



YEAR IN REVIEW

2024/2025



Community Futures

Thompson Country

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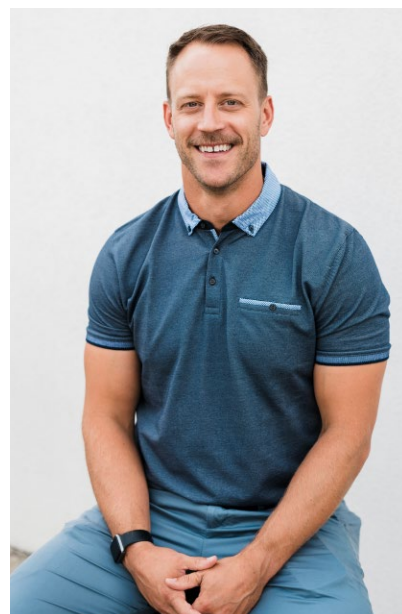
11 LOCAL BUSINESS GROWTH

intro

This past year has been one of connection, growth, and meaningful milestones for Community Futures Thompson Country. Alongside celebrating our clients' successes and sharing program highlights, we honour the retirement of a valued team member and a long-serving board member whose dedication has shaped our organization. Within these pages, you'll find inspiring client stories, program and loan statistics, and how we're building a stronger and more connected future for our region.



A NOTE FROM OUR general manager



- Blair Gray MBA,
General Manager

“
LOOKING TO
2025/26, WE ARE
EXCITED TO BUILD ON
THIS MOMENTUM.
”

Reflecting on an impactful and energizing year for Community Futures Thompson Country (CFTC), I'm proud of our accomplishments and client successes. Our continued focus on community-based economic development has led to exciting growth, meaningful partnerships, and powerful outcomes for entrepreneurs across our region.

A significant achievement was the completion of two major initiatives: the Disaster Relief and Economic Adjustment Initiative (DREAI) and the Forestry Impact and Recovery Coordinator Project in the North Thompson. Both programs have been instrumental in helping communities and businesses navigate economic disruption, and we are proud of the role CFTC played in delivering support that made a tangible difference on the ground.

A highlight this year was The Big Pitch competition. This dynamic and well-received event allowed aspiring entrepreneurs to share their business ideas, gain exposure, and connect with mentors and investors. The energy, innovation, and

community support showcased at this event captured exactly what CFTC is about.

Looking to 2025/26, we are excited to build on this momentum. Among our new initiatives is Lemonade Day Kamloops, a youth-focused entrepreneurship program that will empower the next generation of business leaders with real-world experience and mentorship. We believe in the potential of our youth and look forward to seeing their creativity and ambition shine.

While we can't always predict the challenges ahead, our CFTC team remains committed to delivering programs and services that have a meaningful impact on the communities we serve. The future is bright, with new projects on the horizon and a strong foundation built on collaboration, innovation, and resilience.

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers, staff, community partners, and all the entrepreneurs who inspire us daily. Here's to continued growth and shared success in the year ahead.

COMMUNITY FUTURES fueling Kamloops' entrepreneurial spirit

At Community Futures Thompson Country, we supported 115 general business service or start-up inquiries over the past year — excluding loan-related questions. These inquiries most often led to referrals to our myCF platform or sharing start-up and business maintenance resources. As many of these inquiries come in through word-of-mouth or personal recommendations from friends and family, it highlights the trust and visibility we've built in our community. Others found us through partner organizations like WorkBC or by searching online for Kamloops business resources — further proof of our website and programs' strong presence in the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

We saw strong engagement in our business development learning opportunities, with 45 entrepreneurs participating in our workshops, including our multi-session Business Bootcamp, targeted sessions such as "AI Tools for Small Business," and our Financial Controller's popular bookkeeping workshops. In total, we hosted 51 individual workshop sessions, giving local entrepreneurs meaningful opportunities to expand their knowledge and confidence in running a business.

A particular highlight has been our Guest Speaker Series, which featured 42-hour sessions with local business professionals

sharing insights across all areas of business operations—from banking and insurance to legal matters and marketing. We're incredibly fortunate to have a generous group of experts who volunteer their time to foster the success of emerging entrepreneurs.

