

Want to start a business in Durham Region? The area has support centres to help with that

By Jennifer Foden

Nicole Morais, the founder and CEO of Durham Region's incredibly popular [Crave Doughnuts](#), which has nearly 50,000 followers on Instagram, has a lot of love for [Business Advisory Centre Durham](#) (BACD). She enrolled in the Starter Company Plus program, funded by the [Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade](#), prior to opening her first brick-and-mortar location in Whitby in November 2019, which provided her a \$5,000 grant, as well as access to useful workshops and networking. "I used it to really start our business," she says. "It helps you create a business plan and really helps you find solutions to the challenges that you're definitely going to come across in your first few years of being an entrepreneur."

Morais isn't the only one who has turned to BACD for help starting a small business. The Centre, which operates within Invest Durham, the Region's small business support department, provides free advisory services to over 5,000 entrepreneurs a year. "We're a go-to resource for people at any stage of their business, from idea to scale," says Teresa Shaver, manager of BACD.

The BACD has been around for more than 25 years and helps entrepreneurs with everything from applying for loans and grants, building a business plan, financial projections, market research and connecting them with professionals like realtors, lawyers and accountants. "It takes a village to raise a business," says Shaver. "[Our support is] highly customized for each person, because yes, there's a large swath of people that are all looking for the same thing, but once we start to get to work with the business owner, there's a lot of [different] support they might need."

And their services are always evolving. "I have a workshop series kicking off in the fall that's all on how to adopt artificial intelligence into your business," she says. "We're constantly evolving – because with the speed of life and business is changing. So, we have to listen to what entrepreneurs need. They drive our direction; they drive us by telling us what they need."

The Business Advisory Centre Durham is in good company: budding entrepreneurs in Durham Region can look for advice at the [Spark Centre](#), [Brilliant Catalyst](#) and [1855 Whitby](#), too. While BACD is typically the first point of contact for service, training, and support, Spark Centre focuses on technology and innovation entrepreneurs and 1855 on high-potential tech companies, whereas Brilliant Catalyst supports Ontario Tech students, faculty and recent alumni.

One thing that sets Business Advisory Centre Durham apart is that they help everyone. Not only do they foster inclusive entrepreneurship – whether that's an underrepresented group, a women-led business, a newcomer, et cetera – they support all different types

of companies. There are, physiotherapy practices, skilled trades like plumbers and electricians, finance companies, marketing agencies and food companies like Crave and technology businesses, of course.

Speaking of Crave, Morais is really thankful for the culture of entrepreneurship in Durham Region. "I have lots of people in my circle that are business owners in Durham," she says. "I bounce ideas off of [them] or we work together, we collaborate, that's so important... I think that's crucial because if you don't have people to talk to, then it leaves room to feel lonely."

And Shaver adds that this culture of entrepreneurship helps everyone, not just small business owners, but Durham Region residents at large. These local small businesses create jobs, of course, but it also creates a more dynamic community. "The more interesting citizens we get here, the more interesting services and foods and cultural things that they want," Shaver says. "A good mix of different things makes for happy citizens if you don't have to drive far."