

# Brora Health Food and Gift Store

Taking over business premises in Brora for his new health food and gift store wasn't as straightforward as Andrew Weston had anticipated. Indeed he goes as far as to say it was the "scariest thing" he has ever done. Yet it wasn't until he reached the stage of signing a lease that he realised he needed support. He learned about Business Gateway while browsing on the Highland Council website.

## Useful discussion with Business Gateway officer

"I thought the process of setting up a small business would be relatively simple, but it wasn't – it all took a lot of time and research," he recalls. "It was clear that I needed impartial expert advice but without a price tag!" Andrew (49), who went into business with his wife, Angela, e-mailed David Knight, Business Gateway's regional development officer for Sutherland, and was invited to attend a one-to-one advisory session. "We had a useful discussion about my new business and how it would progress," he reveals.



## Registering for VAT

Andrew took up the offer of a free place on a two-day Business Gateway start-up course in Lairg which he found useful, particularly the information given on the pros and cons of voluntarily registering for VAT and about notifying the Inland Revenue of his self-employed status. "It was great to meet other people who were at different stages of starting up their own business," Andrew states. "Some only had an idea and didn't know where to go from there. I learned much more than I expected in two days and the whole experience was invaluable."

## Shop outfitted thanks to start-up grant

With funding very tight and stock having to be ordered on personal borrowing, the couple were particularly pleased to receive a Business Gateway start-up grant. "The service paid 75% of the costs of fitting-out the shop. Thanks to them we were able to put up shelving and buy computer equipment," reveals Andrew. "It was a really nice boost because we'd put everything we had into the business. It meant we could divert some of our funds into buying stock."

## Varied career but keen to be own boss

The Westons moved from Halifax to Brora six years ago. Andrew has had a varied and interesting career, working in the royal navy, as a self-employed photographer on a cruise ship, in advertising sales and as a bus driver. His last job was in retail, as supervisor of a local supermarket. "I've always wanted to be my own boss and master of my own destiny," he admits.

### **Gap in the market**

He felt there was a gap in the market for a health food store and knew from his own experience that shoppers were not always able to buy particular products locally. Brora health food and gift store sells a wide range of whole foods and caters for people on specific diets. Responding to customer demand, Andrew is also stocking a range of eco household products as well as gifts. He believes his store is attracting visitors who then go on to shop elsewhere in the village.

### **Marketing**

He is now focussing on improving his marketing and is hoping to gain access through Business Gateway to the services of a marketing consultant. He is keen to expand into e-commerce as well as supplying catering establishments in the North of Scotland. "The benefit to caterers is that we can supply products as and when they want and without a delivery charge," he explains.

### **Impressed by quality and range of goods on offer**

David Knight commented: "In addition to providing products that are really hard to find anywhere else, the refurbished premises are playing a major part in the development of Brora's centre. We've also been really impressed with the commitment to customer service, the quality and diversity of goods on offer and Andrew's hard work and determination. Following Andrew's attendance on Business Gateway courses, we were happy to help the business with a small start-up grant for shop fittings."

Business Gateway provides practical help, advice and support for new and growing businesses in Scotland. To find out how Business Gateway can help your business, visit [www.bgateway.com](http://www.bgateway.com) or contact your local office on 01463 713889 or 01343 563634.