

Working for a better future

How training and inclusive employment help Yukoners open doors to opportunities, pride, and self-determination

By Meral Jamal

Joella Hogan remembers the light-bulb moment when she realized the difference she makes in people's lives.

It was a few years ago, and one of the first young women Hogan hired to help with her local business asked if Hogan would be a reference on her résumé. Hogan, of course, agreed. Out of curiosity, she also asked to see the résumé.

The document said the employee had worked in "manufacturing and production" for the Yukon Soaps Company. Hogan recalls laughing because these weren't words she attributed to her business at the time.

"A few years ago, [these words] just seemed so big," Hogan said. "But I thought, that's because [my employee] sees this work as really big."

SDG # 8 : Decent Work and Economic Growth

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #8 aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all." Specific targets relate to enabling employment for all – especially youth and persons with disabilities, equal pay for equal work, decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, protecting labour rights and safe and secure working environments, and enabling entrepreneurship.

For more information SDG #8, visit <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/economic-growth/>

Flash forward a couple years and that young woman is now an archaeologist in British Columbia. While Hogan doesn't take credit for her success, it was in this moment that Hogan realized she could play an important role in helping to set others up for success.

These days, Hogan firmly believes economic growth and decent work in the Yukon begins with empowering young people in their communities by giving them employment opportunities that help build necessary skills and gain important knowledge.

Closing the labour gap

Decent work and economic growth is the eighth of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) put forth by the United Nations in 2015.

Also known as the Global Goals, the 17 SDGs were adopted by all UN Member States as "a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030."

The UN believes that goal eight, decent work and economic growth, is important because, as the global economy recovers from the 2008 recession, the world is seeing slower growth, widening inequalities, and not enough jobs to keep up with a growing labour force. Decent work, as a result, involves creating opportunities for everyone to find work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, and better prospects for personal development and social integration.

In the Yukon, businesses such as Hogan's Yukon Soaps Company are contributing to advancing the SDGs and local social priorities by providing decent work and pursuing economic growth locally.

Unity in business values

Hogan is a member of the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun First Nation in Mayo and of the Crow Clan.

After returning to live in her traditional territory, she took over Yukon Soaps almost a decade ago as a passion project that would connect her love for Northern Tutchone heritage and culture with products that are environmentally responsible. Her products include hand-crafted soaps, shampoo bars, and essential oil blends, and feature ingredients such as locally harvested wild rose petals and juniper berries. The company uses a Yukon-shaped press, and also incorporates the beadwork of Indigenous artisans.



**Joella Hogan
believes in
empowering
young people
by giving them
employment
and skills
development
opportunities in
their own
communities.**

For Hogan, Yukon Soaps is also a conduit to create economic opportunities that align with Yukon First Nations' values.

"I always go back to page 22 in Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow, which is economic development in our agreement ... because in there, if you look, they really talk about bringing self-sufficiency back to our people. Regional wealth, [and] economic development that aligns with our values," she says.

Over the years, Hogan says she's helped economic development in Mayo by showing people they don't have to leave their community to lead a better life. They have options – whether it's through employment with businesses like Yukon Soaps Co. or by following Hogan's entrepreneurial example and starting their own business.



"I really feel the need to be able to provide skills and work so that people can be their best selves in this community and not necessarily have to seek employment elsewhere."

Joella Hogan, Yukon Soaps Co.

"So for example, I see a lot of young people who finished high school or might not finish high school, and they want to work. But they don't have the competence or basic skills, and so I'd like to be able to [help out with] that. Hopefully, the skills and confidence and cultural grounding that they get will be a starting point for them in either starting their own business and seeking independence and economic resiliency, or, just finding their own financial freedom."

Hogan has also established Yukon Soaps as a community-building, language-learning, Earth-connecting hub in Mayo. She's brought elders and local youth out on the land to gather wild botanicals, employed youth in the workshop, offered crafting workshops, and participated in farmer's markets across the territory. This is important because Hogan says she wants her organization to give back to the community by bringing her community into all her work.

"At the end of the day, I don't want it to be just my business," she says. "I know people go into shops and say, 'Oh, I'm looking for Joella's products.' But I really want it to be a Mayo soap business."

In 2019, Yukon Soaps Company won the Indigenous Business of the Year Award at the International Arctic Investment Conference.

Fighting fires and developing a workforce

Another organization creating employment opportunities and economic growth in the territory is the Yukon First Nations Wildfire (YFNW).

A wildfire fighting service that was awarded the 2020 Arctic Inspiration Prize for its Resilience Training and Healing program, YFNW is committed to incorporating Traditional Knowledge in its work and supporting the growth of Yukon's youth in consultation with community elders.

The organization currently works in collaboration with 10 of the 14 Yukon First Nations, and, according to its website, envisions itself "to be the best Wildland Firefighters in Canada while providing employment opportunities for Yukon and First Nation youth."

Chad Thomas, CEO of YFNW, says focusing on youth in the territory is part of the organization's mandate because young Yukoners are the territory's "future leaders."

