

19/
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ANNUAL
REPORT

EPI|Centre

Entrepreneurship + Practice + Innovation



www.epicentreuwindsor.ca

A year has gone by since I became the Director of EPICentre. While I am very proud of the accomplishments we have achieved in the past year, I am cautiously optimistic about the coming year due to the adverse impacts brought to all of us by COVID-19 pandemic.



Wen Teoh

EPICentre's team and programming have all been transitioned to a virtual platform since mid March 2020 to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. As an entrepreneurship centre and business incubator, our role has never been more important as existing businesses and startups face unprecedented challenges brought on by the pandemic. We were glad that we were able to quickly adjust to continue delivering our existing programs and services to support entrepreneurs virtually. Additionally, in the midst of the pandemic, we managed to launch a new program in collaboration with WEtech Alliance, Windsor Essex Small Business Centre and RISE Windsor-Essex Network to provide funding and support to help our local businesses pivot and attain sustainability during this challenging period and beyond.

No matter the challenges that will be coming our way as we are all slowly rebuilding our economy, I have faith in our team and our community that we will survive and thrive through ingenuity, commitment and collaboration. Our economy needs resilient entrepreneurs and we are here to support them.

Thank you to the University of Windsor, our board of advisors, mentors, partners and sponsors for being with us along the way. We look forward to a challenging but rewarding year.

Sincerely,

Wen Teoh

Director & Co-Founder, EPICentre

COVID-19 update



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Amid the global pandemic, the Windsor-Essex region was faced with a severe shortage in personal protective equipment (PPE). The community rallied to find ways to create and supply PPEs for frontline workers and we were proud that EPICentre had the ability to contribute to such a good cause. In collaboration with local organizations WEtech Alliance, Kelcom and PepCorp, we donated 500 face shields to various charities and non-profit organizations. This collaboration truly magnified the importance of the local tech community as the face shields were 3D printed by Kelcom and EPIIC Incubator Member, PepCorp.

EPICentre also had the opportunity to collaborate with Dr. Jill Urbanic, professor from the Faculty of Engineering, her research team and global manufacturers Valiant TMS in the production of face shields. We were able to assist with the project using our 3D printers and laser cutter in our makerspace (Windsor Mold Group EPIC Makers' Base) to create the necessary parts. Close to 500 face shields have been produced and donated to frontline workers in our community as of May 2020.



*Hamed Kalami, University of Windsor PhD Candidate in Mechanical Engineering with the face shield designed by Dr. Jill Urbanic's research team
(Photo credit: Hamed Kalami)*

a year in review

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

RBC EPIC Founders Program

The 2019 RBC EPIC Founders Program, funded by RBC Foundation, accepted nine new startups comprising of 11 entrepreneurs in May 2019. This 12-week accelerator program provided mentorship, workshops, hot desk space and up to \$6,000 stipend to participants while they developed their businesses.

The program concluded with the Final Pitch Day on August 1st, 2019. The Top Founder's Award of \$3,500 went to Jesse Thompspon, founder of HagggleFree (now known as Fetch Moto), a platform designed to improve the vehicle shopping experience. The second prize of \$1,000 cash, sponsored by the Lucas Imagine Fund, went to Mohammad El-Nassar and his startup Lokally (now known as Quikr), an all-in-one online booking platform to help small businesses easily connect with their clients.



RBC EPIC Founders on Final Pitch Day with EPICentre team and mentors



LIBRO EPIC Social Enterprise Program

The Libro EPIC Social Enterprise Competition took place on September 19th, 2019 where seven finalists pitched their social enterprises to a panel of judges to compete for a spot in the 2nd Libro EPIC Social Enterprise Program. Four social enterprises: Kindness Café, West End Farmers Cooperative, Grown Lady Garments and Half Step Away Music Centre were selected to participate in the 16-week accelerator program started in October 2019. In addition to \$8,000 in seed funding, participants received mentorship and training in business-related topics.

