



The Business Help Centre



of Middlesex County



A Community Futures Development Corporation

2009/2010 Annual General Meeting



www.thebusinesshelpcentre.ca

Business Consulting Services

Small Business Tools

Small Business Loans

Business Workshops & Seminars

The Business Help Centre is...

Committed to helping local businesses succeed

Middlesex County Tourism

Community Partnerships

Small Business Internship Program

Helping to advance small businesses and economic development in Middlesex County

The Business Help Centre



of Middlesex County



A Community Futures Development Corporation

Introduction

The Business Help Centre (CFDC) of Middlesex County is a community-based, non-profit organization staffed by business professionals who encourage entrepreneurship and the pursuit of economic opportunities. The organization was Federally incorporated in 2001. Funding support for core operations of the The Business Help Centre is realized through partnership with Industry Canada/FedDev Ontario.

Community Accountability

The Business Help Centre is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. All Directors are appointed to serve a three-year term and represent the interests of the County at large.

Board member recruitment is carried out on a gap/skill analysis basis. Factors such as geography, skill base, gender and sector experience are each taken into consideration when analyzing Board nominations. Resource persons are consulted as needed to ensure a balance of skill and professional opinion in developing and maintaining program success.

The Business Help Centre remains in close and regular contact with all of its funding partners. Quarterly reports and financial claims are submitted for review and process. Advice is sought from the appointed FedDev Ontario Program Consultant on an on-going basis to ensure that the goals and objectives of the Corporation are consistent with those of the Government of Canada.

An annual report is made available to Directors, members and representatives from all levels of government for review. An annual budget and business plan are submitted to the Government of Canada for review and approval.

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Tiny van Pinxteren - President, Board of Directors



It has been a most interesting and rewarding year for us at The Business Help Centre.

The economic shift that took place in Southern Ontario resulted in Community Futures Development Corporations being called upon to develop new ways to address key priorities for action in helping to sustain and transition our communities.

As our General Manager welcomed a new addition of her own, we welcomed several new programs, Directors and support staff to our organization.

Of great significance, we also welcomed a new agency, the Federal Economic Development Agency of Southern Ontario (FedDev) to our funding mix. With this came much-needed programming for the small businesses and rural communities of our region, along with new processes, and priorities for our core operations.

I commend the Federal government on their handling of the transition and appreciate the trust they placed into our organization during a period of particular economic change. The additional funds they entrusted to us locally were used for both loans and community economic development and resulted in the creation and maintenance of hundreds of jobs, and helped retain numerous small businesses in our area. Such investments will continue to build the local economy over several years to come.

I would like to give credit to all of our staff, who under the direction of our General Manager, bring their knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm to the table in order to build and shape the business landscape here in Middlesex County...one client at a time.

On a final note, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to my fellow directors, who give of their time and insight voluntarily to help guide the organization and keep us ever-informed of what we can do to serve our local communities. I am very proud of the work that we have accomplished over the past fiscal year, and look forward to all that we will continue to accomplish by working effectively together for benefit our resident communities in the future.

Sincerely,

Tiny van Pinxteren, President

Cara Finn - General Manager

Looking back on the last fiscal year, one word comes to mind...Remarkable. It is the word that describes so much about what resulted in the success of The Business Help Centre in 2009-2010.

In the wake of the recession, the Federal Government called upon Community Futures Development Corporations such as ours to deliver stimulus programs on their behalf. Our staff and Directors quickly rose to the occasion, making every allowance necessary to offer supports to make economic recovery readily accessible for local businesses.

Their efforts resulted in a record amount of community development assistance being pumped into the local economy; to help stabilize and strengthen our rural communities. Similarly, not only did the need for our general lending increase, there was a pressing demand for specialized lending such as that which we have been pleased to deliver in conjunction with Agriculture Canada and the OACFDC under the Sand Plains Community Development Fund.

To properly address the demands, we added staff to be available to clients requesting our assistance, and our Directors committed additional time to provide for the review and support of applications. With contributions by the Government of Canada, and through the success and subsequent repayment of loans by many of our clients, we were able to advance an unprecedented level of financing this year. We also remained committed to the Federal Government's call to increase our loan size to \$250,000 for local enterprises.

Acting as a delivery agent for several additional Provincial and Federal programs, we were able to lead numerous projects that have provided a boost to local small business, created and maintained local jobs, and ultimately, contributed positively to the future of our region.

