



Small Business Field Officer helps Flying Muffin take off



Wendy Scott says her Field Officer, Terry Le Behen, has provided invaluable advice from day one.

Former Ansett flight attendant Wendy Scott has always been a keen baker.

“I used to take my muffins into the staff lounges at Melbourne Airport. My brand name was *The Flying Muffin*. They were very popular and would always sell out.”

It was this entrepreneurial spirit that saw Wendy start up a home-based business selling sweet and savory muffins to retail outlets.

“My husband and I own a dairy farm and the drought has really affected us. I decided to turn my passion for baking into an income, and started selling muffins to retail outlets and at farmers’ markets.”

Wendy said when she decided to turn her hobby into a business in 2006, she was baking 5-10 dozen muffins a week, which

one year later had increased to 35 dozen a week.

But she said this production rate was about to skyrocket. With the help of her *Small Business Field Officer*, Terry Le Behen, Wendy has decided to fast track her business plans and relocate her wholesale business to a shopfront in Numurkah, Victoria.

A helping hand

“For me, relocating to a shopfront and investing in commercial equipment is a big step, but Terry has really held my hand through the different stages and is a trusted voice.

“If Terry wasn’t around I probably would eventually open a shop ... but not for another 5 years.

“Terry is a trusted voice”

“In fact I even took him along to have a look at the shopfront I want to lease to make sure I had a sound and objective business opinion ... I am so passionate about what I do that it’s great to have a reasoned voice around!”

Wendy said the *Small Business Field Officer* program had provided invaluable advice and support from day one.

“When I started out, Terry helped me develop a comprehensive business plan that included costings, a marketing blueprint and focused my thinking about whether or not I wanted to be involved with wholesale or retail.”

Wendy Scott describes the *Small Business Field Officer* program as “the best kept secret”.

“I’ve referred three of my friends to Terry and the program already because it’s invaluable to have someone who just has a wealth of business information at their fingertips, and it’s all free!

“Plus he’s local. That’s really important because it means he knows the area, what will do well and how much money people will pay for things.

“When you’re setting up in business you want clever people around you giving you good advice, and that’s exactly what I got from Terry and the *Small Business Field Officer* program.”

The *Small Business Field Officer* program is an Australian Government initiative, under the Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business program.

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Success can be sweet ... or savory.

Small Business Field Officers

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Fran Bailey

Minister for Small Business
and Tourism



Small Business Field Officer helps online soap business



Lynette Johannesen's home based business now known worldwide.

For Lynette Johannesen, closing down her shopfront and running her business from home, was one of the best business decisions she could have made.

“After the local meat works closed, our retail business really struggled,” said Lynette. “So, we decided to close down and operate from home.”

Lynette also scaled back her product range and decided to specialise in pure, handmade soaps. “I started selling my soaps on eBay to test them and got really good feedback, so I thought OK, there’s a market for what I’m doing.

“I decided to move away from all the general products I’d been doing and use the internet to sell just the handmade soaps.”

With its own website that receives orders from around the world, the *Speciality Soap Shoppe* in Rockhampton, Queensland, is now a *bona fide* success. Lynette says she couldn’t have done it without the support and encouragement of her *Small Business Field Officer*, Stacy Szczerbinski.

New direction a winner

“Stacy has been absolutely critical to our business success,” said Lynette. “She has just given us so much help and is still helping us every week ... at least twice in fact!

“And every couple of months we meet her and other small business owners as part of her Home Based Business Club.

“Stacy’s help critical to our business”

“Stacy helped us do our business plan and really encouraged us to look at creating a niche product. She also helped us get our website up and running.

“She sat with us and helped us develop the navigation, gave us a crash course in good design, gave us feedback on the content, and encouraged us to put testimonials on to give us credibility. Really fantastic, practical advice.”

Lynette said Stacy also helps her company develop business ideas.

With Stacy’s help we’re promoting our soaps to schools as a fundraising alternative to chocolates.

“We’re already taking interstate orders. Again, Stacy was invaluable in this. She researched how we should approach the P&C committees and who we should talk to.

“Stacy’s really held our hand and I’m so grateful for that. In fact I’m about to call her now about freight to New Zealand!”