Regarding supporting long-term business viability, we're proud of the results: 84% of Self-Employment Program participants (27 out of 32) who began the program in fiscal year 2023–24 were still in operation one year later. This speaks to the effectiveness of our approach and the resilience of the entrepreneurs we serve.

a. We had 49 people attend Orientation from April 1, 24 – March 31, 2025. Out of the 49, 38 entered our Business Boot Camp, and 34 launched businesses.

b. Client breakdown by specialized population groups: 25 Women, 7 youth, 5 persons with disabilities, and 5 Indigenous. We've recently updated our Business Launch form to include 2SLGBTQIA+ as one of the specialized population options. This addition helps us better recognize and support the diverse entrepreneurs we serve.

c. Out of the 38 who were in Business Boot Camp, 2 were paying LEAF clients.



Julie Bayman &
Carmen Jordan

STATS

self-employment

Inquiry Calls	85
Through Orientation	59
Entered Business Boot Camp	36

CLIENT BREAKDOWN BY specialized population groups

Women	25	Youth	3
Indigenous	5	Disability	10

“So, so, so good. This program has given me just the boost I needed to be accountable to my own goals and get clear on what exactly those goals are! Julie and Carmen and team are all amazing at their jobs...”

– Kayla Brazier, Kayla Brazier Somatics



CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

meet the makers,
meet the movers,
and the shakers.



— Graham Young,
Owner/Operator



BEARDED
PLUMBER
CANADA



Please give us a brief description of your backstory.

I've been plumbing now for over 13 years. Last year, I got laid off twice from two different companies that were just not the right fit for me. The second time, I had just returned from holidays and couldn't afford to not be working and decided to take my future into my own hands. I'd always wanted to be out on my own but the timing just never seemed right. I launched Bearded Plumber Canada at end of January of this year. .

Tell us about your business?

At Bearded Plumber Canada, I'm not just here to fix your pipes—I'm here to make plumbing a little less painful and a whole lot more dependable. With years of experience, a fully stocked van, and a beard that's seen more leaks than a nosy neighbour, I bring the kind of service that's honest, efficient, and just cheeky enough to keep things interesting. Whether it's a simple repair or a head-scratching mess, you can count on me to show up, sort it out, and leave things better than I found them. Bearded, Reliable, and Ready—Plumbing with Integrity and Character.

What have been your successes, milestones, and challenges?

I just launched in January and am taking Kamloops by storm. I have taken on marketing and branding myself and I take it very seriously down to custom Bearded Plumber Canada earrings. I recently just won silver in the Plumber category in best of Kamloops which is huge. To be in business as little as I have and already have that title next to IPH and above Hadwins is huge to me.

What did you find most valuable in working with Community Futures Thompson Country?

Being able to connect with like minded individuals launching business at the same time and learning all the ins and outs of running a business was huge for me. All the little things I didn't think I needed to run my own business such as WorkSafeBC.

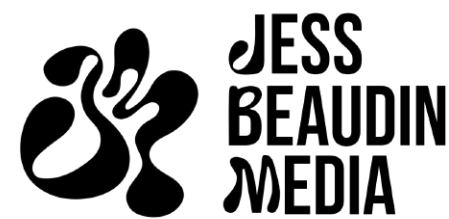
What advice would you give to others who want to open their own business?

For others hoping to start their own business, the timing will never be right. I jumped in head first and am making an honest go of it. I worked out of my SUV for the first few months and suffered but short term pain for long term gain.



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Please give us a brief description of your backstory.

I've always been a creative person; I loved drawing, writing, and taking pictures growing up. Since my first year in university (2016), I've done photography as a side gig, but in 2024 I started getting requests from organizations I knew through my day job to do other media and marketing work alongside photography.

Before I started the self employment program in January 2025, I had been working as the communications and marketing personnel for a nonprofit organization in Kamloops since 2022. My employment contract was up for renewal at the end of 2024; that's when I decided to take the leap into self employment through Community Futures.

I've been vocal about the environment and human rights since I was a kid, and I've become more passionate about them as an adult. While working in the nonprofit space mostly aligned with my values, there were still certain constraints about working within the system that didn't sit right with me, but I knew we had to follow as an organization. That was a big push for me wanting to be my own boss; I could decide exactly how I did things. The flexibility to pivot and do the best I can in an industry that doesn't always use the most ethical practices is something I really love and am proud of.

Tell us about your business?

Jess Beaudin Media is a values-led media agency that specializes in working with human rights and environmentally focused brands.