We look forward to the challenge of monitoring our increased lending portfolio and client base over the next year, and to our continued work in the fields of business and economic development in Middlesex, and throughout Southwestern Ontario.

Thank you to our staff, partners, funders and volunteers who have given of themselves to meet the needs of our community. And, as always, thank you to our clients for putting your trust in our services, and your investment in Middlesex County.

Sincerely,

Cara A. Finn, General Manager



Business Counselling and Advisory Services

The Business Help Centre delivers two (2) business counselling and advisory products/services:

i. Direct Consultation with Entrepreneurs

Responsible for business counselling and advisory services, The Business Help Centre consults directly with Middlesex County entrepreneurs to discuss business development issues.

Serving as a business liaison, The Business Help Centre works to achieve the following:

- Reduction of barriers to entry among clientele;
- Facilitation of business retention and expansion;
- Expansion of linkages, expertise and resources;
- Access to no-cost consulting for business start-up and operation;
- Reduced incidence of business risk among those using the service;
- Job creation/maintenance in the local community by businesses served by The Business Help Centre.

ii. Business Resources

With a large geographic catchment area, The Business Help Centre provides business services including a comprehensive website and an on-site entrepreneurial library.

Serving as a platform for disseminating information, the corporate website located at www.thebusinesshelpcentre.ca allows us to virtually publish and distribute small business and economic development resources to the entire catchment area at a relatively low cost. The on-site library further offers individuals in the catchment area ready access tools and information to help them plan for their future business success.

# of General Inquiries	4918
# of In-Depth Interviews	1085
Total Leverages	\$6,031,782

# of Businesses Assisted	
Start-ups	29
Maintenance	31
Expansion	41

# of Jobs Created/Maintained	
Created	233
Maintained	59

Investment Fund Services

The Business Help Centre provides term loans to small businesses and local non-profit organizations that have had difficulty finding financing elsewhere on reasonable terms.

Loans up to a maximum of \$250,000 can be made to businesses in Middlesex County (excluding the City of London) that will be creating new jobs or maintaining existing jobs in the local area.

Financing can be used for any legitimate business purpose which may include, but not be limited to, the purchase of fixed assets, leasehold improvements, inventory or working capital.

Applicants must complete a business plan that proves the viability of the operation. Past financial statements (if applicable), as well as projections, must be submitted with the application.

Business plan outlines and loan applications are available online or by contacting our office.

A successful application must demonstrate:

- The ability to repay the loan;
- Adequate security which may include a combination of business and personal assets;
- The capability to operate and manage the business;
- A firm commitment to the business, including a personal investment of funds and resources.

Loans are subject to a maximum five (5) year term, with a maximum amortization period of fifteen (15) years. All loans are subject to regular monthly payments however, remain open for repayment, in full or in part, at any time, without penalty.

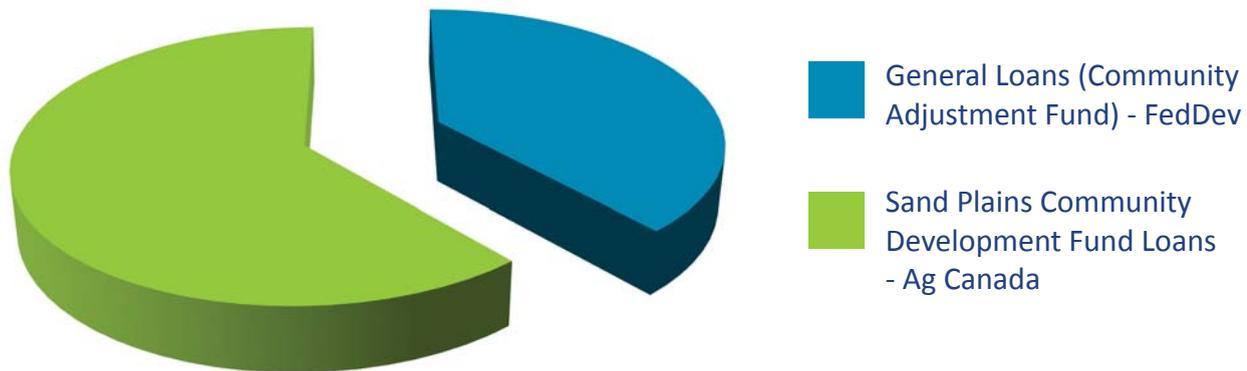
All interest earned on The Business Help Centre loans is returned to the investment pool in order that the corporation may further extend financing to additional small businesses in Middlesex County.

