

Case study

Clealls of Corfe



When Juliet and Chris Porter took over Clealls Store in January 2007, they thought they had bought the dream.

The couple, originally from the South East, were tired of the M25 and the rat race, so headed West to the picture postcard village of Corfe.

But with no retail experience and the worst trading conditions for generations round the corner, the dream of running a shop in a Dorset village became more like a nightmare.

At the end of 2008, with their business and mortgage at stake, they got in touch with Business Link and were introduced to adviser

Chris Darlow. The Porters believe his fresh perspective and objective support helped them climb out of trouble and may even have saved them from going under.

Nearly three years later the shop, now Clealls of Corfe, is open for business and the Porters have been on an incredibly steep learning curve.

The store has also just undergone a refit as it was chosen to feature in the BBC's series Mary Portas Queen of Shops.

Juliet said: "It was very difficult for us to begin with but the advice that Chris Darlow gave us was key to our survival and perhaps even saved us. Now we can look forward and hope to start making a profit."

BUSINESS ISSUES

The Porters were in serious financial trouble when Chris Darlow met them, with mounting debts, a lack of regular trade and stock issues. They had also been hoping for a good summer to bring coach-loads of tourists, but that didn't happen and they were a month away from going under.

OBJECTIVE SUPPORT OFFERED

Immediate action was needed so Chris set about dealing with the finances. He advised on how to get debts deferred, a business rate rebate and delay an impending increase in rent.

He put the Porters in touch with other local organisations set up to support rural businesses and advised them on their stock and how to improve the display of their best lines.

Juliet said: "Chris's free advice really helped us to get back on track. We worked out a plan of action together and it really helped us personally to feel like we were able to take control of the situation and keep the business going."

Chris was able to identify a number of measures to shore up the business and give the Porters a chance to get back on an even keel.

He said: "It hasn't been an easy run for them. My job was to help them through the immediate financial problems, so we looked at the figures and talked about how to restructure their debts and how to make the best of the stock they had.

"They have now gone from being a general store to a convenience store and they are hoping the makeover by the BBC will help bring the customers in."

EVALUATING SUCCESS

With the shop yet to turn a profit, success for Clealls can be measured by the fact that the Porters are still there and open for business every day.

Bringing down the levels of debt they have faced also means they have been able to keep the business moving forward.

The television show makeover has increased footfall already and people in the area are talking about Clealls.

FUTURE PLANS

The Porters are looking forward to next year and starting to turn losses into gains.

Juliet is passionate about keeping it local, making the shop a focus for the village and the place where everybody shops.

They are looking at how to set aside space in the shop for village meetings or just for people to get together for a coffee.

But most importantly they feel the worst is behind them and they can look ahead with confidence to a successful future.