I offer commercial photography and videography, and management for communications and marketing projects.

The most notable service I offer is 100% Indigenous-to-place film developers. This is a service I spent many hours developing; it uses plants that are native to the community I am photographing in to develop film in lieu of traditional film chemistry, which is toxic and environmentally degrading. The headshot of me has been developed using sagebrush and chokecherries.

What have been your successes, milestones, and challenges?

I've had the opportunity to work on some really cool projects! I photographed 20 climate

disaster survivors in collaboration with the Climate Disaster Project, ran through UVic and TRU. These photographs were published in our local news outlet, The Wren, on display at the Kamloops Art Gallery and even adapted into an award-winning play! I also photographed Kamloops Designer Delayne Dixon's sustainable fashion line, sponsored by Recycle BC, at Vancouver Fashion Week. Both projects and several others I've had this year felt like "I made it" moments. These larger commercial contracts really aligned with my values, and I didn't expect these types of contracts so quickly after starting my business.

My biggest loss has been getting scammed out of \$1500 while trying to upgrade my very old camera gear. That really sucked, but was a good learning opportunity

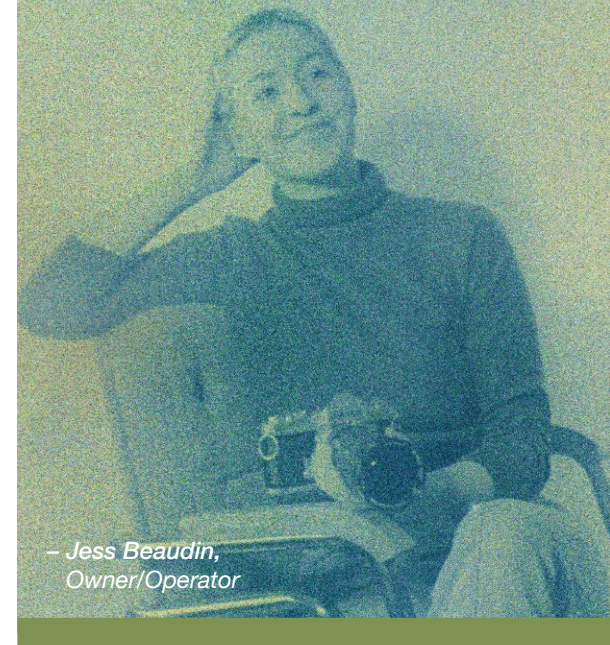
What did you find most valuable in working with Community Futures Thompson Country?

The guidance and guest speakers in the Self Employment Program were so helpful. Starting a business has so many moving parts it can be overwhelming, but the program laid out clear steps for me to take. I never would have known I should do half of the stuff you're "supposed to" when starting a business if I wasn't in that program - who knew I should register for Work Safe BC when I'm my only official employee?

The practice of making a business and financial plan was also valuable. The feedback I received on the business plan, and having to check in on my financial projections and business activities every month through the program really helped keep me on track while getting in the flow of working for myself. It's something that feels more habitual now and that I'll be able to keep doing when I'm no longer working with Community Futures.

Please share your funding experience, and how that has supported and shaped your business?

I'm currently receiving monthly living support through the Self Employment Program. Without this financial support I wouldn't have taken the leap to start working for myself full time. The living supports let me invest money back into my business while I'm starting up and still be able to pay my bills. This was especially helpful during the early stages of the Self Employment Program, where I was working on building my business and not yet working in it.



— Jess Beaudin,
Owner/Operator

What advice would you give to others who want to open their own business?

Connect with community! I've met so many amazing people that have been fundamental to establishing my business. Whether you end up collaborating with other local business owners or just chatting with someone who gets what it's like to be new in business or your industry, it's going to help you. We can't do great things alone; we need to support each other if we want to see our community succeed.

Have you accessed a program and service for those who traditionally experience barriers to self-employment? This includes Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program or PRIDE in Entrepreneurship Program?

Yes, I have accessed PRIDE in Entrepreneurship Program.

If yes, how did participating in accessible entrepreneurship impact your confidence, business plans, or sense of community as an entrepreneur? We'd love to hear your personal reflections.