Investment Fund Activity 2009-2010

	2009-10	Cumulative from Inception (2001-10)
Loans Advanced	\$1,375,000	\$4,800,519
Interest Earned	\$100,180	\$567,675
Federal Contributions		\$3,375,000
FedDev	\$530,000	
Ag Canada	\$845,000	
Jobs Created	140	289
Jobs Maintained	45	200
Leveraged Funds	\$3,726,602	\$6,716,355
Total Loans Outstanding		\$2,677,224
Loan Loss Provision		4%

2009-2010 Loans Advanced

Total Loans Advanced
\$1,375,000



The Flower Ranch and Green Fuels Ranch

Located just outside of Strathroy is a haven for plant lovers and gardeners alike, known as the Flower Ranch Garden Centres. Established in 2004 and incorporated in 2005, the Flower Ranch is owned and operated by Melinda Rombouts and her partner, Dave Burch, and provides customers with a one-stop garden centre that allows them to purchase a variety of plants and garden essentials straight from the growers.

Melinda and Dave's passion for plants is the key to the success of their business. Dave is a farmer who concentrated on specialty crops, and Melinda has a degree in biology from the University of Waterloo, where she specialized in plant biology and microbiology. She asserts that her tremendous passion for plants is innate: when asked why she loves plants, Melinda responded, "It's shocking to me to hear people ask why I enjoy growing things. Some people just have it in them. I grow everything in pots and love rearranging my plants, it feels like redecorating."

Melinda and Dave approached the The Business Help Centre last October with plans to expand their business to include an off-season product. Under the name 'The Green Fuels Ranch', Melinda and Dave are producing various strains of algae, which are being purchased by nutraceutical companies across Southwestern Ontario. "Algae contain a high amount of Omega-3 fatty acids, and 70% of it is oil. The Omega-3 found in fish actually comes from the algae they consume," states Melinda. The Green Fuels Ranch is set apart from the competition because they are providing a product in a very small niche market. There is no one else in Canada who is growing algae on a commercial basis, and many companies are turning to Canadian producers instead of outsourcing as the quality of the algae grown in foreign markets does not meet Canadian standards. In the future, Melinda hopes to expand The Green Fuels Ranch to provide algae for a variety of different industries, including cosmetics and feed companies who want to benefit from the Omega-3 found in algae by adding it to the diets of animals bred for consumption.

The Business Help Centre assisted Melinda and Dave by providing a business loan for The Flower Ranch and The Green Fuels Ranch, in order to move the business away from the wholesale market and into the retail market, which is more profitable. "I found that everyone [at The Business Help Centre] was really good to deal with. Brian Chalmers [Business and Loans Advisor] stepped in to defend the technical aspects of growing algae," states Melinda, adding that it is currently extremely difficult to find business funding through traditional means. "Banks are really tight right now and can't look outside of mainstream crops. Brian and The Business Help Centre team were open to

this innovative idea for algae growth.” Melinda and Dave were recipients of Sand Plains Community Development Funding, which allowed them to expand The Flower Ranch business and start-up The Green Fuels Ranch.

Melinda explained that the biggest challenge facing a small business owner is the economy. “Our sales really went down last year, by about 10%; the economy really hurt our business,” she states. However, when asked about advice to give to aspiring entrepreneurs, Melinda recommends doing thorough research up front, have the financial backing before jumping in, and be open to the idea of changing the direction of your business. “When you’re working for yourself, your whole life revolves around your business,” says Melinda. While sometimes she envies those who have stable 9 to 5 jobs, Melinda says that her business makes her feel as though she has a bigger purpose.

MELINDA TO SEND PHOTO AND COMPANY LOGO



Community Economic Development (CED)

The Business Help Centre works closely with community partners and provides partial funding and/or management for joint projects that encourage economic opportunity in our local communities.

Funding may be possible for non-profit initiatives that:

- provide long-term economic benefit to Middlesex County;
- do not create a dependency on government funds;
- are jointly funded by other sources;
- demonstrate the ability to create and/or maintain local jobs;
- contribute to the overall business development mandate of The Business Help Centre.

CED Projects

# of Projects	130
\$ Invested in Projects	\$954,271

Special Projects

The Business Help Centre also offers administrative services as a delivery agent for Federal, Provincial and Municipal government programs in order to advance local and regional projects that contribute to the economic stability and growth of Southwestern Ontario.

