" Youth also described the workload as overwhelming or too fast. Another mentor added: “It would be nice to have more time before the end of the school year as a winning team to develop the business because thats when everyone is guarenteed to be around.”

Our Next Steps: The second cohort will run from September 2026 to January 2027, allowing us to avoid the end of the school year and give mentors and youth more time together. We'll also explore shortening the curriculum to provide greater flexibility.

Time Crunches and Pacing

One mentor identified a disconnect between Modules 7 and 8, explaining youth found it "hard to create the budget without having information from the general public to start making estimates with." After submitting their abstracts, students created "marketing posters and surveys for market analysis" through the mentor's own instruction. The mentor felt introducing this earlier "would have made the budgeting activity an easier entry point" and provided a "great talking point for adding to their pitch decks." Despite this, they emphasized they "definitely received adequate support throughout the entire course. :)"

Our Next Steps: We'll revise the curriculum so students complete a marketing/product survey before the financial planning and pitch stages. This will ensure they reach Modules 7 and 8 with real-world feedback and data to inform their budgets and pitches.

Whole Group Introduction

While mentors participate in train-the-trainer sessions, one mentor suggested: “I think a whole group introduction would be best at the start of this program or video intoduction from you guys about what your role is what the students can expect throughout the course and what this is all culminating to would really help!”

Our Next Steps: We'll explore creating a short welcome video introducing the team, outlining the curriculum, previewing the showcase, and featuring past participants or showcase winners so students know what to expect from day one.

VOICES FROM THE PROGRAM

Mentor Testimonials

"It was incredible to see the confidence of my students grow and to see how passionate and driven they are to make their idea succeed. This gave them a chance for their creativity and problem solving to flourish." — Samantha Green, Stoke Youth Network

"As a first-time mentor and teacher of Entrepreneurship 12, the program provided an amazing framework for providing students with the concepts, resources, and experiences they will use if they continue with entrepreneurship following graduation!" — Anonymous

"This experience gave me the means and confidence to deliver a program that was greatly sought after in our school environment!" — Anonymous

Youth Testimonials

"This class was so interesting and great experience for me. I am so happy that we got into Final showcase." — Yuito Kishi, Youth Participant

"A fun way of learning the challenges of being an entrepreneur and how useful can the skills be for your daily life." — Juan Sebastián Aboytes Camarena, Youth Participant

"You can do more than you think if you just believe in yourself :)" — Youth Participant

Innovate for Impact

Ignite ideas, spark change, transform the Kootenays.

Inspire the next wave of social entrepreneurs by championing youth-led innovation. Your guidance can spark lasting change for young people in the Kootenays, while fueling social and economic progress across the region.

Community Futures East Kootenay

Community Futures East Kootenay (CFEK) is a non-profit that supports entrepreneurs and local development in BC's East Kootenay region. They offer business loans, training, and lead regional economic initiatives.

IMPACT TOOLBOX

Impact Toolbox (ITB) is a British Columbia-based social enterprise and registered charity that equips youth with the training and resources to turn their passion for social change into impactful and sustainable enterprises.

KAST

Since 1998, KAST has driven economic development in the Kootenays by fostering a vibrant tech community through inclusive opportunities, job growth, and support for entrepreneurs and businesses.