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Lynette and her Field Officer
Stacy Szczerbinski.

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Small Business Field Officer helps company to expand



Smart cookies: Nolen and Daisy Oayda (left and centre) and Field Officer Sarah Hannebery.

When *Snowy Mountains Cookies* swung into full production in June 2006, owners Nolen and Daisy Oayda had a well-designed business plan for the coming year.

Working with their *Small Business Field Officer*, Sarah Hannebery, they planned to develop their local distribution base, research freight options and improve procedures.

But just six months later, they won a \$76,849 grant from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's *Food Processing in Regional Australia* program, which added new timeline pressures.

The grant, which *Snowy Mountains Cookies* matched dollar for dollar, allowed

the Jindabyne business to buy specialist machinery and increase production of its premium gourmet-style cookies, as well as develop a national distribution network.

Fast track to success

Initially distributing locally, *Snowy Mountains Cookies* now serves a loyal customer base across three states, supplies national-branded outlets, regional airlines and has been profiled in the national media. And all within the first ten months of business!

Nolen says the speed at which everything has happened has been both exhilarating and exhausting.

“Sarah has been a strong mentor for us”

“Winning the grant meant lots of stress as we’ve had to invest far more than we planned in this early stage, but it has allowed us to move into stage two of our business plan almost two years ahead of schedule.

“We’ve been able to reach a critical volume as far as our processing goes, which in turn has allowed us to target bigger clients,” he said.

Both Nolen and Daisy said the support they received from the *Small Business Field Officer* program was invaluable.

“Sarah has helped us from day one and has been a strong mentor for us,” said Nolen.

“We met her at some local seminars and her professional ability and personal business experience were a perfect match for us.

“Sarah understood the local area and the problems we faced finding retail outlets in our isolated position. She gave us some great leads when it came to finding retailers.

“Sarah also offered suggestions about distributors and freight companies and she continues to be a great sounding board for ideas.”

Nolen said Sarah had provided very useful feedback on the company’s application for the *Food Processing in Regional Australia* grant.

“Sarah gave helpful advice that helped get the wording right. It’s a difficult grant to win so we needed to make sure our pitch was perfect. Thanks to Sarah’s help and the *Small Business Field Officer* program, it was.”

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Snowy Mountains Cookies two years ahead of schedule.

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Small Business Field Officer program a “one-stop shop”



Thanks to her Field Officer, Kevin White, Antonia has expanded her professional networking circle.

Following a career as an IT technician, Antonia Moore knew she had the knowledge and skills to design electronic surveillance systems and solutions.

She also knew it was a niche sector crying out for good operators. But while she had a clear idea about her business, she was less sure about how to access government programs and services that might be available.

Armed with her business plan, she went to see Kevin White, her local *Small Business Field Officer* in Cairns.

“I was pretty clear about how to develop my business,” said Antonia, “but what I didn’t have was any knowledge about how to access services.

“Small business people are time poor, and it’s a big help to have a one-stop shop service to say ‘OK ... this is where you go’.

“That was the real benefit to me of the *Small Business Field Officer* program. It was a one-stop shop for me in terms of research and information.

“I’m now always referring people to Kevin. It’s a good opportunity to spread the word and help people get access to this information.”

Ongoing benefits

Antonia said the workshops and seminars Kevin told her about proved to be very useful.

“Kevin is an alliance partner”

“I went to a few workshops in the early days. One was about strategies to motivate and communicate and another was an investment facilitation workshop. They gave me some good ideas and gave me an opportunity to further develop my skills.

“More recently, Robert Gerrish’s workshop for solo entrepreneurs was a great motivator and led me onto the AICD Breakfast Forums.”

Perhaps the greatest ongoing benefit of the *Small Business Field Officer* program for Antonia, however, is the networking opportunities it offers.

“Kevin is constantly sending out emails about things that are going on in Cairns and he’s good at putting businesses in touch with others when there’s an obvious synergy.

“Through the *Small Business Field Officer* program I’ve been able to expand my professional networking circle and list of business contacts. As a sole trader this is critical for me. I really see Kevin as an alliance partner. Through his contacts I can find other businesses to partner with.”

