

2019-2020



# ANNUAL REPORT



## ON THE COVER: LOLITA RICHARDS, FOUNDER OF MADE BY MOI CAKES

Lolita was born and raised in the heart of Scarborough, Ontario. Her love for baking started at age eight when she received her first Easy-Bake oven for Christmas. She put her skills to work and gained experience working in the hospitality industry and non-profit sector.

She decided to merge her leadership skills with her passion for baking to create Made By Moi Cakes – baking delicious customized goods for special occasions.

In 2016, she received a loan from ACCESS to purchase equipment, supplies, marketing material and finish her website.

Lolita channels her passion for helping others succeed with a variety of non-profit initiatives. In 2017, she founded a free baking program for youth in marginalized neighborhoods called “Wee Bake,” which ran successfully for three years.

She also uses her voice to impact others, working as a program facilitator and public speaker at YouthSpeak Performance Charity.

## THE GTA IS THE INCOME INEQUALITY CAPITAL OF CANADA

Poverty in the GTA disproportionately affects women, immigrants and racialized individuals. Systemic discrimination creates barriers to success for these individuals, limiting their opportunities and ability to reach their potential.

ACCESS Community Capital Fund ensures everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential through sustainable employment and self-employment.

By providing access to affordable loans, coaching and support, we help people achieve their dream of owning a business or finding success in a rewarding career.



## OUR 3 CORE PROGRAMS:

### **Small Business**

We offer low-interest loans, coaching and education to help emerging entrepreneurs launch their business.

### **Women's Business Accelerator**

Our free workshop series equips newcomer women with the tools they need to build a profitable business and economic independence.

### **Foreign Credential Recognition**

We help educated newcomers re-launch their careers, creating a better future for themselves—and the Canadians who will benefit from their services.



## SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES IN A WORLD OF CHANGE

Recently, we can all see that there's a great need to target our support to the marginalized communities who face inequality in our society. The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically increased inequality among racialized communities, new Canadians, women and low-wage earners.

Our mission at ACCESS has always been to create economic opportunity, a goal that has moved even further out of reach for countless Canadians. We're still facing many unknowns, but one thing is certain: affordable financing will continue to be in high demand.

Our team has adjusted to providing services remotely, such as developing online coaching and webinars on topics such as marketing and building credit scores. Throughout this difficult period, we have kept in contact with clients, providing extra support and flexibility to help them weather the unprecedented challenges.

We have also seen an outpouring of kindness from the community, which has supported us through donations, volunteering and partnerships.

While we anticipate more changes in the months ahead, we remain optimistic that we can help make a difference by providing opportunities through loans, coaching and support.

We invite you to learn more about our 2019-2020 accomplishments and successes in this report, as well as stories from our clients and volunteers.

Thank you for your continued support of ACCESS Community Capital Fund.

Sincerely,

Jess Merber  
Chair, Board of Directors

Ryan Hollinrake,  
Executive Director



## NEW PROGRAM: THE WOMEN'S BUSINESS ACCELERATOR

In 2019 we received a grant from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to train and prepare newcomer women for entrepreneurship. This resulted in The Women's Business Accelerator (WBA), which helps us address systemic barriers to obtaining loans to start or grow small businesses due to race, gender and immigration status.

To launch this initiative, we hired a new coordinator, developed a curriculum, forged a partnership with Agincourt Community Services Association, arranged childcare, and recruited volunteers to provide training and coaching.

The workshops include business planning, finances, marketing and a pitch competition. Feedback has shown the participants grew confidence in their business ideas and felt able to move forward with their goals of becoming entrepreneurs.

## CLIENT PROFILE: NAVITA VERMA



Navita Verma, who took first place in our Women's Business Accelerator pitch competition this spring, is passionate about bringing positive change to people with her line of eco-friendly, organic spices.

Even though entrepreneurship runs in Navita's family, it was never the path she envisioned for herself. "I was quite set that I was going to work a corporate job, nine-to-five; that was the vibe I had throughout university," says Navita. "I always presumed I'm going to go work for a large corporation. I never saw myself as an entrepreneur."

It wasn't until trying to buy spices online that Navita realized there was a gap in the market and was inspired to start her own business. "Living downtown it was really challenging to find any sort of ethnic offering, so whatever Amazon sells is what I can buy," she explains. It was then she realized there are a lot of products not being sold that people want to buy. With her background in market research, she began researching the space.

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Through the program and doing the step-by-step workshops, it was a great combination of knowledge and support.



After hearing about the WBA last year, Navita decided it was exactly what she needed to translate her business idea into reality:

“Through the program and doing the step-by-step workshops, it was a great combination of knowledge and support.”