2009-2010 CED Projects

Break Into Business Café

- Teamed up with Youth Opportunities Unlimited to offer an innovative, hands-on entrepreneurial opportunity to local youth ages 14-29.

Small Business Internship Program (SBIP)

- Acted as a delivery agent of SBIP throughout Southwestern Ontario, matching post-secondary students in need of job experience with SMEs in need of e-commerce enhancements.

Break into Business Workshop Series

- Provided new and existing entrepreneurs business development information in an informal and supportive group atmosphere.

Downtown Revitalization

- Offered support and funding for projects contributing to the revitalization of core districts.
- Produced manuals on the organization and delivery of regional Main Street programming.

Middlesex Tourism

- Produced and published the 7th annual edition of Middlesex...We're on the Way tourism publication.
- Invested in a billboard campaign in 2009 to further boost tourism recognition across the region. Hosted and maintained www.middlesextourism.ca.
- Tourism Symposium presented an opportunity to bring together stakeholders throughout Middlesex County who have a vested interest in forming a coalition to enhance tourism in the County.

Southwestern Ontario Development Program (SWODP)

- Offered support and funding to initiatives which promoted rural socio-economic development. Priority areas of investment included: Business & Skills Development Programs for Business Development Projects, Skills Development Projects, Internship Projects and Community Development Funds for Local Initiative Projects.

Middlesex Heritage Trail Signs

- Created 28 new historic signs to increase total signs to 113 through Middlesex County. These signs help commemorate the historic significance of events, buildings and locations as well as geological formations in the area

Green Energy

- Offered support and funding for projects to support strategies for job creation in renewable and green energies.

ME Inc.

- Produced a youth-oriented business magazine which documents the steps required to start a business through the eyes of various young entrepreneurs.

2009-2010 CED Special Projects

Western Ontario CFDC Under the direction of the General Manager, administered funding for the joint promotion and best practice sharing of the 7 CFDCs located in the Southern most region of Ontario.

South Central Ontario Region

Provided stakeholder input, volunteer hours, and acted as a liaison between the CFDCs and the Municipal membership of SCOR.

Sand Plains Community Development Fund

Provided input regarding the framework, delivery and procedures required for the 2009 launch of this new program, aimed at the economic transitioning of the former tobacco-growing regions of Middlesex, Elgin, Brant, Oxford and Norfolk.

Enhanced Investment Fund Activities

Participated in the Federal Stimulus Program to increase public awareness of commercial financing and enhanced services for small businesses throughout rural Ontario.

SBIP

Small Business Internship Program



Industry
Canada

Industrie
Canada

Small Business Internship Program
is supported in part by contributions
from the Government of Canada

PSPE

Programme de stages dans les petites entreprises



Industrie
Canada

Industrie
Canada

PSPE est financé en partie
par une contribution du
gouvernement du Canada



During the past year, the Small Business Internship Program (SBIP), funded by Industry Canada and delivered by The Business Help Centre, has encouraged small- and medium-sized businesses to develop information and communication technology projects to increase their productivity and competitiveness.

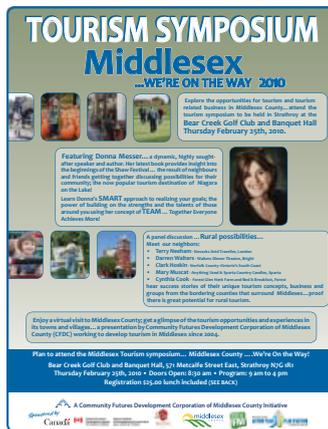
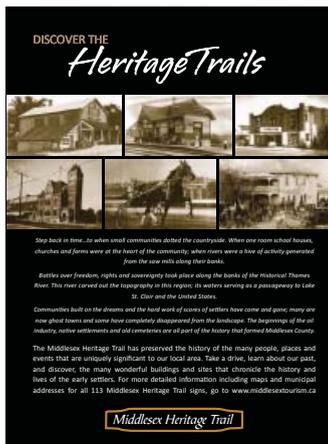
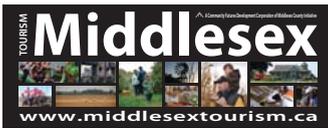
Small and medium businesses were encouraged to hire post-secondary business or communication technology students to prepare marketing campaigns and promotions for displaying product information online. Students were hired to enhance existing websites by promoting new products, introducing social media tools, employing techniques to increase visibility in search engine sites, along with receiving various traffic reports on site visitors.