Since starting her business in 2004, *AMM Security Solutions* has gone from strength to strength. And more recently, the firm’s turnover has increased four fold after Antonia finished her university studies and started working full-time.

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Antonia’s business has gone from strength to strength.

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Small Business Field Officer helps children's store



Kate McDonald (left) said it was a “godsend” to meet her Field Officer, Caroline Andrivon.

When Kate McDonald opened *Lottie & Louis*, a boutique children's clothing and gift store in Port Fairy, Victoria, she was well and truly ready to take the plunge into her first business venture.

“Along with having a degree in public relations/communications, I had 16 years experience working for some of Australia's largest fashion retailers in the capacity of store management and visual merchandising.

“*Lottie & Louis* became the culmination of a long held ambition of living my dream.”

The only gap in Kate's knowledge was where to find some of the answers to her business questions.

“The greatest obstacle for me when I started up was that I had so many questions ... specific business questions ... but didn't know where to look for the answers,” said Kate.

Information channel

“I searched the White Pages and the web but was unable to locate a channel to access the information I needed. I also wanted information that was relevant to my local area.”

Kate said it was a “godsend” when she met her local *Small Business Field Officer* Caroline Andrivon.

“Caroline is a great sounding board”

“Caroline has been great. She has pointed out lots of things to me that I either wasn’t aware of or didn’t treat as a priority when I should have.

“For example she pointed out that really I needed two signatures on my cheques and said I should organise Power of Attorney.

“My focus was on establishing a successful business and these more administrative issues were secondary to me, but really they should have been the most important.”

Caroline also pointed Kate to the Australian Government’s business portal, www.business.gov.au, to get information on risk management strategies for her business type, and in the right direction for information on traineeships, employing part-time staff and franchising.

“It’s great to get hands-on advice from someone who knows my business and is local,” said Kate.

“I feel I can call Caroline anytime with a question and she’ll point me in the right direction. She’s a great sounding board.”

Kate’s business model is already winning her accolades. In April 2007 *Lottie & Louis* was named Best New Business in the 2007 Powercor Great South Coast Regional Business Awards.

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Kate says she received invaluable hands-on advice.

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Small Business Field Officer helps business grow



Suzy Allport (left) and Lynette Thompson of *LBH Promotions* say the business wouldn't be where it is today without the help of their Field Officer.

Lynette Thompson says if it wasn't for the support provided by her *Small Business Field Officer* Christine Drakeford, her business wouldn't be where it is today.

"I first met Christine in 2003 at a Small Business Answers breakfast. I have found her to be the most professional and helpful person I have ever come across in business.

"Over the years Christine has kept in contact with me throughout my business endeavours. The wealth of information she has given me is one of the reasons I have a successful business today."

Lynette says that when she met Christine, *LBH Promotions* was a small home based business. Four years later, it is one of the

biggest letterbox distribution companies in Australia.

LBH Promotions is about to launch a tri-monthly booklet called *Business to Business* that will be distributed to 15,000 businesses along NSW's Central Coast, and has diversified into printing.

Professional and knowledgeable

"The support and advice I have received from Christine has been critical to my business success," said Lynette.

"I talk to business people on the Coast everyday, and when you mention Christine, they all know her and say how professional and knowledgeable she is.

“Christine has been critical to my business success”

“She’s one of the most highly respected people involved in small business on the Central Coast.”

Lynette says Christine’s support has ranged from pointing her in the right direction for information, to providing strategic marketing input for her new booklet.

“When I first met Christine she gave me a magnetic list of important telephone numbers for government agencies. It was a small thing but invaluable at the time.

“But probably the biggest thing she has taught me is the importance of communicating and networking. These are the fundamentals I have built my entire business on, so you can see she’s been pretty influential!”

Lynette said the great thing about the advice offered by the *Small Business Field Officer* program was it was comprehensive, ongoing and free.

“Just this week Christine came to my office to help me with the *Business to Business* booklet.

“I was simply amazed with the ideas and support that she was able to offer. After Christine left my office, I felt inspired by the way she was so positive and supportive.

“Christine is like my mentor. She believes in what she does and is very knowledgeable. She is the perfect person to advise small businesses on how to go about things.”