It felt nice to be able to access business coaching that was in tune with my experience as a queer business owner. While the world is a lot more understanding of the different identities and experiences we all have, I definitely experience discrimination and harassment for just being myself, and this has already impacted my business. Through the Pride in Entrepreneurship program, I've been able to explore risk management practices related to being a queer entrepreneur, like handling hate comments online related to my identity, or dealing with discrimination from potential clients.

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COMMUNITY engagement

At Community Futures Thompson Country, community engagement is more than a value—it's a core part of our operation. This past year, we introduced new community-based programs and initiatives to support local entrepreneurs, youth, and small businesses.

From launching first-time events to strengthening existing partnerships, our team was proud to show up, collaborate, and create opportunities that reflect Thompson Country's diverse needs. Whether through workshops, collaborations, or celebrations, each initiative was rooted in the belief that strong communities are built through shared support and local leadership.



COMMUNITY EVENT



Empowered & Entrepreneurial: Recognizing Women in Business

In celebration of International Women's Day, Community Future's offices across BC proudly partnered with WeBC—a not-for-profit organization that has supported women business owners across British Columbia for nearly three decades—to host an inspiring evening honouring women entrepreneurs in our region. Held on March 4, 2025, at Red Beard Café in North Kamloops, this special gathering was funded by the Government of Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy and reflected the heart of that strategy—amplifying the voices, experiences, and potential of women entrepreneurs in our community.

With the warm and engaging Charlene Muchipisi as our host, the evening featured four dynamic panelists who generously shared their personal business journeys: Christina Grono, founder of The Art We Are Café; Clara Shipp, Health Coach and Women's Wellness Specialist; Stacey Owen, multi-business entrepreneur, CEO of Hey Silly Rebel and Founder of Meet Pepper; and Deena Aspinall, owner of Our Footprints Eco Store. Their honesty,

wisdom, and humour filled the room with encouragement, motivation, and solidarity.

Guests were treated to a curated grazing table and gift bags filled with items from local women-owned businesses, reinforcing the importance of supporting one another in both big and small ways. The room buzzed with meaningful conversation and laughter, and many attendees shared how deeply the event resonated:

"We all have challenges in business, and we are stronger together."

"You don't have to be the expert, but you can be a contributor."

"It eased a lot of imposter syndrome I had."

"The biggest takeaway? How beautiful and supportive our female entrepreneur community is in Kamloops."

From the carefully crafted details to the powerful takeaways, Women in Business was more than an event—it celebrated community, courage, and the future of

“ THE BIGGEST TAKEAWAY?
HOW BEAUTIFUL AND
SUPPORTIVE OUR FEMALE
ENTREPRENEUR COMMUNITY
IS IN KAMLOOPS. ”

COMMUNITY EVENT

The BIG Pitch:
Fueling the Future of
Local Business



This spring, we proudly launched The BIG Pitch—a dynamic new event designed to showcase and support emerging entrepreneurs across the Thompson Country region. Inspired by the energy of Dragon's Den and the spirit of community collaboration, The BIG Pitch brought together creativity, support, and economic opportunity under one roof.

Held at Kelson Hall Centre for Arts & Education in downtown Kamloops on March 1, 2025, the event began with a closed-door pitch session, during which participants shared their business ideas with a panel of local experts. Five finalists then advanced to the highly anticipated live pitch, competing in front of an audience for the \$5,000 grand prize sponsored by us and community partner, Venture Kamloops. Participants were also vying for the People's Choice Award, which included valuable mentorship hours sponsored by local business, Angie Olson Business Coach & Consulting.

The day was more than just a competition—it was a complete celebration of entrepreneurship. Our Business Support Services Tradeshaw ran alongside the event, connecting attendees with local organizations, resources, and entrepreneurial support across the region. This event welcomed everyone to discover, network, and get inspired.

The energy in the room was undeniable. Thirty-nine entrepreneurs registered, 28 pitched in the finals, and the top 5 took the stage to share their dreams with a full house. Every contestant brought passion, vision, and heart, making it an unforgettable day.

The success of The BIG Pitch was made possible through the generous support and collaboration of so many dedicated individuals and organizations. We extend our sincere thanks to our panel of judges—George Emery, Angie Olson, Anna Harrison, Stacey Owen, Lian (Evangelia) Dumouchel, Jeremy Heighton, Brian Jones, and George Casimir—who generously lent their time, expertise, and thoughtful feedback to help elevate the ideas and ambitions of our participants.