They also learned special topics from industry professionals such as design thinking and social impact measurement. Finally, they had the chance to showcase the progress of their ventures at the Social Enterprise Forum on March 12th, 2020. All of these activities and programs were funded by Libro Credit Union as part of the Libro EPIC Social Impact Initiative.



Libro EPIC Social Enterprise participants with EPICentre's team



Inaugural EPIC VentureWomen participants with EPICentre's team

EPIC VentureWomen Program



Through collaboration with the WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation and funding by FedDev Ontario under the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy initiative, EPICentre launched the EPIC VentureWomen program in December 2019. The initiative aimed to equip woman entrepreneurs with tools and resources to overcome systemic barriers faced by female entrepreneurs to be successful in their business ventures, especially in emerging technology or related fields.

The inaugural cohort, consisting of four startups with female founders: Vectorgaze, Ground Culture, Beaux App and XpressCareer LMS (now known as Mentur) started the 6-week accelerator program in February 2020. Due to the restrictions posed by COVID-19, the cohort made their final pitches virtually to a panel of judges via Zoom on May 1st, 2020. Ground Culture claimed the top prize of \$3,000 sponsored by the Lucas Imagine Fund.



EPIC Nimble Program

Many small businesses not only in our community but around the world have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to this crisis, EPICentre launched the EPIC Nimble Program in partnership with WEtech Alliance, Small Business Centre and RISE Network in April 2020. The goal of the program was to help existing small businesses find a way to pivot or to create new revenue stream by integrating technology into their current businesses. The EPIC Nimble Program was funded by FedDev Ontario, the Lucas Imagine Fund and the above partners. The program is currently in progress. Visit our website or follow us on social media for updates on this program.

EPIC Legal Triage Program

After the completion of a successful term in Winter 2019, we were excited to continue the collaboration with Prof. Myra Tawfik, Professor of Law and EPICentre Professor of IP Commercialization and Strategy to continue the EPIC Legal Triage program. This unique program provided an experiential learning opportunity to law students taking the EPICentre Practicum course taught by Prof. Tawfik to help EPICentre's startups identify legal and intellectual property issues. 14 one-on-one sessions were delivered throughout Fall 2019 and Winter 2020 terms.

COMPETITION highlights

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RBC EPIC Business Model Canvas Competition

The 4th Annual RBC EPIC Business Model Canvas Competition took place on November 8th and 9th, 2019. 12 semi-finalists from across Ontario (and one from Boston) were selected to compete in Windsor. We were honoured to have Roger Kirkness, co-founder of Convictional, a Y Combinator tech startup based in Toronto as the keynote speaker. The two-day competition took place at Windsor Hall, Odette School of Business and EPICentre.



Diffusiv team with Lauren Makaric from RBC (left) and University of Windsor President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Robert Gordon (right)

Neophyto Foods team with Duane Acorn from Postmedia (left) and University of Windsor President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Robert Gordon (right)



Diffusiv from University of Waterloo won the 1st prize of \$10,000 cash. Neophyto Foods from University of Guelph won the 2nd prize of \$2,500 cash, the Postmedia People's Choice Award worth \$2,500 in-kind advertising and the KPMG Financial Competency Award of \$750 cash.

We were honoured to have our new President and Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Robert Gordon present the awards to the winners. Special thanks to leaders and entrepreneurs from our community who served as judges as well as our student volunteers who helped out at the competition.



EPIC Blue Sky Competition

The 6th EPIC Blue Sky Competition received a makeover this year. Instead of being a general idea competition, we focussed on the theme of mobility. Participants in teams of at least two students from different disciplines, demonstrated their ideas solving problems in mobility in a 2-minute video. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, final submissions were judged remotely by a panel of judges instead of on Final Showcase Night like in the past.