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Field Officer Christine Drakeford (standing) and Lynette Thompson discuss strategies.

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Small Business Field Officer helps business rebuild after cyclone



Small Business Field Officer Sue Fairley helped Michele Heidenreich (left) access government assistance after Cyclone Larry.

Michele Heidenreich remembers walking outside early on the morning of the 20th March 2006, into the oncoming storm, and wondering what the day would bring.

Just an hour later, Cyclone Larry would rip Michele's successful flower farm apart. She would lose 95% of her greenhouse roofs and be without power for 12 days. In total, she would sustain more than \$500,000 worth of damage.

In the days that followed, Michele and husband Terry received help from friends and family in their home town of Malanda, north west of Innisfail. But if she was going to rebuild, Michele was desperately aware she needed to access the government emergency help programs that were immediately being offered.

As soon as power and telecommunications were restored, Michele says her *Small Business Field Officer*, Sue Fairley, rang to see how bad the damage was.

"Sue had been working with me on an ongoing basis for a few years, either providing me with assistance or contacts," said Michele.

Advice worth its weight in gold

"But I have to say the advice and support she provided following the cyclone was worth its weight in gold.

"She told me what funding I was entitled to and helped me successfully complete the applications. Without her, I don't know where we'd be today."

“I don't know where I'd be without Sue's help”

Michele had just successfully applied for the Australian Government's \$10,000 *Small Business Assistance Grant*, which she said was “like a glass of water for a man dying of thirst in the desert.”

With Sue's advice, Michele successfully applied for further funding. She was awarded another *Small Business Development Grant*, this time for \$15,000, and wage subsidies from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) for her six staff.

Sue also referred Michele to initiatives sponsored by the Queensland Government, including its *Farm Financial Counsellor* service and the *Queensland Rural Adjustment Assistance* (QRAA) fund.

From those, Michele received a \$50,000 QRAA grant and \$200,000 low interest loan that requires no repayments for the first two years.

“I'm so grateful to Sue and the government for the help we received following the cyclone,” said Michele.

“For example if we hadn't received our wage subsidy from the Australian Government, which was \$200 a week for each worker employed before the cyclone, all our staff would have been unemployed and we'd have had no-one to help us rebuild.

“But the subsidy payment pretty much covered super and tax and really made the difference.

“Thanks to Sue and the *Small Business Field Officer* program, I'm back in business,” said Michele.

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Blooming marvellous! After a tough year Michele is back in business.

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Small Business Field Officer helps local gallery



Suzanne and Geoff Faulkes are fulfilling a dream thanks to their Field Officer Vicki Brown (left).

Suzanne and Geoff Faulkes had already achieved success in their careers as a nurse and fireman, when they decided what they really wanted to do was own and run their own small business.

“Geoff had taken early retirement and I knew I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life doing night shift, so we decided to buy a framing business and gallery. Owning our own small business was a dream for both of us,” said Suzanne.

While both were enthusiastic about the new venture, Suzanne said they were short on know-how when it came to setting things up. That changed after a friend suggested they contact Vicki Brown, their local *Small Business Field Officer* in Albany.

“We rang Vicki and she was so positive, enthusiastic and encouraging. She gave us exactly the right advice and sent us this amazingly comprehensive information kit the same day.

“We got all this information on GST for small business, other tax information booklets, a start-up checklist for small business ... a mix of information which was just what we needed. It was all very accessible and readable and really helped us. We got all the information we required.”

Nothing too much trouble

Suzanne said she has already recommended Vicki and the *Small Business Field Officer* program to others.

“Vicki gave us exactly the right advice”

She thinks everyone thinking about starting a small business would benefit from getting in touch with their local officer.

“Vicki just really understood where we were coming from in a business sense and worked out what we needed. Nothing was too much trouble and she said ‘whatever you need, just ask’. She was fantastic.”

Suzanne was so pleased with the help she received from Vicki, she “accosted” her in the street to say thank you.

“Vicki didn’t know who I was as we had only spoken over the phone very early on. But I stopped her and said thanks so much for your advice, you were fantastic. I think she was a little shocked.

“But it was thanks to her and the information she sent us that we really understand what we are doing as small business owners.”

