

Dacorum’s Den winners 2012-2014 – where are they now?

Winners from 2012

All 8 companies that received awards in 2012 are still trading although one winner under a different name. Their current positions since winning the awards are set out below.

Lush Pups – Following her success in the Den, the business owner secured a contract with Harrods to sell her dog beds within the store and this was successful until Harrods closed its pet department. She is currently working as the interior designer for a pet hotel in Hertfordshire as well as selling her pet beds online.

Baby Moments – Having been awarded the money on a ‘drip-feed’ basis, as the business owner was working part time for an employer, she has since quit her job and is now full time on Baby Moments. She has grown from strength to strength and has just found her first ‘franchisee’ for the business. She is currently working on the franchise offer with her business advisor.

Grim Reaper Foods – Since receiving the grant to buy a gazebo to take to fairs and events, the company increased their profit in the first year from £2K to £26K and have increased their profits each year consistently by 15%. Originally with 1 employee, they have taken on 2 full time and 1 part time employees and are taking on their first premises in Tring in the Autumn. His products are also now sold in Selfridges, Fenwicks and 29 gadget stores called Menkind in Lakeside, Bluewater, Westfield and stores all around the UK.

Quest Joinery - When they applied for the funds they were in their first year and employed 2 people. The additional machinery helped them to now employ 8 and have a further 12 working for them as subcontractors. Their turnover has grown from 350k in our first year to 1.2m in their last. At the time the grant was very helpful to help invest in tools which aided the business in establishing itself and helped them to grow locally, in turn helping to secure work.

Industrial Floor Machines - The grant allowed the company to invest in a Martindale EasyPAT 2100 PAT tester for the owner’s son, who is now working full time, increasing staff from 6 to 7, to attend a PAT testing course at Martindale's offices in Watford. Simon also attended a one day course on Risk Assessment for Portable Appliance Testing held by Seaward, the leader in PAT testing equipment. They use the PAT tester on a frequent basis, testing every mains powered machine that they repair, and have used it for various service contracts including the annual repairs for Aylesbury High School and regular/monthly repairs for Ashley Cleaning Services (Enfield), JPM Contract Cleaners (Watford) and many others besides. They estimate that sales of over £8,000 can be attributed to PAT testing of electrical cleaning equipment, in addition to the kudos gained by being able to properly and legally provide certificated testing of electrical cleaning equipment to clients in the public and private sectors.

Aid4Disabled – The £1000 was spent developing a website which provides help to Multiple Sclerosis sufferers. This has had a huge impact on the business and has enabled to the owner to launch a ‘public speaking’ career where he speaks at local charity dinners, the MS Society and the NHS on living with MS.

Hemel Stags – The award helped the Club to part fund their website which has had a huge impact on the appearance of the club within the Community and illustrated their step into professional sport. It also helped them to gain sponsors such as Haven Holidays and NGK Spark Plugs.

Marios - Originally DELI-ghtful Foods, the proprietor realised that the competition was vast and they would need to change their image to survive. The £1000 was used to rebrand the business to give it a more modern feel. She believes that they would probably not have survived without the £1000 which allowed them to keep up with the competition and the times. Another positive outcome was that she feels it gave the business the confidence to spend on rebranding'. They started with 0 employees and they currently employ 3 staff.

Winners from 2013

12 businesses were awarded grants in 2013, although 2 of the social enterprises did not get off the ground and take up their award

The current positions of the other 10 since winning the awards are set out below.

Green Light Mediation – Following the award of the Dacorum's Den funding, which enabled the co-owners to keep going forwards, their turnover increased by 100%. They have now just completed their tax return and again this year achieved over 100% increase. Their figures in the last three months are the best ever, enabling them both to become full time employees of the company. This year they are looking to increase the areas in which they work and potentially bring in two part time freelancers. They believe that they would not be trading without that small cash injection at the right time and the support associated with it.

Divine Trees – The business owner used her £1000 to secure an online shop as she was originally trading in the market but this did not suit her needs. The online website has allowed her to sell her wig products both nationally and globally and has allowed her to make sufficient living to survive. She is now able to pay herself a full time salary.

The Counselling Living Room has now set up a clinic at home and also work within other premises such as Ginger in St Albans. Two years on, she now also does some freelance work for a counselling agency and is building-up her own private practice. She is currently in the process of expanding from individual counselling to couple therapy and will also be working with EAP (Employee Assisted Programmes) later this year when as soon as she is accredited.

