

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Central Okanagan

## United Way launches program to inspire tech careers for local youth

**January 30, 2019 (Kelowna, BC)** — The United Way along with several program partners are bringing together Okanagan tech companies for some friendly competition and an amazing cause.

Kicking off in March, the Super Mega Ultimate Techathlon is a fun-filled fundraising campaign involving eight simple but ‘ridiculous challenges’ from retro video gaming, to a stock photo contest, and rock paper scissors tournament. While there are prizes and bragging rights on the line, the ultimate goal is to raise funds for disadvantaged youth skill building in our community. All of the proceeds from the Techathlon go to <CODE>anagan, a non-profit program that helps local youth build their tech skills.

“There’s no denying that Okanagan Tech is buzzing,” says Helen Jackman, Executive Director at United Way CSO. “But too many young people in our community just don’t believe they could get involved. They lack the skills, resources and, above all, the confidence to even dream of a future in tech. <CODE>anagan blows a hole in that, kick-starting aspiration and equipping them with skills and expert connections.”

<CODE>anagan addresses a real need in our community. The 2017 Accelerate Okanagan report on the Economic Impact of the Okanagan Tech Sector found that the number one risk for Okanagan tech businesses is lack of talent and skills required to support growth. Yet, potentially talented young people right here in the Okanagan face multiple barriers to pursuing a future in tech – these include financial, mental health and/or learning challenges. One in five children and youth live in poverty in the Okanagan.<sup>i</sup> In BC, 84,000 youth experience mental health issues, and as many as 70% of mental health problems develop before the age of 18<sup>ii</sup>. One in seven have learning differences – such as dyslexia or attention deficits - which mean that traditional educational settings don’t always play to their strengths<sup>iii</sup>. As many as 11% of high school students have no plans to continue with education<sup>iv</sup>.

<CODE>anagan gives youth, aged 16-22 who face some of these challenges, hands-on learning opportunities and coaching to access the tech sector. Bootcamps and courses build skills in tech subjects from audio engineering and video game development to 3-D printing. Teaming up with a coach from a local tech business helps them navigate the sector. Many of these kids slip through the cracks in traditional education so <CODE>anagan is designed to ignite imagination and aspiration among a group who may not realize the opportunities available to them right here in the valley.

A testimonial from a local parent of one of the 2018 participants writes: “My daughter was part of the <Code>anagan program this past spring. She is a gifted teen who has struggled to feel like she fits in the public school system, so she has been part of a distributed learning school for this past year. The <Code>anagan program gave her a way this year to learn new technology skills while engaging socially with like-minded peers in a supportive learning environment. We are so impressed with the program and the ways that it has given her more confidence and self-esteem, as well as providing a way for her to build skills in technology and connections with others in the field.”

Spearheaded by United Way, <CODE>anagan program partners include Accelerate Okanagan, Okanagan Boys and Girls Clubs, and Okanagan College. In 2018, over 200 youth registered for 12 bootcamps. This pilot showed encouraging results and spring and fall bootcamps are now planned for 2019. The team has secured grants from RBC Foundation and Coast Capital Savings to support the program roll-out but urgently needs to raise funds to meet the shortfall. The Techathlon campaign is designed to do just that! Techathlon kicks off March 7<sup>th</sup> at the Innovation Centre and runs weekly until a ‘closing ceremonies’ April 25<sup>th</sup>.

“The Okanagan tech ecosystem is made of thousands of collaborative and supportive entrepreneurs, coaches, mentors, talent and supporters. You don’t have to look far to find amazing people willing to help grow and develop this community.” says Alex Goodhew of Accelerate Okanagan. “I truly value what the <CODE>anagan program stands for and the Techathlon event is such a fun, easy way to give back and support the next generation of Okanagan tech superstars.”

Sponsoring or participating in the Techathlon is a great way for a company to show support for this vital initiative. Interested companies can register multiple teams of up to 10 members to take part in the Techathlon and can also view the sponsorship package online.

For details about the Techathlon and to sign your team up, visit:

<https://www.techathlon.ca/>

For more information about CODEanagan, visit:

<http://codeanagan.com>

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<sup>i</sup> 2017 BC Child Poverty Report Card

<sup>ii</sup> The Federation of Community Social Services of BC – Life in BC Snapshot:2017

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.ldrfa.org/learning-disability-adhd-facts/>

<sup>iv</sup> McCreary Centre Society – From Hastings Street to Haida Gwaii – 2013)