

# Hard yards pay off as craft market proves tourism hit

## COLLETTE DEVLIN

A walk along Wellington's waterfront on a Saturday morning isn't complete without a nosy in the Wellington Underground Market.

The subterranean trove of the capital's crafts has been a highlight for locals and tourists since it opened in 2009.

Helena Tobin and Wendy Jasper knew the market would be popular with Wellingtonians, but never expected it to become a tourist attraction.

A recent visitor survey conducted on behalf of the market, revealed some "impressive" results for stall holders.

"To know people come from outside Wellington to visit the market makes the hours of hard work worth it, now the dream has become a reality and not only have we created careers for ourselves, we are supporting the livelihoods of small business owners," Jasper said.

The market attracts between 70 and 100 stallholders each week.

When the friends dreamed up the idea of setting up a market to sell their handmade creations, they were looking for ways to escape their corporate nine-to-five jobs.

Jasper came up with the initial idea after returning from Canberra, Australia where crafts markets were a growing trend.

"Our children were in the same class and one day we just got chatting and I was asking where the weekly markets were held. I was surprised to hear there were vegie markets, but no craft stalls in a creative city like Wellington," Jasper said.

Despite its success Jasper and Tobin faced significant obstacles before launching their business.

They spent the first two years looking for a suitable indoor venue and lost crucial council funding during that time.

After organising fundraising events they found their premises on Jervois Quay.

The pair thought their business would

grow at a much faster rate.

"We laugh now at how slow it has been. It's been a hard slog but we will continue with our vision."

Their aim has always been to enable artists to make a living from their craft and ironically the measurement of their success was when business left the market to set up a retail operation, she said.

Their company, Wellington Creative, has added staff and also operates the waterfront summer Pop-Up Village.

Other initiatives are in the pipeline, including looking at other types of markets and taking pop-up shops to the regions.

Support during the early days of the business from Chris Elphick of Business Mentors New Zealand was crucial.

"There were so many ups and downs and challenges. We wouldn't be here today without the insights he offered us."

"He empowered us to be the best business people we can be."

Elphick said the survey revealed how important the market was to Wellington and the creative scene.

"New Zealand relies heavily on small businesses and the market is helping a further 40 to 50 of these flourish," Elphick said.

"I suspect a lot of people would have given up years ago, particularly when the funding was withdrawn, but the pair persevered."

***"The dream has become a reality and not only have we created careers for ourselves, we are supporting the livelihoods of small business owners."***

**Wendy Jasper**



**Wendy Jasper and Helena Tobin left the corporate world behind to set up the Wellington Underground Market.**