Skin Therapy - Most of the grant was spent on a professional update to their website which included making it much more accessible to those viewing on mobile devices. The stats reveal that many more customers are using these to browse and place orders and their turnover for the year following the grant increased almost 3 times. They have also taken on 3 part/time staff (2 FTEs).

Wickes Ice Cream – The owner bought a bicycle with the money to trade his ice cream from. Over the past year of so he has had to put the ice cream business temporarily on hold but he feels the market is still there and hopes to restart in time for Christmas.

Watts Hussein - Watts Hassan were given the money to develop an educational 'app' to help with media learning. Their app has now been developed and is currently with Apple for approval.

Grand Union Community Energy – The money was used to create a toolkit to capture learning from previous projects and create a practical guide for the future. Dacorum's Den funded 40% of the costs. The company report that the Toolkit saved hundreds of hours of volunteer effort and supported the application to become a mentor with the UK Co-Operatives Community Energy Mentoring Scheme. They have also recently been invited to plan and fundraise for Watford Community Housing Trust for solar panels on over 20 of their sheltered accommodation and community buildings.

Rockin' Lockin' – The owner set up an online store which grew steadily over the next 13 months. However, circumstances have since meant that she has given up the site and is now in full time employment.

Sunnyside Rural Trust – The money was used on an irrigation system for their plants which has saved many volunteer and staff hours, freeing them for other tasks. The money has made them far more cost effective and productive.

Cake Stories – The business continues to work on the children's parties and produce celebration cakes. Her business continues to be successful today.

Lessons Learnt – the two failing businesses were part of a specific amount of money specifically allocated for Social Enterprises and these have been the hardest parties to work with. Moving forwards it is unlikely that Social Enterprises will be eligible to apply for the Den.

Winners from 2014

8 awards were given. All businesses are trading and growing.

A1Optician – The award recipient reported that they spent their award on printing and designing new leaflets and created a special poster card for meals on wheels housebound people, delivered to all 2600 housebound in Hertfordshire. From this they have gained 9 new patients a week and are working 6 days to see all the patients. They are now looking into maybe employing an extra staff member to help with paperwork.

The Tea Tree – The business won the Dacorum's Den double award and opened her shop in the summer and is now a thriving tea shop in the Old Town. The shop currently employs 4 members of staff. Lisa also reached the final 5 in the Best Newcomer section of the Hertfordshire Food Awards. They are currently looking at options to open in the evenings.

TSE Productions –The team have gained several new projects through the grant and are now looking at working with cruise ships also.

Cinnamon Travelling café – Cinnamon Travelling Cafe won the Dacorum's Den double award. The £2000 grant changed the business from a good idea to a working concept that they have expanded and now market as a viable profit making entity. The money enabled them to move from using small

domestic kitchen appliances to being able to purchase proper catering equipment and create and design marketing material, which opened their business up to a much wider audience and the ability to cater for much bigger occasions. They were able to progress from catering at small village fairs of a few hundred to successfully tendering big music festivals, such as Hatfield House's folk festival which attracted 8,000 people. They have won a rolling contract with a local brewery and regularly cater for big council run events. They recently came second in the Best Newcomer section of the Hertfordshire Food Awards

MMSpark – The owner reports that Modern Marketing Spark (mmspark.com) has evolved immeasurably in the past year, and the seed funding to develop the online services was an invaluable part of this growth. MMSpark has grown by leaps and bounds and is now proud to serve a wide range of diverse clients across Herts, Beds and Bucks, as well as further afield. Winning this award increased the business profile in the business community and opened many doors.

Ecqo – Ecqo was slow to start as there were production issues that Jessica had to work through. Now these are resolved, they are steadily growing their range of products and the orders are growing proportionally also.

3spirit UK – The winner met one of the judges after the Den who helped her to put together an electronic version to pilot her training scheme. Several other orders have now been taken for the pilot and the business continues to grow.

Hippoty Hop Shoes – The grant was requested to help fund a new shop window for the children's shoe shop in Berkhamsted. The business reports that this has made a big impact on their turnover as the new window catches the customer's eye and attracts more passing trade. They feel this has made a considerable difference to their business.