The *Small Business Field Officer* program is an Australian Government initiative, under the Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business program.

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Collie Street Gallery is a picture of success.

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Small Business Field Officer advice critical to success



Heather and Bruce Dutschke attribute their business success to their Field Officer, David West (right).

Having just successfully survived their first full financial year, Heather Dutschke says she is happy to report their mobile diesel repair and maintenance business performed above target.

She attributed this success to the good business advice she and her husband Bruce received from their local *Small Business Field Officer*, David West.

Identifying hidden issues

As first time small business owners, Heather says she and Bruce had little idea about how to set up, let alone operate, a business.

“We had no previous experience in business. All we really knew was that a high percentage of small businesses fail. We knew we needed advice and contacted

David when we saw an advertisement about his services in the local paper.

“Initially David helped us clarify what we wanted out of setting up a small business, such as financial independence, a flexible lifestyle and personal satisfaction.

“Then we talked about marketing strategies and how to identify our client base.

“David did a generic business plan for us that has been very helpful. He just flagged so many things with us that we hadn’t even thought of.”

Heather said key issues David explained included creating the right business image, building their client base, generating start-up capital, the extent of overheads they would incur and how to keep their price structure competitive.

“David helped us clarify what we wanted”

“Two other really important things David got us to think about were the type of work Bruce wanted to take on, and treating his work time as units.

“We now know how many ‘units’ we need to complete each week to generate the income we want.”

Heather said the fact David was local and had small business experience himself, was important to them. “We feel we’re benefiting not only from David’s knowledge, but from his business experience and the lessons he has learned,” said Heather.

“And because he is local he was able to come and visit us at home which was really important at the start, as Bruce was still a wage earner when we first started planning the business.

“Thanks to David meeting us at home, we were able to have our business plan pretty much in place when Bruce finished up and we avoided any shortfall in income, which we’d been really worried about.”

Heather said David is still providing good advice and lets them know about any seminars coming up locally.

“Bruce and I really can’t believe that we got such valuable advice about setting up our business without paying a cent! We can’t understand why everyone doesn’t do it,” said Heather.

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David West talked to Heather and Bruce about marketing strategies.

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Fran Bailey

Minister for Small Business
and Tourism



Small Business Field Officer helps framing business



Andrew Gilbo (left) says Rob Forgan gave him the confidence to start his business.

For many small businesses, the decision to go from being home based to opening a shopfront can be overwhelming. ‘Can I afford the rent’ and ‘how will people find me’ are just two common concerns.

In the South Australian city of Mount Gambier, an innovative program launched by *Small Business Field Officer* Rob Forgan, gave framer and leadlighter Andrew Gilbo, a safe way to find out.

“I was running my business from home in Millicent, 50kms from Mount Gambier, and going to local markets and field days to sell my products,” said Andrew.

“But I was unsure of how to take the next step and open my own shop. I just didn’t

know if it would be viable or if there was real interest in what I was doing.

Home Based Business Network

“I joined the Home Based Business Network in my area and Rob Forgan, the *Small Business Field Officer*, said he had organised shop space in a local council building that was going to be demolished, and asked if I was interested in helping to promote the network at these premises.

“I offered my services but asked if I could bring my work with me, as I couldn’t afford not to be working. I suggested a ‘working display’ as a draw card.

“Being involved in the network project gave me the confidence to have a go.

“Rob is constantly sending me information”

“The shopfront showed me people were interested in what I was doing and that there was a market there. It was a good litmus test and it prompted me to set up my own shop in Millicent.”

Andrew said the other important thing he learned during the trial shop phase was the importance of networking, and how to do it. As a result, Andrew now actively promotes his local Home Based Business Network.

“During the shopfront program, I and the others involved all worked to promote our own businesses and each others.”

Andrew said that since opening, his business had gone from strength to strength. At the end of the first 12 months, he said he was operating 18 months ahead of where he expected to be.

“I’d like to grow the business enough,” said Andrew, “so that my wife can work here when she retires. We’d both like to draw a wage from it.”

Andrew said he was very grateful for the opportunities provided by his local *Small Business Field Officer*, Rob Forgan.