The top three prizes sponsored by the Sushil Jain Triple I Awards went to:



Kicking off the 6th Blue Sky Competition at the Blue Sky Launch Party on February 6th, 2020

1st

Drivfluent

(Hardik Sonetta, Computer Science; Shriaa Sheth, Business)

\$1,500

2nd

Slinger T-Mod Longboard

(Andrew Thibault, Mechanical Engineering; Stewart Allen, Industrial Engineering; Luke Marinelli, Mechanical Engineering)

\$750

3rd

Nomad Kitchen

(Anh Lam, Political Science; Duy-Khang Dang, Master of Management; Hoa Nguyen, Master of Mechanical Engineering)

\$500

SCHOLARSHIPS & awards

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Congratulations to Kindness Café, a social enterprise by University of Windsor Masters of Medical Biotechnology graduate, Ola Ahmed. Ola was the recipient of the 2019 **Shibley Righton Community Impact Award**. The Shibley Righton Community Impact Award was established in 2016 to support a student entrepreneur where his/her business has a potential for positive community impact in the Windsor-Essex region.



Ola Ahmad, recipient of the 2019 Shibley Righton Community Impact Award



Zainab Ikpong, recipient of 2020 Alumni Association EPICentre Founders Award scholarship

Zainab Ikpong, an undergraduate student in Political Sciences and Criminology was the recipient of the 2020 **Alumni Association EPICentre Founders Award**. This \$1,000 annual scholarship was made possible through the generous endowment fund by the Alumni Association awarded to a student demonstrated good academic standing and involvement in entrepreneurship activities.

OTHER STUDENT ACTIVITIES

International Student Research Assistants

EPICentre hosted two undergraduate business students from the Federal University of Sao Paulo from April to October 2019 under the MITACS Globalink program. Anna Paula Costa and Gabriel Carvalho Santos came to EPICentre to expand their knowledge in entrepreneurship outside of Brazil and to experience the Canadian culture. They learned about EPICentre through their professor, Dr. Marcia Carvalho de Azevedo who was a visiting researcher at EPICentre in 2018-19. Anna and Gabriel assisted Dr. Francine Schlosser, Odette Professor in Entrepreneurship and Innovation in two different projects: researching and developing teaching cases and participating in consulting projects by working alongside Odette student consultants. Anna's teaching case, titled "Didi Chuxing: Branding Safety and Security in an Emerging Hi-Tech Industry", co-authored by

Dr. Schlosser and Dr. Carvalho de Azevedo, was recently accepted and published by Ivey Publishing. They also had the opportunity to interact and learn with the RBC EPIC Founders and to assist EPICentre researching best practices and benchmarking of entrepreneurship centres. It was a pleasure working with Anna and Gabriel.

Student Clubs at EPICentre

EPICentre was delighted to provide a foothold to three student clubs who inspired innovation and entrepreneurship on campus: Developer Student Clubs, Women in CyberSecurity and UWindsor Robotics & Tech Club. By providing them with a space to collaborate and the opportunity to network with EPICentre's startups, we hoped to encourage more students to engage in entrepreneurial activities, that may in turn ignite the next best idea.



Anna (left) and Gabriel (right) working with RBC EPIC Founders participant Masoud (middle)

EPICentre welcomed our new President and Vice-Chancellor, **Dr. Robert Gordon** to the EPIC Board of Advisors as the chair of the board and new advisors in February 2020:

- **Marco Fiori**, Executive Director, WindsorEssex Capital Angel Network; Owner, Windsor Rock Gym
- **Keith Henry**, President, Windsor Mold Inc.
- **Sandy Ilievski**, Global Powertrain Prototype Manager, Ford Motor Company
- **Stephen MacKenzie**, President and CEO, WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation
- **Celso Oliveira**, Manager, Business Centre & Lead, Automotive Industry Strategy, Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC)



Robert Gordon, PhD



Marco Fiori



Keith Henry



Sandy Ilievski



Stephen MacKenzie



Celso Oliveira



*K.W. Michael Siu, PhD,
FCIC, FRSC*



Karolyn Hart



Michael Chachula

We would also like to thank the continued support of returning advisors:

- **K. W. Michael Siu**, PhD, FCIC, FRSC, Professor and Vice-President, Research and Innovation, University of Windsor
- **Karolyn Hart**, Founder and President, InspireHUB Inc.
- **Michael Chachula**, Founder and CEO, Foursixty

Last but not least, with the utmost gratitude, we would like to thank the following advisors who have supported us for the past three years:

- **Dr. Alan Wildeman**, past University of Windsor President and Vice-Chancellor
- **Dr. Mitch Fields**, Dean of Odette School of Business
- **Roy Verstraete**, Corporate Director
- **Debbie Landers**, COO – Operational Acceleration, Georgian Partners
- **Dr. Stephen Lanier**, Vice-President, Research, Wayne State University
- **Mark Dietrich**, President & Founder, Bloodstone Solutions

PARTNERSHIPS & collaborations

EPICentre is built on the belief that it takes a village to encourage student entrepreneurship and to ensure success and sustainability. In the past year, EPICentre has built new partnerships to further the University of Windsor's commitment to engage and benefit our community through our programs and services.



SOAR Innovation, a non-profit accelerator and incubator in Chatham-Kent

The University of Windsor (EPICentre) has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with SOAR Innovation, a non-profit corporation created to build investable ideas into businesses and grow successful businesses into larger international companies, and the Municipality of Chatham-Kent to enhance opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship and business and economic growth particularly in food and agriculture sectors in the region. This partnership will enable industries and new businesses to tap into the expertise and research capability at the University of Windsor to support the development of new technologies and innovations. EPICentre's entrepreneurs will also have access to additional resources and funding opportunities to help them accelerate their businesses through SOAR Innovation.

EPICentre joined the Southwestern Ontario Regional Consortium led by the WindsorEssex Community Foundation to support social enterprises in the tri-county region. The consortium is leading the Investment Readiness Program, part of a \$50 million fund launched by the federal government in June 2019 to support social purpose organizations to become "investment ready" in the social finance market.

Sarnia Community Foundation, the Windsor Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, Workforce WindsorEssex and the Downtown Accelerator are also part of the consortium.



Partners in the Southwestern Ontario Regional Consortium



EPICentre was proud to be part of a new initiative created to support women in entrepreneurship, science, technology, engineering and math disciplines. The RISE Windsor-Essex Network was founded by the WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation's Small Business Centre, EPICentre, WEtech Alliance, Build A Dream, Windsor Essex Capital Angel Network and Workforce WindsorEssex. This initiative was funded by Government of Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy, a \$692,000 funding over four years to support local women entrepreneurs, including the EPIC VentureWomen Program.



SUPPORTING WOMEN IN STEM & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

RISE Windsor-Essex network, an initiative to support women in entrepreneurship, science, technology, engineering and math

In September 2019, Windsor Essex region received \$5 million funding from FedDev Ontario to grow the automobility cluster in our region for the next three years. Led by WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation, the cluster also included University of Windsor engineering professor Dr. Mitra Mirhassani and EPICentre. EPICentre's role in the cluster was to support entrepreneurial activities in mobility innovation through various programs.

Fetch Moto (Jesse Thompson)

Formerly known as HagggleFree, Fetch Moto is a platform to streamline the vehicle buying process. Jesse came up with the idea as he was frustrated in the current car shopping process that he had to go through twice within a few months due to car accidents. Jesse joined the RBC EPIC Founders Program in summer 2019 to develop this idea where he ended up winning the top prize of \$3,500. Shortly after graduating from the RBC EPIC Founders Program, Jesse was accepted into the AC JumpStart Program where he received \$30,000 in seed money to further his business. Jesse is currently working with his team as an EPIC Incubator Member at EPICentre.

www.fetchmoto.com

**GaiaDigits (Cheng Ye)**

GaiaDigits joined the EPIC Incubation Program as an industry member in January 2020. GaiaDigits is a new Canadian software company offering flexible workforce management software on the cloud in B2B market. Recently, in response to COVID-19 pandemic, GaiaDigits launched GaiaScreen, a health status self-screening application for essential businesses. This solution could help businesses overcome workforce shortage by being able to adjust their employees' work schedules quickly due to self-isolation. Cheng, Co-founder and CEO of GaiaDigits has more than 10 years of experience in the software industry. He hoped GaiaDigits can help companies improve their workforce management and maximize value for their teams.