Through the SBIP, Tina Gokstorp, president of CTAR Corporation, hired an intern to help her achieve the projects she knew she needed to stay competitive. CTAR provides solutions for businesses dealing with the challenges presented by the changing pace of technology, which includes removal or recycling of obsolete electronic equipment. CTAR is very concerned about the environmental impact of e-waste and ensures that outdated or excess equipment finds a suitable new home.

Tina's website was relatively new but needed updates such as the introduction of social media tools. A comprehensive inventory list was added to the website, along with payment tools enabling customers to view and purchase products. The company added eBay so they could follow the bidding of products. The intern was able to promote the inventory and other services the company presently offers, as well as connect and communicate with potential buyers. It was a wonderful opportunity for both the intern and CTAR.

The SBIP intern is expected to work a total of 420 hours during a 10-12 week period, in an environment with monitored supervision. Without this program, many employers would be unable to hire students or enter into ecommerce technology. Employers are offered up to 75% reimbursement of wages and employer-paid benefits.

During the 2009-10 year, a total of 68 SMEs hired students and were reimbursed a total of \$397,800 from SBIP. As a delivery agent, The Business Help Centre covers the Southern and Southwestern region of Ontario. This program funding is renewed on a yearly basis.



Middlesex TOURISM

ANGIE TO COMPLETE FOR MONDAY

Since opening its doors in 2002 The Business Help Centre has done its part to keep tourism a key priority in the economic development strategy for Middlesex County. With assistance from FedDev Ontario and SWODP Program, The Business Help Centre was able to bolster these efforts in 2009-2010.

An investment in the Middlesex Heritage Trails saw an additional **28** signs added this past year to the existing network of **85** signs that now span across our County. [Heritage trail map](#), [Heritage Trail Banner](#), [Heritage Trail AD](#)

A successful symposium was held in early 2010 and brought together key tourism stakeholders from throughout the area and beyond to discuss plans for keeping tourism alive and well in Middlesex.

Marketing efforts were also increased in 2009-2010. Our campaign now includes not only our very successful full-colour publication highlighting tourism in the region, but also includes several billboards, radio campaigns and an improved interactive website. [Promotional Materials](#), [Banners](#), [Signage](#)

[Middlesex We're On The Way - now in 8th year](#)

[Incorporation, consultant for funding application, staff,](#)

Finally, the efforts of The Business Help Centre culminated in March of 2010 with the birth of a new organization, Middlesex Tourism, with which funding provided by the Sand Plains Community Development Fund will help ensure future success for the tourism industry.

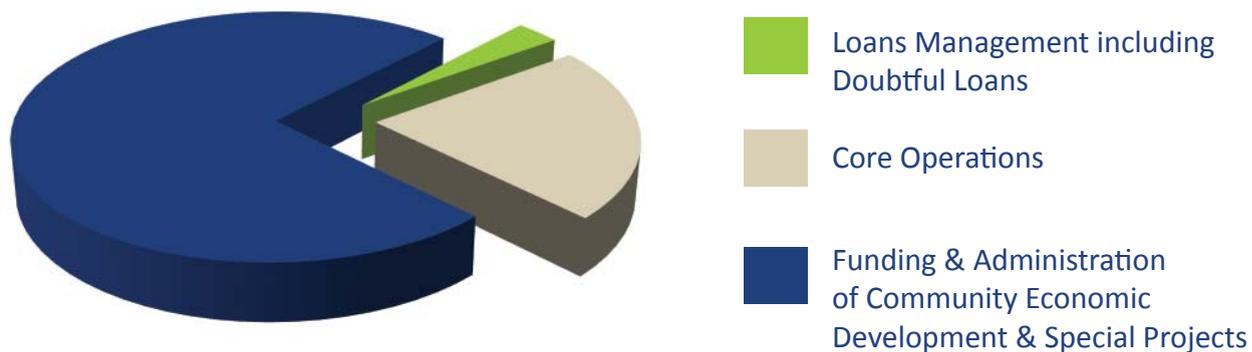
Financial Summary

The Business Help Centre 2009-2010

Revenue



Expenditures



The Business Help Centre Looking Forward

Business Counselling and Advisory Services

Throughout the coming fiscal year, The Business Help Centre is committed to continuing to offer one-on-one consulting services to new and existing business owners throughout our geographic service area. We are also seeking additional funding to provide enhanced business development services including business plan development and coordination to our clientele.