"[Yukon youth] are going to be the next CEOs, they're going to be the next group of chiefs, they're going to be the next group of politicians here in the territory.

It's definitely going to be a time for the next generation to start walking tall, leading from the front and speaking from the heart."

Chad Thomas
CEO, Yukon First Nations Wildfire

For this reason, Thomas says YFNW "really leans on the youth with everything that we think we can put on their shoulders."

While YFNW focuses on wildfires because it is one of the biggest threats to safety in the territory due to its geography and the fact that wildfires often cause significant damage to local infrastructure, Thomas says it's also important to note the organization's work goes beyond fighting fires. Since its start in 2018, YFNW has helped mitigate floods, engaged in search and rescues, and provided training programs for other Yukoners interested in helping with safety in their communities.



Yukon First Nations Wildfire

Yukon First Nations Wildfire provides training and employment to Yukon youth, building skills, confidence, resilience, and pride.

Challenge Disability Resource Group (CDRG)

For 45 years, this Whitehorse-based not-for-profit has assisted people with disabilities to become active and independent by learning skills and entering the job market. CDRG also runs two social enterprises, creating employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Empowering workers through employment training

Jillian Hardie, Executive Director and CEO, is passionate about how CDRG prepares persons with disabilities to enter the workforce:

"Employ Abilities is a 12- to 16-week program focused on essential skills for employment, with both classroom and work experience components. Even through COVID, participants moved through the program and into full capacity employment of their choice. Two even began a carpentry apprenticeships after graduating from our program."

She also noted that CDRG's Employment Services is growing in April 2021 to offer employment goal setting, employment and skills assessment, job development, job coaching, and job coach training.

Enhancing employers' capacity to work with persons with disabilities

CDRG's Employer Specialist works directly with any employer to identify their knowledge gaps and develop specific training opportunities to fill those gaps, at no cost to the employer.

Offering residential programs and transition support

CDRG runs three residences: Granger Haven, a home for adults with developmental disabilities; the Mental Health Treatment Home, a transitional residence for persons with severe and persistent mental illness; and Max's Place, built on a harm reduction / housing first philosophy of care to assist residents who have fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), are connected to the justice system, and are active in their addictions. CDRG supports residents to learn skills for living independently, managing their medications, and for psycho/social activities.

Putting business to work for social purpose

Bridging the NGO and business worlds, CDRG also owns and operates two social enterprises: Career Industries and Bridges Catering. Career Industries has been manufacturing wood products for 25 years, supplying mining and construction industries in Yukon, BC, Alaska, and Russia with core boxes and survey lath. Bridges Catering, is a full-service kitchen that employs persons with disabilities to provide a variety of healthy, locally-sourced and -made meals and catering services .

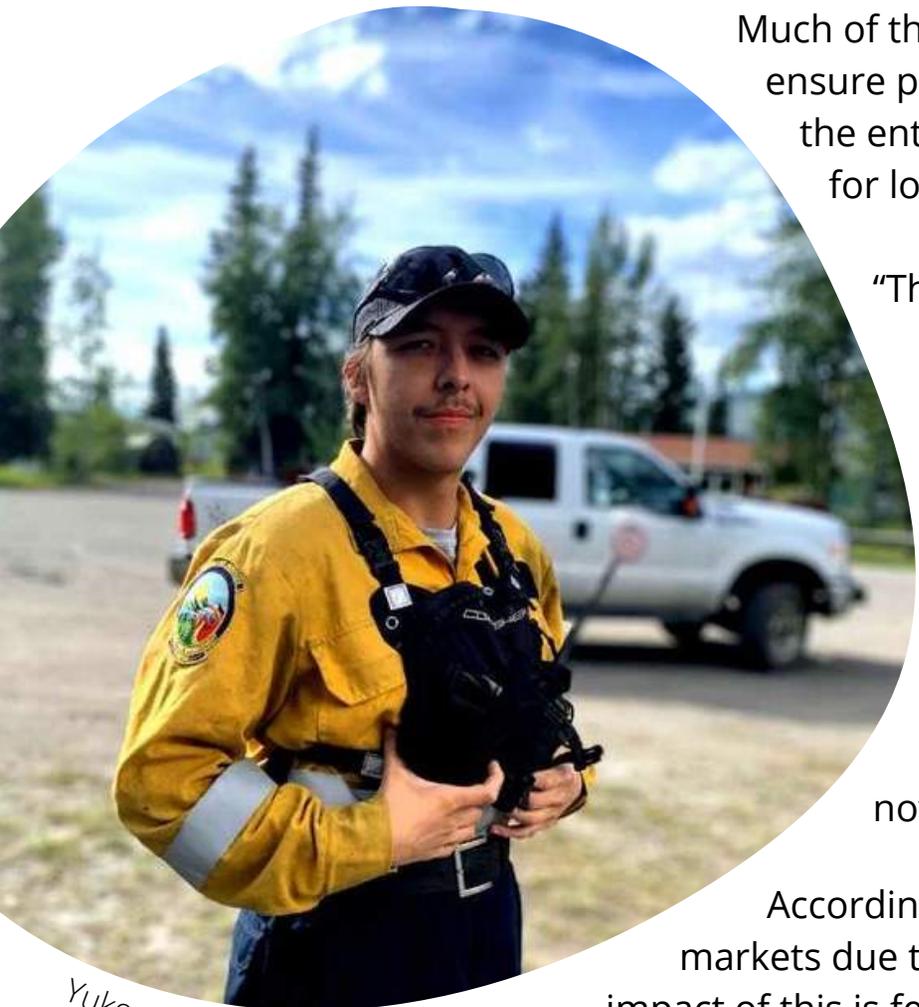
These for-profit businesses have a social mandate baked in to how they operate, from the employment opportunities and income they provide to how they use the profits to support financial sustainability of their services. Both businesses use what CDRG calls an "integrated workforce model." Their website explains:

"We use an integrated workforce model where adults with disabilities [or barriers to full capacity employment] work in an environment with more abled individuals. This follows our principle of social inclusion and allows our more abled workers to role model workplace etiquette and teach new skills. All workers are paid to industry standards."



According to Nicholas Mauro, a multi-hazard technician at YFNW, the training programs have been especially important during the pandemic because many Yukoners were being let go from work.

“We got an influx of really highly skilled, highly fit individuals who couldn't go anywhere to get a regular job and [came] to us, and it felt great to provide the opportunity to a bunch of new local youth who wouldn't have been able to get a job had it not been for us,” Mauro said.



Yukon First Nations Wildfire

Much of the training provided by YFNW last year moved online to ensure pandemic safety, but Mauro said the students were engaged the entire time, which shows the importance of training programs for local youth in the territory.

“They were paying attention, they were reading up, they were asking questions, and they were really trying hard to get the job because it was do or die for them,” he said.

In the end, YFNW trained over 20 new firefighters and deployed 15 of them onto their unit crews.

The problems of fewer opportunities for decent work and slower economic growth have been exacerbated in the past year due to the global pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus in 2020.

According to the UN, the unprecedented shock to the world's labour markets due to COVID-19 has pushed the world into a recession. The impact of this is felt to a great extent by small and medium enterprises, workers in informal employment, the self-employed, and daily wage earners.

The Yukon is not immune to this downturn. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on local businesses of all sizes in the territory, as well as the Yukoners whose livelihoods depend on them.

According to the 2020-21 interim fiscal and economic update by the Yukon government in October last year, the territory lost 4,000 jobs between March and June 2020. Most of these job losses were in the service industries, with food and accommodation employment cut in half and accounting for one-third of overall job losses.

Almost 9,000 Yukoners applied for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and received an estimated \$72 million, while 4,000 Yukoners saw their wages subsidized due to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS).

The report also states the unemployment rate in August was eight per cent—the highest it's been since June 2015. When the number of unemployed individuals who were not looking for work during the pandemic are accounted for, the unemployment rate balloons to 12.5 per cent.

Despite these challenges, businesses such as Hogan's Yukon Soaps Company and the Yukon First Nations Wildfire have found ways to create employment opportunities and contribute to the territory's economic growth—by inviting the community in, and putting young Yukoners at the heart of their work.

For Thomas, the silver lining is that COVID-19 has taught local businesses in the territory, including the YFNW, that the pandemic is something all Yukoners are in together.

"The pandemic has shown us that the virus doesn't decide who it hits. It's all the same out there, and so we're a company that employs First Nations youth but we're here for the support of everybody."

About the writer

Meral Jamal was born and raised in a joint family in the United Arab Emirates. She is a journalism and history student at Carleton University in Ottawa, and the newsletter editor with LiisBeth, a feminist publication in Toronto. She spent the summer of 2019 in the Yukon as part of Stories North, an initiative by Carleton professor Kanina Holmes to get journalism students involved in experiential reporting. Her time there showed her the value of reporting from and with BIPOC communities.



About the editor

Kanina Holmes is a Whitehorse-based journalist, editor, professor, and entrepreneur. She is the founder and creative lead of Stories North, a journalism education business responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by equipping journalism students with the skills to respectfully share stories from the North. Learn more at storiesnorth.com.

#YukonBusinessesForGood

About this storytelling series

#YukonBusinessesForGood stories highlight some of the many Yukon businesses who create benefits for their communities and environment. The stories show how business can play a positive role in addressing shared values that have long been held by many Yukoners and now form the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs): global priorities from 2015 to 2030 for 192 countries, including Canada.

This series also showcases young writers in Canada's North and provides them paid experience as they begin journalism careers, thanks to funding from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC).

About YukonU Innovation & Entrepreneurship (I&E)

We support Yukon-based innovators and entrepreneurs with funding, resources, expertise and incubation. For more information on how we can help you, visit YukonU.ca/innovation or email innovation@YukonU.ca