“I am constantly getting newsletters from Rob and information on all sorts of topics relating to running a small business. These have been extremely helpful in setting up my business.”

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Andrew says the Field Officer program taught him how to network.

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Small Business Field Officer provides vital contacts



Designer Sarah McKeney knew she needed professional advice to take her business forward.

Sarah McKeney had been successfully operating her online business, *Barefoot Maternity*, for two years when she realised if she was going to develop it any further, she needed some professional help.

“My website was ranking highly on the search engines,” said Sarah. “I was in the top six sites on Google when someone searched on ‘maternity clothing’, and I really had as much work as I could comfortably handle on my own.

“But I got to a point where I thought what do I want to do with the business, and what resources are available to someone like me?”

“I also wanted to develop a professional network with other online small businesses so I could ask all those questions that my husband is just not interested in.”

Sarah got in touch with her local *Small Business Field Officer*, Jo Whipp.

Support for young entrepreneurs

“Jo was great. She visited me at home and we discussed what I wanted to do with the business.

“I explained that I wanted to grow my business but not so much that it would become unmanageable.

“Jo suggested some programs and workshops. She also said I should get in touch with the Hunter Business Centre about its Hunter Entrepreneur’s Program, which I did and it has just been fantastic.”

“Jo provided great advice”

After making a presentation to a panel of experts, Sarah was accepted into the program and assigned a mentor, David Gray. She received an intensive 12 hours of one-on-one tuition, and said it was “one of the most useful things I’ve ever done for my business”.

Sarah said the program was particularly good because David had a “wealth of experience” in marketing, an area where she lacked knowledge.

As a result of the program, Sarah is now focusing on creating an identity for her line of maternity wear, and trying to better identify her target market.

“I’m reviewing the entire range to see what sells well and what needs to be consolidated. David taught me that I have to work out what my ‘point of difference’ is ... why people buy from me rather than my competitors.

“For example I’ve realised that the ‘plus’ sizes for pregnant women, size 22 and above, are undercapitalised, so that’s an area I’m going to explore.”

And thanks to Jo, Sarah is now carrying the ‘Australian Made and Owned’ logo on her products.

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Sarah and her Field Officer
Jo Whipp.

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Small Business Field Officer helps struggling newcomer



Natalie and Rudy Lombaert say their Field Officer threw them a “lifeline”.

Natalie Lombaert says that when she agreed to help out in her husband’s kitchen cabinet making business, she didn’t realise what a shock she would be in for.

“I was a former nurse and had no idea about making cabinets or running a business. And while Rudy is very good at what he does, he’s a tradesman not a businessman, and he really wasn’t interested in that side of things.

“So when I got involved, there were serious issues that had to be sorted out, and I had no idea where to start. It was really quite terrifying.”

Thrown a lifeline

Natalie says she was thrown a “lifeline” by her local *Small Business Field Officer*, Heidi Neumeister.

“The help Heidi has given me has been invaluable. I think I’ve used everything she has on offer.

“At our first meeting she gave me a booklet called *New to business? Checklist for starting a business*. [www.business.gov.au]

“It was a fantastic starting point. It gave me exactly the information I’d been after on licensing and employing staff.

“And since then I’ve been to seminars, started networking with other small business owners through the Home Based Business Network, and am now taking part in my local ‘Training and Mentoring’ program that is funded by AusIndustry.”

Natalie said attending this program had pulled her “out of the dark ages”.

“Heidi’s advice has been invaluable”

In particular, she said the marketing component of this program made her realise she and Rudy couldn’t just assume what people wanted in their kitchen cabinets.

So, on Heidi’s advice, Natalie set about contacting old clients to find out what they thought of the service *Border Country Cabinets* had provided.

“By talking to past clients,” said Natalie, “we realised that, before people made their decisions, they wanted to see lots of photos of kitchens we had built.

“So instead of building a new showroom, we are now looking at developing a website that will showcase our product.”

Natalie said that thanks to the information, contacts and general support she had received from her local *Small Business Field Officer*, she felt that after two years “struggling in the dark”, their business was now right on track.

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Natalie with field officers Heidi Neumeister (middle) and Natalie Hallows.

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