# of Client Contacts	4000
# of Businesses Assisted	107
# of Jobs Impacted	89

The organization will continue to offer a comprehensive website containing links to funding opportunities, regulatory information, and business planning tools for the use of local entrepreneurs and those interested in investing in business development in Middlesex County.

Our on-site entrepreneurial library will continue to be maintained and expanded to offer clients immediate access to printed material including legal, accounting, marketing and business planning information that is relevant to the start-up and expansion of their businesses.

Loans

It is the intention of The Business Help Centre to offer a minimum of \$1,870,000 in term loans to local enterprises this year. Using a targeted investment figure of \$15,000 per job created/maintained by these loans, we expect to directly impact 150 jobs, and leverage at least \$467,500 in additional financing. As demand for our commercial financing services continues to rise, we will be partnering with a multitude of other funding sources to exceed the proposed level of investment.

Number of Loans	31
Value of Loans Advanced	\$1,870,000
# of Jobs Impacted	150
\$ Leveraged	\$467,500

Next Year At A Glance

Community Economic Development

In 2010-2011, The Business Help Centre will be investing/administering community economic development supports through the following programs and initiatives:

# of Projects	72
Value of Projects	\$1,026,049
\$ Leveraged	\$1,160,049

Small Business Internship Program (SBIP)

Administer funding on behalf of Industry Canada for the placement of up to 50 post-secondary students in small and medium sized businesses by March 31, 2011.

Break Into Business Cafe

Continue offering hands-on entrepreneurial experience to youth and youth-at-risk from Middlesex County in a supportive and educational atmosphere.

Middlesex Tourism

Continue to support tourism in Middlesex County by producing and distributing the 8th “Middlesex...We’re on the Way” tourism magazine, and by continuing to support Middlesex Tourism with its initiatives to improve and promote Middlesex County as a tourist destination.

Green Jobs Strategy

Participate in the regional Green Jobs Strategy aimed at evaluating the current interest and investment in green energy related projects among communities and small businesses in Southern Ontario.

Break Into Business Workshop Series

Offer a comprehensive workshop series covering all aspects of the business planning process.

War Of 1812 Showcase

Partnering with Middlesex Tourism and Middlesex County to fund a historical video, “Rural Raids and Divided Loyalties – Southwestern Ontario the War of 1812”. The project’s TV series, web site, downloadable maps, driving tours & mobile application will showcase our region’s 1812 related tourism assets.

Special Projects

In addition to above-noted, the CFDC of Middlesex County is committed to providing administrative support and input to the following special projects in 2010-11:

- Western Ontario CFDC
- Sand Plains Community Development Fund
- Enhanced Investment Fund Activities
- South Central Ontario Region

The Business Help Centre



A Community Futures Development Corporation

THE BUSINESS HELP CENTRE (CFDC) OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY is proud to acknowledge our sponsors



Federal Economic
Development Agency
for Southern Ontario

Agence fédérale
de développement économique
pour le Sud de l'Ontario

Canada



Western Ontario
Community Futures Development Corporation



OXFORD SMALL BUSINESS
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ELGIN
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Elgin Middlesex Oxford
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EMPLOYMENT
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Ontario's employment & training network

KNOWLEDGE**SHARE**



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middlesex
county

Ministry of Agriculture,
Food and Rural Affairs



Ontario



Ontario

MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRADE



Ontario

MINISTRY OF TRAINING, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



SAND PLAINS
Community Development Fund



Small Business Internship Program



Programme de stages dans les petites entreprises



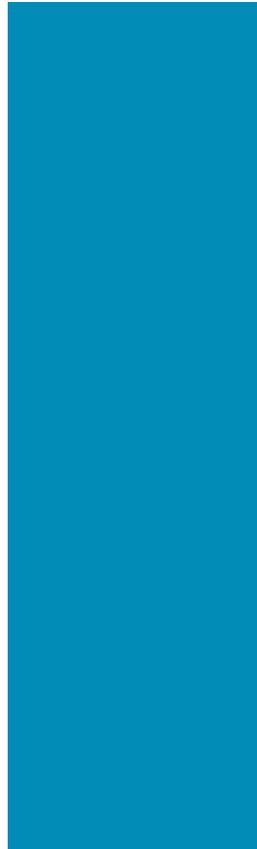
United Way
of London & Middlesex



YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES UNLIMITED



**The Business
Help Centre** 
of Middlesex County
 A Community Futures Development Corporation



Since 2001 The Business Help Centre has encouraged entrepreneurship and the pursuit of economic opportunities in the region.



www.thebusinesshelpcentre.ca