



## Success stories

### Big Bears Donuts

The secret recipe to business success.



### The first 'donut day'

"I made my first donut 3 days before opening" claims Ewan Fotheringham, the concrete plant operator, turned commercial fisherman that transformed into the man behind one of Lakes Entrance most well-known businesses, Big Bears Donuts.

### It began...

It was November 2019, a month before the Black Summer bushfires would decimate East Gippsland and four months before the state of Victoria would be plunged into its first lockdown, Ewan Fotheringham launched Big Bears Donuts. "On our opening day, we had \$50 in the bank, there wasn't enough money to print business cards. We were

either going to go broke and lose our home or makes something of it" recalls Ewan.

Ewan was operating from a food-van that he'd built himself.

Amongst the turmoil of the fires and lockdowns Ewan had seen enough signs that his product was good, there was a business to be made from donuts. As he navigated through the early stages of Covid lockdowns he looked for opportunities to improve his business. This included home deliveries to build a loyal client base, rebuilding the van for greater efficiencies and reaching out to Michael Duncan of the Strengthening Business Program for support.

### Support Arrived

All the talk in mid-2020 was about 'Roadmaps' and 'Donut Days' – by entering the Strengthening Business Program Michael and Ewan combined the two and the results have surpassed all expectations.

Michael recalls "in the early days, we were looking for efficiencies and opportunities for a low-cost scale up whilst trying to get a better work/life balance for Ewan as he continued to grow the business. Ewan became more efficient across all areas of his business"

### Then we began again

Not for the first time, Ewan had an idea for Big Bears Donuts and again, took every cent he had and "doubled down" by opening a retail store on the Esplanade in Lakes Entrance. At a time that hospitality was on its knees, Ewan opened a 'take-away only' store allowing him to increase his production capacity and meet demand, whilst keeping the food-van, which came in handy throughout lockdowns when nobody could travel.

The calculated risk paid off for Ewan who's grown a business that's become the envy of many, with lines regularly stretching over 50m along the street and

doors regularly closing early when they sell-out.

The rise of Ewan's business has seen Big Bears Donuts awarded the 'Agility' Award in the 2021 Gippsland Business Awards for their ability to adapt and grow throughout the pandemic.

## Where to next?

It may come as no surprise, in just eighteen months, a business that started as a food-van, that moved into a retail space is looking to expand.

Ewan believes, "We're now employing 14 people and at the point that we're looking for more space, there is demand for us to increase production and potentially add further retail outlets across Gippsland"

His strengthening business facilitator is just as excited for the future "Ewan has been incredible to work with, very hands on, doesn't spend a lot of time worrying about what could go wrong, he listens to the advice and by the time you check in to see if he's made a decision he's three steps ahead of you, it's amazing to think that this is just the beginning of his story".

Michael believes that although Ewan doesn't often stop to smell the roses and celebrate his incredible success, his appreciation for the Strengthening Business program is represented by the referrals he's made to others to join and receive the same supports.

When asked what he's learnt and what advice he can offer after two years in business Ewan says, "think outside the box, back yourself; don't surround yourself with what you can't do but focus on what you can".