Navita’s vision is to be a seller and educator of natural and eco-friendly products at a price that’s in reach of the average consumer. “I’m focused on providing spices and seasonings for those who are health conscious and looking to explore a new cuisine, so we’re trying to specialize in high quality, organic non-GMO goods,” she adds.

When it came time for Navita to present her business idea in the pitch competition, the judges were impressed with her obvious hard work and preparation. She credits the program management, workshop leaders and her coach for providing her with knowledge and support during the three-month program.

Now with an officially registered Ontario business and plans to expand into a subscription service and moving into the B2B market, Navita is fully embracing her entrepreneurial spirit: “Working on my business has been one of the most rewarding things that have happened to me. For those who have ideas, push forward to make them come true because they’re not going to happen if you don’t do anything.”



## CLIENT PROFILE: SUHER MOUSSA

Suher Moussa's food truck business is all about smiles. "I believe with a delicious meal you will smile and be happy in the moment. I want to see that smile in my customers' faces," says Suher.

After moving to Canada from Saudi Arabia 14 years ago, Suher was excited to explore opportunities for entrepreneurship. With a bachelor's degree and experience working with people, she decided this was the right time to follow her dreams and start a business.

Despite having the chance to achieve her goals, she faced an unfamiliar landscape: "I didn't know the system: what we can do, what we can't, how you build your credit score. This information I didn't have at all before. I didn't know you can take loans to start your business. This was new information for me."

After searching online, she came across the Women's Business Accelerator and decided to give it a shot. Originally, her plan was to sell merchandise through Amazon, but the COVID-19 outbreak caused shipping issues and she realized she needed to scrap the idea.

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Before I was just  
brainstorming.  
ACCESS helped me  
organize my ideas.



"I like to cook and my friend [Suher's business partner] likes to cook too. In the end I can see the people smiling and thanking me," she explains. "It's my passion to build a relationship with people."

And so the idea for her food truck, Laghawes, was born. She plans to sell unique hamburgers, hot dogs and fries to university students and office workers during the day, then move to events and entertainment venues in the evening. After a few years, she hopes to turn the brand into a restaurant along with more trucks.

Her coach Daniel, was instrumental in helping her shape her plan for success. "Just having an idea is not enough, you have to be organized to take your first step," adds Suher. "ACCESS helped me. I'm still working. I hope my business will see the light soon."

Suher's positive attitude impressed the judges in the pitch competition, along with her well-thought out strategy to gain awareness through social media and eventually expand her service across Toronto. Suher now knows how to take her idea and work through the details, such as research and planning, giving her a clear picture of success.

"Before I was just brainstorming. ACCESS helped me organize my ideas."

## CLIENT PROFILE: YOUNES AL HYAR



When 28-year old Younes came to Canada from Morocco, he knew finding work straight away would be challenging. “As an immigrant it’s not always easy to find a qualified job because of the Canadian experience requirement,” says Younes.

“To get a job you need experience and to get experience you need a job!”

Younes had always dreamed of living abroad, and as an architect, was drawn to Toronto as a city where he could employ his design skills. “It’s one of the most dynamic cities in North America,” he explains. “Actually, it’s the city which counts the highest number of cranes. Because of the economics and the major firms here I was really motivated to come here to be an architect.”

Creativity has always been important to Younes, who as a child loved playing with Lego, disassembling his toys and trying to understand how things work. In high school, a visit from an architect who told the students about his job was the moment Younes realized his professional calling.

(Continued...)



Thanks to ACCESS and the FCR loan I was able to support myself financially and be able to focus on my studies.



“It’s not an easy job but it’s really rewarding and fulfilling to be able to do so every day.”

Upon arriving in Toronto, Younes decided to complete a bridging program at Ryerson University, but finding money for tuition was a challenge. He visited the YMCA Centre for Newcomers where he learned about ACCESS’s foreign credential recognition loans.

“ACCESS was really a big relief to me because financially as a new immigrant, especially with the high rents here in Toronto, it would have been really compromising to start without financial support. Thanks to ACCESS and the FCR loan I was able to support myself financially and be able to focus on my studies.”

After only a few months in Canada, Younes completed his course and was hired by a major firm working on a large hospital project west of Toronto. He’s since received additional standards certifications and is working towards being fully licensed with the Ontario Association of Architects.

“I’m really happy that people trusted me and believed in me,” says Younes. “I couldn’t be happier.”

## OUR IMPACT

# 93%

of clients surveyed reported their ACCESS loan had a positive impact on their well-being, reduced stress and increased motivation.

