

Branching Out's CommonFare Kitchen receives \$15,000 in funding

By **Sam Odrowski**

A local pilot project that's providing employment to adults with developmental differences recently received a couple boosts in funding.

CommonFare Kitchen, which is ran through Branching Out Support Services (5 First Street), was awarded \$10,000 in funding last month through the My Main Street Local Business Accelerator program. It is being used to upgrade the kitchen's infrastructure with the purchase and installation of a new commercial grade sink. It also helped buy stainless steel prep tables and exterior signage for the building.

"That [kitchen upgrade work] is all being done by local companies, and that is another thing that I really appreciate about this grant," said Branching Out's owner, Kimberly Van Ryn. "It's not only benefiting our business but it's benefiting a number of other local small businesses,"

An additional \$5,000 grant and 16 weeks of coaching for product development, aimed at promoting a circular economy, has been awarded to CommonFare Kitchen through Innovation Guelph, in partnership with 10C Harvest Impact.

"That grant has really been about mentoring us in the circular economy ? how we can connect with other people around our business and our products, so that we can lower the costs. And we can benefit other businesses, as well as ourselves," said Kimberly Van Ryn,

CommonFare Kitchen's maple kissed granola is now a part of the circular economy, with the organization using spent grains from Good Lot Brewery in Alton, which were used to make beer. The grains are dried out and offer a high protein, high fibre, oatmeal replacement for the granola. The best part is they're free for CommonFare Kitchen to use, they just go over and pick them up.

The kitchen is also doing bulk purchasing with the Village Refillery (28 Mill Street, Unit 109B) for whatever ingredients they're collectively buying and they split on shipping costs.

A company in Burlington is helping CommonFare Kitchen around fully recyclable packaging.

And the syrup that's added to the maple kissed granola is sourced from Maple Grove Farms in Mount Forest, who can be found at the Orangeville Farmer's Market on Saturdays. Van Ryn said all ingredients are sourced locally as much as possible, although a couple things that aren't available in the region or province come from Manitoba.

"We keep it all Canadian," she noted.

The adults with neurodiversities who Branching Out serves with its day program have all had a chance to practice working on the maple kissed granola being made and sold through CommonFare Kitchen.

Two of the adults have really taken initiative and leadership in the creation of the granola and are now employed, working the past three weeks out of Westminster Church, a community partner. They'll be working out of CommonFare Kitchen in September when renovations are complete.

"The response from them has been incredible," said Van Ryn. "I think we as working adults, take for granted what it means to go to work and get a paycheck every other Friday. Like that's so normal for us, we don't even really think about it unless it doesn't happen."

She continued, "There's a lot of barriers for people with neurodiversities to get paid employment if they don't have full time support. It is really expensive and if you can't afford it, the possibility of you getting a job just went down to pretty much zero."

But with the CommonFare Kitchen pilot project, the support is built in with a sous chef/support worker who oversees the making of granola at Westminster Church.

"It provides them one of the most normative working experiences that we can offer," said Van Ryn. "They prep, bake, package, do everything ? dishes from start to finish. That's their job. And so far, they are loving it, and it has added a lot of value to their lives and to ours."

As granola sales grow, the number of hours and employees will grow with it. Currently they each work three hours a week.

Going forward Van Ryn said she's hoping CommonFare Kitchen is able to sell their granola to local farms or businesses who could keep a steady flow of orders going. Anyone who runs a farm store, CSA, consignment store or booth at a farmers' market, and would like to sell the granola, can email info@branchingoutsupportservices.ca.

"I think that's the next big step for us, is securing our buyers in this project," said Van Ryn,