

BusinessAdvocate

Celebrating Northland business success and innovation

biz@northernadvocate.co.nz

Northland's young entrepreneurs

Back flips mastered with attitude

By Christine Allen

GYMNASTICS is a little like starting a business — you need to be super flexible, have persistence to learn new skills and have the support of an awesome team.

For young Whangarei entrepreneur, Ashleigh McCaw, 26, creating a business from a passion for coaching gymnastics has allowed her to do the business back flips that she's always dreamed of.

While she was in her final year at Kamo High School, and just 18 years old, she took part in the Lion Foundation Young Enterprise Scheme with some classmates and kick-started an idea that would soon turn into the business that now employs seven part-time coaches and teaches gymnastics, swimming and athletics to about 400 children from Dargaville to Waipu and across the district.

On Monday, Ashleigh and her team opened the Active Attitude headquarters on Commerce St, after running an outreach service for more than two years and having started with nothing more than her own skills and a humble van.

"I've always been a sporty kid and when I was 14, I started coaching gymnastics. I just had that passion for it," she said.

After completing her final school year and a children's aerobics DVD called *Beat The Feet*, she undertook the Northland Young Entrepreneur Programme during her gap year, where she built networks, solidified her passion and direction for the future and established the Active Attitude brand.

Leaving Northland to get a Bachelor of Sport and Leisure at Waikato University and further courses in all three codes, including coaching courses, was a necessary part of the journey.

"There wasn't a huge range of options here [Northland]. I knew I would return home, that was all part of the plan."



YOUNG BLOOD: Ashleigh McCaw, Active Attitude owner, is just one of Northland's young entrepreneurs. PHOTO/JOHN STONE

Once armed with a swag of qualifications, in October 2012 she turned north and made her way home and bought a van and some gymnastics equipment.

She started offering coaching to children in a number of communities at community halls and clubs.

"I was taking sport out to communities that didn't have coaches or clubs. So many parents are too busy to volunteer to coach with clubs. The communities love it — we have around 400 children training with us now."

Ashleigh kept her business idea simple and overheads down. Starting with 50 children to coach with equipment in the back of a van.

"Time was the biggest challenge for me. I was a one-man band delivering classes, and had to do admin while I was just developing skills.

"Also, this type of gymnastics coaching coming to the

community was a new concept. People were unsure about what equipment I could fit in my van."

Confidence

She said being a young business person had its challenges.

"You don't have contacts at that age and are just going through it all, learning as you go."

She said the region needed a networking group for young business people.

But confidence in her own ability and a plan were the keys that unlocked potential.

"There's no point worrying about what people who are older than you perceive you to be. Have an end goal and stay positive and professional."

By term two she had some part-time help. Two years later, the team and the service have grown.

Active Attitude is affiliated with GymSports New Zealand,

which Ashleigh previously worked for, and the centre is training six others to coach children.

She said the programme allowed her to pay it forward. Her youngest coach was just 15 years old.

"We have a great team — it's exciting and we are all following a vision."

She said the service would continue to reach communities but she hoped the Whangarei base would also grow, with services provided on site.

It will also be the home of the Active Attitude Aerobics Academy.

"I thought it would be a struggle to get the support from communities, but we didn't. We are expanding because the communities, including teachers and schools, have supported us," she said.

"Sport teaches us persistence because, in sport, the games don't always go right."

Young entrepreneurs find YES opens new doors

By Christine Allen

Northland's connection to an entrepreneurship accelerator programme is helping Lion Foundation Young Enterprise Scheme (YES) graduates to step across the bridge from high school projects to successful enterprise.

The free six-week Venture Up programme is powered by the Young Enterprise Trust and Lightning Lab and is for 17 to 25 year-olds.

Based in Wellington it connected with three Northlanders from the YES scheme last year.

Gary Larkan, YES coordinator for Northland said three of last year's 27

participants came from this region, and were now running their own enterprise.

"Through the year we identify potential candidates from the YES programme and encourage all students to join the Young Enterprise Alumni."

Mr Larkan's daughter Jade, 22, is studying in Auckland but running Filter, a company which matches graduates and students to internships in their chosen industries.

Former Kerikeri student Alysha Terrizzi's company is selling glow-in-the-dark markers to fishing and hunting supply stores, while Far North student Chance August had created a website.

Mr Larkan said the Young

Enterprise Programme was also a vital piece of the puzzle in Northland. Funded by the Methodist Employment Generation Fund with Auckland community organisation Lifewise, the programme provided interest-free loans to young business people whose companies could grow to employ others.

Mr Larkin said that with more than 200 students participating this year, the YES programme certainly had companies ready for market.

Joseph Stuart, general manager of business growth at Northland Inc said about 20 young people involved in business start-ups in the region had already enquired after the

centre's Dorian Scott seminar running later this month (see page 15).

"I think the YES programme is working well for Northland graduates. The students are learning problem solving and a customer focus. It's a practical programme."

Mr Stuart was also a graduate of the YES scheme, having interned at Port Nelson during his 1988 programme. He said that many entrepreneurs had not completed formal education.

"Entrepreneurs need drive and focus and many don't have formal education. They do need support to help revise and refine their vision and develop business structure."

Praise our youth

Christine Allen
BUSINESS EDITOR



Northland's Lion Foundation Young Enterprise Scheme (YES) reminds me of the Irish proverb "mol an oige agus tiocfaidh siad". It means "praise the youth and they will blossom".

One out of every five youths in Northland is not in employment, education or training (NEET). Our NEET rate is the highest in New Zealand, while our overall unemployment rate is also sitting above the national average.

One quarter of Northland students left education before their 17th birthday in 2013, compared with the national figure of 17.3 per cent.

Northland has a mass of disengaged young people.

We need to do more than just praise the youth — high school students need to be encouraged to think, create and invent. YES does this and teaches them the skills to make business ideas a reality.

I was one of the mentors invited to a recent YES speed mentoring event in Whangarei.

Business ideas came straight from students' desires to brighten up their region, and country.

Some web-savvy teens talked about the global market.

Many shared stories revealing their personal motivation for wanting to start the business. The reasons were heartfelt. The passion was real.

Some students had just come alive with the programme — students who may not have been achieving in other subjects.

There have been lots of millionaires who didn't complete mainstream education but had a spirit of innovation: Thomas Edison, Richard Branson and Simon Cowell.

Walt Disney, who coined the phrase: "If you can dream it, you can do it", dropped out of school at 16 and turned out just fine.

So, what about those students who did finish school and went on to successfully run their own business?

Over the next four weeks, the *Business Advocate* will feature young entrepreneurs — their motivation, innovation and inspiration.

Our first entrepreneur, Ashleigh McCaw, was just 18 when she started her sports-coaching business, Active Attitude.

■ *If you know of a young entrepreneur in Northland, why not get in touch with us at biz@northernadvocate.co.nz — we'd love to feature them.*