# 52

newcomers and entrepreneurs received loans to achieve their professional goals.

# 80%

were able to achieve what they wanted for their businesses through planning, coaching support and financial backing.

# 86%

said their business knowledge had increased and 66% improved their knowledge and ability to manage their personal finances.

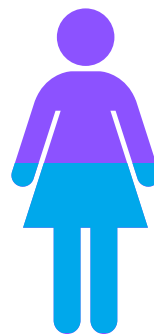
**“Working with ACCESS Community Capital Fund has been one of the best experiences. As a new immigrant, their support has been essential in my professional progress. I received the support and funds to study at York University, which has been essential to achieve my goals in the labour field.”**

## FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

ACCESS achieved strong results in Fiscal 2020, establishing a solid foundation for growth. We continued to focus on growing our revenue base to support our current and future clients.

**\$488,655**

loans disbursed

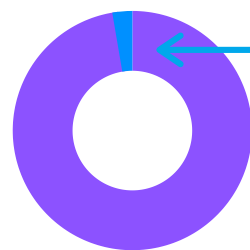


**52%**

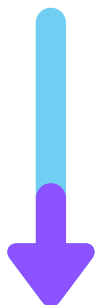
of our loans  
funded women

**97%**

of our expenses went to  
our programs and services



admin costs



loan defaults reduced from

**4 to 1**





## WHAT'S NEXT:

### **A new program to launch entrepreneurs**

We are in the process of launching an exciting new program to help our clients successfully launch their businesses. This will incorporate our small business loan program with a similar educational model as our WBA program. By combining affordable loans with formalized training and support, we will help our clients clarify their business ideas and understand the steps to turn their plans into profits.

### **Increasing our capacity**

Our priority for 2020-2021 will include building up our guarantee fund and staff resources so that more individuals can access our loans and support programs. To meet this need, we will be launching a fundraising campaign this fall.

### **Updating our brand**

We've recognized our need to stand out and be known for what we do best: helping people achieve their dreams. To make sure we're well known and recognized we'll be presenting a new look and identity in the New Year.



## VOLUNTEER PROFILE: DAMI ADEJOLA

Hearing people's stories and learning the impact a loan will have on their lives is a major motivating factor for Dami Adejola, Loan Review Committee (LRC) co-chair and WBA coach.

"My first interview was the most memorable," says Dami, of an applicant from Iran. "It was very interesting to meet this person, to hear his story, why he and his family moved to Canada, the challenges and struggles he has faced."

Dami has a long history of helping people access financing. Before completing her MBA in Kenya, she worked as a consultant helping small and older farmers in Nigeria gain access to credit.

Now a finance professional working at RBC, she's still helping business owners secure loans, albeit on a larger scale. "All through my experience I've found that the biggest challenge to business growth and expansion is lack of access to capital," she explains. "I've always wanted to help companies access capital."

(Continued...)



It was very interesting to meet this person, to hear his story, why he and his family moved to Canada, the challenges and struggles he has faced.



Looking to expand on her experience through a volunteer role, she learned about opportunities with ACCESS on Volunteer Hub and reached out for more information. Dami started out as an LRC member and a loan officer, contacting applicants to learn more about their situation, what they need a loan for and to get a sense of their character.

“It’s been a great experience meeting people, hearing their stories and putting them forward for the loan or not based on what was gathered from meeting these people,” she adds.

She has since taken on more responsibility as a co-chair of the LRC team, leading meetings, helping to keep the other volunteers engaged, actively looking for ways to improve processes and making sure everything runs smoothly.

Dami enjoys knowing that she’s making a difference in people’s lives, not only for the individuals but also for their families and their future. “I’m very excited and happy to be associated with such an organization in Toronto,” says Dami.

“I really believe in ACCESS’s impact, which aligns personally with my goals and interests. I’m excited to continue with ACCESS.”

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE: DREW BARVIR



Drew came across a volunteer opportunity with ACCESS while looking for a way to support entrepreneurship and people facing economic barriers. After reading about ACCESS's mission he was excited to get involved.

With his passion for philanthropy and experience working for the Canada Pension Plan's private equity team, Drew was a perfect fit to help clients through the loan review process.

"What I really enjoy about ACCESS is the person-to-person interaction and the ability to see the tangible impact that a small loan, and the mentorship and coaching that goes along with it, can make in someone's life."

In addition to his original role with the Loan Review Committee (LRC), Drew has since taken on additional responsibility as an LRC co-chair and member of the ACCESS volunteer leadership team supporting best practices, volunteer engagement and new initiatives.