We're proud to recognize our 2025 BIG Pitch winners for their passion, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit. Dennis Mullis, founder of VERT Agtech, impressed the community with his vision for sustainable indoor vertical farming, earning him the People's Choice Award. Chef Amanda St. Pierre, the creative force behind The Sweet Spot, wowed the judges with her luxury cakes and custom sugar cookies, taking home the Grand Prize.

As we reflect on the success of our very first BIG Pitch, one thing is clear: Kamloops is brimming with talent, ideas, and ambition.

Thank you to everyone who helped bring The BIG Pitch to life—your support and community spirit made this event truly unforgettable: Venture Kamloops, Central Interior Business Accelerator, Angie Olson, Pepper, Castanet Kamloops, Standard Office Space, Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Interior First Nations, North Shore Business Improvement Association, Tire Tracks and Felines Incentives, Scwérwerh Economic Development Corporation, Avidaction Coach, Kathleen Fisher Photography, GK Sound, Kelson Hall, and our incredible emcee, Tara Holmes.



COMMUNITY EVENT

lemonade day kamloops

Our commitment to supporting small businesses and driving economic development is at the heart of everything we do. This year, we were proud to extend that mission—to our youngest future entrepreneurs—through the launch of Lemonade Day Kamloops, which will take place city-wide on Friday, August 22nd, 2025.

Lemonade Day is a nationally recognized, free educational program for youth that introduces the fundamentals of business ownership through one of the most iconic first ventures: the lemonade stand.

Participants work through a structured curriculum—available as a printed workbook or via the My Lemonade Day app—alongside a mentor. Together, they explore essential entrepreneurial skills, including goal setting, budgeting, marketing, branding, customer service, and profit-tracking. From securing an investor (often a family member!) to choosing a location and building their stand, kids get a real-world taste of what it takes to bring a business to life.

Bringing this program to Kamloops and the BC Interior for the first time is more than a milestone—it's a meaningful investment in our region's future. Lemonade Day aligns seamlessly with our long-term goals by building financial literacy, encouraging creative thinking, and cultivating a spirit of entrepreneurship from a young age.

The enthusiastic support from local sponsors, business owners, and parents for this initiative is heartening. We look forward to seeing these young entrepreneurs succeed.



➤ Inspiring the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs



➤ Small Business Connect: Celebrating Entrepreneurship

On October 22, 2024, we hosted our second annual Small Business Connect: Celebrating Entrepreneurship, an evening dedicated to recognizing the incredible small business owners, supporters, and partners who make Kamloops' entrepreneurial ecosystem so vibrant. Once again, our event proudly coincided with BDC Small Business Week, aligning with the national celebration of entrepreneurs and their contributions to our local and national economies.

The evening brought together community members, clients, and local champions to celebrate the resilience, creativity, and heart behind small business success. We were honoured to spotlight several of our self-employment and loans

clients and hear firsthand the stories that power their journeys.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to our featured panelists, who generously shared their experiences, challenges, and advice: Meagan Mason of Twisted Goat Coffee Roasters, Rory Paynter and Cole Sutherland of Desert City Games, Tatiana Sumina of Calibri Cleaning, and Chris Brown of The Garden Guru. Their openness and insights brought real depth and meaning to the evening.

Events like this remind us of the strength of our local business community—not just during Small Business Week but all year round. We're proud to support and celebrate the entrepreneurs building our region's future.



SMALL BREW,
BIG BUZZ

a creative collaboration gets provincial recognition

In May, our team returned from the 2025 BC Economic Development Association Summit in Penticton, BC, where we were honoured for this year's Marketing Innovation Award nomination at the BC Economic Development Awards.

Our nominated project—Small Biz Brew—began as a simple idea: to sponsor the coffee bar at Kamloops' newest co-working space, Standard Office Space. But rather than opting for a traditional logo placement, we saw an opportunity to create something more engaging and community-driven. Together with local coffee roaster Twisted Goat Coffee Roasters, we co-developed a custom blend designed to fuel the entrepreneurial spirit. The result was a hands-on, grassroots collaboration that brought together small businesses, local creativity, and community support—all in one great cup of coffee.

Small Biz Brew sparked meaningful conversations, introduced us and Twisted Goat to new audiences, and became a fun, functional touchpoint with clients, partners, and community members. We even partnered with local creative agency Meet Pepper to design custom packaging that reflected the bold, collaborative energy behind the brand.

