



MEDIA RELEASE

NEW RISE PROGRAM HELPS ASPIRING WOMEN+ SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS ACCESS CANADA'S BOOMING ENTREPRENEURIAL ECONOMY

RISE CELEBRATES THE COMPLETION OF ITS WOMEN+ ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM PILOT, HELPING WOMEN, TRANS WOMEN AND NON-BINARY ONTARIANS BUILD THE SKILLS TO LAUNCH A SMALL BUSINESS

TORONTO, ON, March 17, 2023 — Yesterday evening, [Rise](#) held a virtual graduation event to mark the end of its Women+ Entrepreneurship Program pilot, made possible thanks to a \$82,800 Resilient Communities Fund grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) in 2022. Designed specifically to support and empower women, including trans women and non-binary individuals (women+) to access entrepreneurship, the pilot culminated with participants pitching a panel of experienced entrepreneurs and Rise staff with the real, actionable business plans they developed over the 10-week program.

“Canada’s entrepreneurial economy is full of opportunities, but we can only truly thrive if women and non-binary individuals are actively encouraged and empowered to participate,” said Kristyn Wong-Tam, MPP for Toronto Centre. “As a former small business owner myself, I look forward to seeing these participants’ businesses come to life. I commend Rise for introducing new targeted supports to help individuals create self-employment opportunities that will strengthen our communities.”

Funds from the OTF grant were used to help with staffing and some administrative costs, marketing, curriculum development and program delivery. The grant was also used to help program participants with supplies and materials.

“From both the mental health and entrepreneurship perspectives, women, including 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, have been among those most affected by the pandemic,” said Beth Dea, Chief Operating Officer at Rise—Canada’s only national organization dedicated to empowering individuals with mental health and addiction challenges towards greater economic and social inclusion through entrepreneurship.

Rise has seen a marked increase in demand for its programs since COVID-19 became a daily reality. **In the first year of the pandemic, the number of women applying to Rise for supports more than doubled, and they continue to represent more than 50 per cent of all applicants.**

“We’ve realized it’s not enough for us simply to say, ‘we encourage diverse women to join our programs,’” Dea said. “Women including Black, Indigenous and racialized women, trans women and non-binary individuals face unique barriers to entrepreneurship, so we needed to develop innovative, inclusive programming tailored to support them on their individual journeys.”

While only about 17 per cent of small- and medium-sized businesses in Canada are owned by women, they represent nearly 40 per cent of self-employed individuals nationwide, which indicates that women are accessing the economy in a variety of small-scale ways. In response to that reality, the Women+ Entrepreneurship Program is highly flexible, meeting aspiring entrepreneurs wherever they are in their business development and in their personal lives. Mental health- and wellness-centered, the curriculum

is delivered from an inclusive, decolonized, accessible feminist philosophy, meaning it's fundamentally informed by realities of business, as they are experienced by women+ individuals with diverse and intersectional identities. Modelled on Rise's longstanding [Peer Supported Startup Program](#), the women+ program includes facilitator-led learning segments that cover business fundamentals (e.g., financial forecasting, brand building, digital marketing and customer experience, etc.), peer group working sessions, and mentorship support.

The pilot engaged more than 20 aspiring women+ entrepreneurs who self-identify with mental health and addiction challenges in 20 two-hour sessions over 10 weeks. With an average age of 41, each joined the program with an idea or in the early stages of business development. From photography to life coaching services, handcrafted greeting cards, socially and environmentally conscious products, a youth writing program and more, the businesses pitched at Thursday's graduation event reflect the rich diversity and powerful potential of women, trans women and non-binary people as small business owners.

About OTF

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), an agency of the Government of Ontario, and one of Canada's leading granting foundations, celebrates 40 years of grantmaking in Ontario and making a lasting impact in communities. Last year, OTF invested nearly \$209M into 2,042 community projects and partnerships, which included funding for the Government of Ontario's Community Building Fund. Visit otf.ca to learn more.

About Rise

Rise is a national organization dedicated to empowering people with mental health and addiction challenges to achieve greater social and economic inclusion through entrepreneurship. Through training, mentorship, micro-financing and other customs supports, Rise helps individuals build the skills and access the capital they need to build a small business that can improve quality of life and enable them to support themselves, their families and communities.

Since its founding in 2010, Rise has benefitted from the time and talent of 800+ volunteers, disbursed more than \$3 million in low-interest loans and established training and mentorship programs that have helped empower 2,000+ Canadians as entrepreneurs. Rise collaborates with local partners to recruit for and deliver programs, enriching partners' existing services and enabling Rise to scale rapidly without traditional bricks and mortar investment. Today, Rise has nine program locations across five provinces (BC, AB, MB, ON & NS), and a national reach that extends from coast to coast.

Rise is changing lives and strengthening communities by unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit of all Canadians with mental health and addiction challenges. Learn more at www.risehelps.ca | [@RiseHelps](https://twitter.com/RiseHelps)

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