

From a Swimming Champion to a Successful Entrepreneur

By Elmira Galiyeva, SOS Local Immigration Partnership



Hamza was a swimming champion and a coach in his hometown, Tiznit, a beautiful town in the south of Morocco. Tiznit is known for its silver handicraft, active and civically engaged community, magnificent historic sites and a number of public facilities, including an Olympic Swimming Pool where Hamza spent a lot of time practicing. Outside of his swimming career, Hamza was an auto mechanic. He was passionate about both but wanted to explore a new path - life in Canada. His destination was Osoyoos.

Soon after he arrived, he started working in the housekeeping department at one of the best resorts in Osoyoos. That's where he met his friend and business partner Magali.

Magali grew up in Uruguay, in a small resort town - Punta del Este. When her father passed away, all the children- two boys and two girls- began to help their mother run a complex family business- a bakery, a pasta factory and a rotisserie. "I always wanted to be independent – travel the world and work in the hospitality field. My mother brought me some information about the "work and travel" program, and I ended up in the US", shares Magali. Before making Osoyoos her home, she studied hospitality and worked at a prestigious hotel in Florida, then in Whistler and Vancouver.

Hamza was looking for opportunities to get back into his field and decided to seek help from the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS) that offer free services to all immigrants. "I am so grateful to Martina, the Employment Facilitator with SOICS, who helped me find a job in my field; it wasn't easy", says Hamza. He was very

happy at the new workplace, Penticton General Motors, but kept working on his business idea that was becoming more and more real day after day. His dream was to bring a piece of his home to Canada – argan oil.

“Argan trees only grow in the south of Morocco - my home, and I thought it would be great to share the purest argan oil with my new community”, Hamza shares. He did a marketing research and together with his friend opened a manufacturing site in Morocco that started to produce pure organic argan oil. SOICS helped him access small start-up funding to kick-start his business, and Magali was his first client.

Hamza’s dream came true. He is now the owner and CEO of the Alia Collection Inc. “Alia” means “precious”. He named the company after his mom. Hamza’s online business is doing great. He is exploring international markets, and is looking into opening a store in the South Okanagan. Magali is by his side – supporting him and encouraging him to follow his heart.