The response exceeded all expectations. The project received national recognition from the Chairs of Community Futures BC and the Community Futures Network of Canada and inspired similar efforts, most notably a collaboration between Community Futures Southwest in Saskatchewan and Badlands Coffee Co.

The BCEDA Summit also reflected many of the values that drove this initiative forward: creativity, experimentation, and the power of authentic relationships. The conversations in Penticton reinforced what we know to be true—economic development is about people first. It's about building partnerships, trying new things, and finding ways to tell stories that connect and inspire.

We're incredibly proud of what Small Biz Brew represents. It's more than a marketing initiative—it's a symbol of what's possible when organizations and entrepreneurs come together with curiosity and shared purpose. While the recognition was a tremendous honour, the true reward has been seeing our mission brought to life in such a tangible, collaborative way.



SHELAGH PEMBERTON, BUSINESS ANALYST – LOANS

The Fall of 2025 marks the retirement of one of our longest-serving and most impactful team members, Shelagh Pemberton. Shelagh began her journey with CF Thompson Country in May 2004, and over the past 20 years, she has played a foundational role in the organization’s growth, stability, and continued success.

As our lead in lending operations, Shelagh has been instrumental in delivering the financial tools and support that have helped hundreds of local businesses launch, grow, and thrive. Her knowledge of lending, ability to navigate complex files, and unwavering commitment to doing what’s right for both the client and the organization made her a trusted resource for our team and many entrepreneurs across the region.

Beyond her technical expertise, Shelagh’s steady leadership proved invaluable during times of transition. She helped guide the organization through multiple changes in executive leadership, maintaining continuity and focus when it was needed most. Her calm presence, attention to detail, and institutional knowledge ensured the work never skipped a beat, and her influence has shaped many of the internal systems and processes we rely on today.

While Shelagh has never sought the spotlight, her contributions have left a lasting legacy at Community Futures Thompson Country. As she steps into retirement, we offer our sincere thanks for her years of service and dedication. Her work has helped build stronger businesses, a more resilient organization, and more vibrant communities.

We wish Shelagh all the best in her next chapter—she has certainly earned it!



KEN WHITE, BOARD MEMBER

This year, we also recognize the retirement of long-standing board member Ken White. Ken has been a dedicated volunteer with Community Futures Thompson Country since its inception in 1987. His background as a commercial banker has brought invaluable insight and expertise to the organization, helping to shape our lending practices and ensure our long-term sustainability.

Over the decades, Ken has served in various leadership roles, including Board Chair, and has remained a consistent and passionate advocate for the Community Futures mission. His guidance, commitment, and advocacy have left a lasting impact on the organization and the region.

We sincerely thank Ken for 37 years of service and leadership. His legacy will continue to influence our work for years to come.



- **Brandon Hall,**
Lending Specialist

Over the past year, our region has faced a dynamic and often challenging economic landscape. Businesses contend with shifting interest rates, new U.S. tariffs, federal government changes, and broader geopolitical uncertainties, testing even the most seasoned entrepreneurs.

Despite these headwinds, local business owners demonstrated remarkable adaptability and perseverance. We continued supporting our entrepreneurs with flexible financing and personalized advisory services. We approved 10 loans totaling \$761,200, which, combined with partnerships with traditional lenders, helped unlock over \$1.5 million in additional capital and contributed to creating or maintaining 53 jobs.

Beyond lending, we championed community engagement by supporting five community-based projects. Our business training programs attracted 664 participants, and our advisory team delivered 500 services designed to assist entrepreneurs at every stage—from startup guidance to growth strategies, including succession planning and smaller-scale mergers and acquisitions.

We are especially proud of our ongoing commitment to youth financing, accessible entrepreneurship, and initiatives that foster quality local jobs—key pillars that strengthen the fabric of our communities. These efforts have fostered stronger connections and enhanced local capacity.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, we are excited by new opportunities and partnerships that will unlock potential and keep Kamloops’ entrepreneurial spirit thriving.



COMMUNITY
FUTURES
navigating
challenges,
fueling
resilience

LENDING FISCAL 2024 / 25

loans

Loans Approved	10
Total Loan Dollars	\$761,200
Dollars Leveraged	\$1,515,000
Jobs Created & Maintained	33

CLIENT BREAKDOWN BY

specialized population groups

Women	2
Disability	3
Youth	1