(Continued...)



You always want to help people but there's always the fiduciary duty to make sure it's the right fit.



While Drew enjoys being able to help people move forward with a loan, often clients are recommended to start with coaching first to improve their plan. “You always want to help people but there’s always the fiduciary duty to make sure it’s the right fit,” he explains.

Recently, Drew interviewed a candidate who was looking to build a legal practice helping immigrants in the GTA. “I came into the interview having read and reviewed the application materials with mixed expectations but ultimately ended up getting blown away by her passion and preparedness.”

He was inspired by her life story and how the loan would make a meaningful difference in her life, as well as the lives of the people she wanted to help. Relaying the news that her loan application had been approved is a moment he’ll always cherish.

“You can’t replicate that feeling,” says Drew. “It’s something that’s truly special and for me, reaffirmed the impact that ACCESS can make on people’s lives and the community.”

**Want to use your skills to make a difference? If you're interested in a rewarding and challenging volunteer role with ACCESS, visit our volunteer page at [www.accessccf.com](http://www.accessccf.com) for current openings, or contact us at [volunteers@accessccf.com](mailto:volunteers@accessccf.com).**





## GIVE THE GIFT OF SUCCESS!

### **Impact investing:**

Investors contribute to our guarantee fund, allowing us to provide access to loans for more entrepreneurs who are building financial independence. Choose your term, from one to three years, then decide if you'd like to withdraw with a small return or renew to help even more clients launch their dreams. Contact us at [investors@accessccf.com](mailto:investors@accessccf.com) to learn more.

### **Become a donor:**

With your gift, we're able to support newcomer women with their business plans, provide education on credit and personal finance, match an aspiring entrepreneur with a business coach and so much more. Every gift over \$20 qualifies for a tax receipt. Give today online at [www.accessccf.com](http://www.accessccf.com) or through your workplace's United Way fundraising program.

### **Corporate sponsorship:**

Does your company's values align with our mission? We'd love to discuss ways to work together. Contact us at [admin@accessccf.com](mailto:admin@accessccf.com) and we can provide you with our corporate sponsorship information.

## OUR TEAM

### Board

Jess Merber, Chair  
Dave Power, Vice Chair  
Katherine Pressnail, Treasurer  
Kelly Gauthier, Director  
Jay Oduwole, Director  
Matthew Oriade, Director  
Natasha Smith, Director  
Alex Ciancio, Director

### Staff

Ryan Hollinrake, Executive Director  
Otis Mushonga, Manager, Program and Services  
Aysha Dawood, Administrative Associate  
Thuraya Elnaiem, Program Coordinator  
Michael Fliess, Coordinator, Volunteer Engagement  
Christina Friend-Johnston, Communications Associate  
Ruqia Karimi, Administrative Associate  
Fares Khouri, Program Coordinator

### Outgoing board members



This year we are saying farewell to our Board Chair Jess Merber and Director Kelly Gauthier. Jess and Kelly have been integral in ACCESS's achievements over the past few years and we are grateful for the support and leadership during their time on the board.

We are pleased to welcome Dave Power as the new Board Chair. Dave's experience as Vice Chair with ACCESS and professional background with KPMG makes him well-positioned to oversee the growth and long-term success of our organization.

## OUR COMMUNITY

**Our community connections help us reach new clients and provide valuable education on personal finance and credit in newcomer and priority communities. We are proud to partner with several organizations including:**

ACCES Employment  
Afghan Women's Organization  
Agincourt Community Services  
Association  
Arab Community Centre of Toronto  
Black Youth Jobs  
Catholic Cross-Cultural Services  
Centennial College  
CICS Canada  
City of Brampton  
City of Hamilton  
City of Pickering  
City of Vaughan  
Costi Immigrant Services  
Credit Canada  
George Brown College  
Humber College Bridging Programs

McMaster University  
Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and  
Training  
North York Community House  
Ryerson University's Diversity Institute  
Scadding Court Community Centre  
Seneca College  
TDSB Newcomer Services  
The Vaughan Business Enterprise Centre  
Toronto Employment and Social Services  
University Of Toronto  
YMCA of Greater Toronto Area  
YWCA Hamilton  
York University Bridging Program for  
Internationally Educated Professionals  
Youth Employment Services-Bizstart  
Program

**Thank you to our financial supporters**





[www.accessccf.com](http://www.accessccf.com)

(416) 462-0496

[info@accessccf.com](mailto:info@accessccf.com)

401 Richmond St. W. Suite 375

Toronto, ON M5V 3A8

Registered Charity #868066911RR0001

