

How DMZ Innisfil plans to take local businesses to the 'next level'

Since its inception in 2020, DMZ Innisfil has helped 65 companies, starting with 14 in that first year and growing to 27 in 2023

[Chris Simon](#) (Original article author)



Marion is rolling in granola.

So much so that she's decided to quit her day job to work full-time on her budding Innisfil-based company, Granolala, which celebrated its [one-year anniversary](#) back in November. Business has skyrocketed since its founding — it now sells product throughout Canada and the United States.

But its humble origins lie in town, in part due to help from DMZ Innisfil, a wing of the town that essentially acts as a business incubator and accelerator, offering leadership at new and existing companies training, mentorship and educational opportunities to meet the demands of the modern world.

"We got so much valuable advice ... that helped with the short- and long-term growth of our business," Marion said, sharing her story with a room chock-full of entrepreneurs and dignitaries during a DMZ showcase at the Lake Club restaurant at Friday Harbour last week. "Thinking back, we would not have been able to do this without the DMZ. I cannot stress enough how valuable the DMZ mentorship is."

The event aimed to network government officials with entrepreneurs from across Canada, as well as Egypt, Japan, Taiwan, Turkey, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

"We can show small towns and municipalities across the country what's possible," Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) DMZ executive director Abdullah Snobar said. "The power of the DMZ is bringing different people together."

Innisfil is proof great businesses can spring up anywhere with the right conditions, he said.

Since its inception in 2020, DMZ Innisfil has helped 65 companies, growing from 14 during that first year to 27 in 2023 — with another 11 welcomed in during the first cohort of 2024.

Of that overall number, 88 per cent are still in business — by comparison, nationally, about 20 per cent of companies fail within the first year. DMZ Innisfil has assisted its businesses with creating and retaining 214 full-time and 172 part-time jobs.

The DMZ helps harness the innovation happening within the community, Mayor Lynn Dollin said.

"We are a small and growing community; in those awkward teenage years," she said jokingly. "(Those businesses) are growing strong today. We're very proud. I'm so excited to take this program to the next level."

The companies helped through DMZ Innisfil have secured more than \$20 million in capital funding and \$4.7 million in grants.

DMZ staff support business founders in their fundraising efforts through mentorship, workshops and the facilitation of ecosystem introductions. That allows those founders to focus on innovation and develop the products and tools to help make lives easier, Dollin said.

"We hear all the time that entrepreneurship can be such a lonely journey," she said. "But being part of this community ... we see you and support you."

Dollin also announced a five-year extension to the formal partnership between the town and TMU, which initially brought the DMZ to fruition.

Granolala consists of a gently toasted blend of oats, nuts and seeds. The product is offered in three flavours: Original, Cranberry and Blueberry.

Visit [Granolala.ca](https://www.granolala.ca)