www.gaiadigits.com



Cheng Ye

Alley Biniarz



Grown Lady Garments (Alley Biniarz)

Grown Lady Garments is a social enterprise with the mission of bringing inclusive fashion to Windsor Essex region. Alley started Grown Lady Garments because she was sad to find most of the brands she used to shop were “greenwashed”. Grown Lady Garments brings stylish, socially responsible clothing brands that were made with sustainable materials to Windsor. Alley was a participant in the Libro EPIC Social Enterprise Program in Fall 2019 where she learned how to start and manage her own business. Alley holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Nonfiction from the University of King's College.

www.grownladygarments.com

Brandi Bechard (left) and Vanessa Carducci (right)



Ground Culture (Brandi Bechard and Vanessa Carducci)

Ground Culture is an edible landscaping and organic vegetable gardening company founded by Brandi. Brandi has a background in Ecosystem Management and a passion to help others connect with their food and the land from where it comes from. Vanessa came onboard later, bringing her knowledge in organic farming and permaculture design. Ground Culture joined the inaugural EPIC VentureWomen Program in February 2020, hoping to utilize the training, knowledge and mentorship offered by the program to develop the Ground Culture Garden Club. The Garden Club is a garden kit delivery program which helps those interested in planting and growing vegetable gardens to do so in their own backyards. Ground Culture was the winner of the \$3,000 Top VentureWomen Award.

www.groundculture.ca


EPICENTRE IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

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Promoting Entrepreneurship

1,768 individuals engaged through
40 presentations & events

Providing Entrepreneurial Learning Opportunities

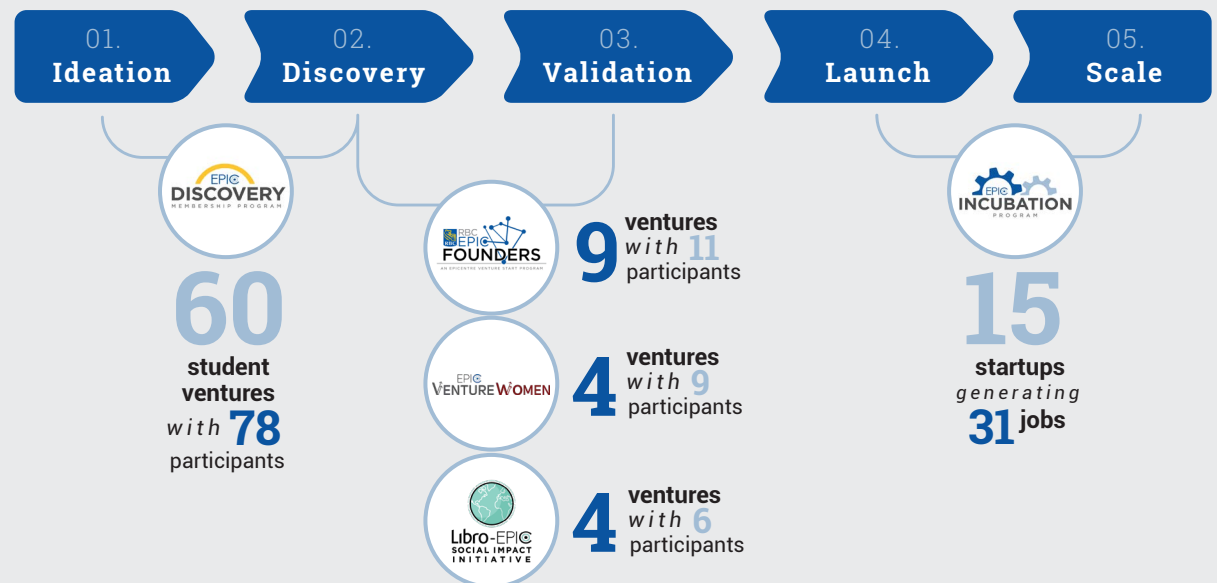
1,382 individuals engaged through
92 workshops 

Preparing Entrepreneurs for Success

437 mentoring hours provided

\$107,500 funding awarded to
17 ventures 

EPIC Startup Stages





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