



Jacqui Gaule [Local Enterprise Office Waterford] and Irene Queally [Pip & Pear].

Photography credit: Simon Burch

Pre-Start

Making It Happen: LEO helps chilled baby food business grow up strong

Local Enterprise Office Waterford nurtures success for baby food manufacturer

The Pip & Pear brand of healthy chilled baby food makes life easier for busy parents. Working with her Local Enterprise Office made setting up the business easier for founder, Irene Queally.

The Waterford woman started out in fashion, with a store in Waterford city. When the recession hit “business fell off a cliff,” she recalls.

She closed its doors and retrained as a psychotherapist. It was preparing to return to her practice after the birth of her second baby that provided the ‘eureka’ moment for Pip & Pear.

“I had been batch cooking for my two children for the week ahead and, though I’ve always loved cooking, I just thought, there must be an easier way. I couldn’t

understand why I couldn’t find good food, gently cooked with no additives - a proper dinner like you’d make yourself.”

The idea played on her mind while her husband’s restaurant gave her the perfect place to develop it. “It’s a day time family restaurant called No.9 and after it closed at 5pm I’d go in to work on recipes, all organic, using the best of the best, which I started putting on the restaurant menu during the day.”

They went down a treat and not just with babies. “The fact that they were a proper dinner you’d make yourself at home really resonated with Mums. When people started asking if they could buy some to take home I knew I was on to something.”

It was at that point that she called to Local Enterprise Office Waterford. “I found it online while trying to see if there were any supports out there to help me.”

She recalls her first meeting. “They asked me to do a business plan so that they could assess my idea properly. Up until that point all my costings were done on the back of an envelope. Maybe because I’d had my own business before I hadn’t felt the need to do one, but it really puts form on your idea.”

On foot of it, she received a Business Priming Grant in 2015 which funded her salary and enabled her take on her first employee.

A second priming grant provided additional funding for staff in 2016, enabling her to go out and pitch the brand to supermarket buyers. Getting on shelves was a huge challenge as chilled baby foods represented an entirely new food category.

Once she found the right spot – beside the fromage frais – strong sales performance, supported by effective social media marketing, helped her hold on to it. Today Pip & Pear can be found in major supermarkets nationwide.

As the business grew she began exploring its export potential. In early 2018, she secured an export assistance grant which enabled her to attend a private label manufacturers’ trade event in Amsterdam.

She also received funding under the LEO Innovation and Investment Fund, which she is using to develop a range of healthy baby snacks.

“The snack market is one of the fastest growing worldwide and we want to do healthy snacks that stay true to our core values,” she says.

Support from her Local Enterprise Office extends beyond funding however. “My way of thinking something out is to talk it out, so just talking to the LEO staff helped me. I’ve also availed of really great, low cost training courses for staff on everything from marketing

to food labelling. Local Enterprise Office Waterford put us forward for a National Enterprise Award too, and winning our regional final was a huge prize for us.”

Local Enterprise Offices provide expert mentoring too while, for Queally, tapping in to its networking side was particularly helpful. “What’s great is that it’s a local resource, I don’t have to drive to Dublin to get it,” she says.

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Irene Queally,
Pip & Pear

Such assistance is available to small businesses at any stage in their development says Jacqui Gaule, Senior Enterprise Development Officer at Local Enterprise Office Waterford.

“If someone has an idea they can come in and talk to us and we can help put structure on it and offer guidance,” she says.

A Feasibility Study Grant can help with market research or developing a prototype before the launch. Business Priming Grants can assist with salaries or capital expenditure in the crucial first 18-month stage when cash flow is tight.

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Jacqui Gaule,
Local Enterprise
Office Waterford

LEOs are for life too, not just for start-ups. “Sometimes we find people who have already established think it’s too late to come to their Local Enterprise Office, or may just feel they are getting by on their own, but there’s always something we can offer to help,” says Gaule.

Business Expansion Grants can help fund growth for a business that is in operation for more than 18 months, for example.

But it’s not just cash, she points out. “Very often people come in for funding but when they engage with us discover just how much they stand to benefit from the mentoring, networking and soft-skills training side of what we offer too.”

If you have a business idea, talk to us. Together, we can make it happen.