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Name: Jackie Roberts

Business Name: The Chocolate Tailor

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The Regional Women's Enterprise Unit  
**RWEU**  
Backing Business in the West Midlands

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## What's life about?

“I'd been a college lecturer for 20 years, suffered a bereavement and other personal things and had come to a stage in my life where I was asking, “What's life about?”. I felt the need to re-assess.” Jackie Roberts, now trading as The Chocolate Tailor, felt that she didn't want to work out the next ten years, “just for my pension”, but that there were other things she wanted to do with her life.

“People had said to me that often a business is generated from a hobby. My hobbies had varied over the years from sailing and knitting to swimming - but I couldn't really see how I could develop any of these into a business. I have, however, always liked chocolate so enrolled on a chocolate-making course with a view to making presents for my friends.”

Jackie found that she enjoyed making chocolate. She started to try out new things and, as her products became more imaginative, she found she was having more fun. Whilst still in employment she attended an Enterprise Conference where two inspirational speakers challenged her “very safe, familiar job with a good salary” with comments like: “Chase your Passion not your Pension!” and “Leap and the Net will Appear!”. Jackie decided to follow this advice and in August 2005 finished employment at the college and started her business providing, “a range of delicious chocolates tailored to your chocoholic needs”.

## A pattern

Now that Jackie has been trading for more than a year, she has identified a trading pattern. Summer tends to be quieter but September to Christmas is very busy. In order to smooth out these seasonal trends, Jackie is looking to supply other markets such as weddings. Jackie also supplies some food outlets but is careful to link up only with those who offer high quality goods so that the exclusivity of her products is recognised. Through regularly attending farmers' markets and food fairs, her business is growing by word-of-mouth.

## Networking

Jackie is a member of Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE) and has attended their workshops and networking meetings. As a result of her membership, she has featured in the local press. “I've gained such a lot from the WiRE network, particularly ideas about my products and where to supply them, and that has been invaluable,” states Jackie.

## Next steps

Jackie is thoroughly enjoying the challenge and the change. Her plans are to overcome the market fluctuations and she has discussed her business with a business advisor in order to help her plan her finances and work out cash flow. “At this stage I am running what is described as a ‘lifestyle business’. It means I can stay in control, keep at a level I can manage and continue to enjoy what I am doing. It's so nice doing something that's appreciated. So often, when I was employed, people only commented when I was doing something wrong. Now I get lots of compliments; people are pleased with my chocolates and I am proud of what I am doing .”