

# Director of the month

## Jenny Dawson

### Founder, Rubies in the Rubble

After reading an article on food wastage, former hedge fund manager Jenny Dawson wanted to create a business that would help ease the problem. "There's enough food and resources to feed the world, yet we eat only a third of what we produce," she says. "With one billion people going hungry, I really wanted to draw awareness to it."

Inspired, she cycled to London's New Covent Garden Market at 4am to find out the extent of the surplus of perishable goods. And, leaving with plenty of perfectly good fruit and vegetables that would otherwise have been discarded, she considered what she could do with it all. "I thought 'well, let's start with chutney'; it's a natural way of preserving and has a long shelf life," she says.

Dawson's premium food brand Rubies in the Rubble was born in 2011. She called cafés and community centres in search of kitchens that were underused at evenings and weekends. "I also asked hotels and cafés to donate jam jars, and for the labels we used cut-off material from fashion houses so that everything was recycled," she says.

The first few jars were sold in London, at Cabbages and Frocks market in Marylebone and then at Borough Market. A two-minute video was also created to send out to potential retailers. "It's a good way to share and tell your story so they can understand what you're doing and allow them to visualise it," she says.

While looking for funding, Rubies in the Rubble came across the Ben & Jerry's Join Our Core awards. "A member of the team said 'I'm entering us for this, as the first 100 to sign



#### My inspiration...

**Who?** The Queen is a huge inspiration to me. She's worked into her eighties and always been so incredibly loyal and a very thoughtful person.

**Media** I use Twitter a lot but nothing can beat reading a good book.

**Best book** I recently read Paul Gallico's *The Snow Goose*, which was a lovely, quick read and beautifully written.

**Favourite place** Scotland. It's home, as my parents live on the south-west coast and it's where I was brought



up. It's probably the one place I feel completely free, and creative and wild.

**I can't live without...** Oranges. I love oranges!

**Relax** For me, relaxing is seeing friends. I get a lot of energy from being around them.

**Brand** The fashion house Beulah. They have beautiful dresses and I really admire what they stand for [raising awareness of human trafficking and the sex trade].

up get a free year's supply of ice cream," she says. "However, the application process actually forced us to make a business plan and think about what we were representing and how to present things, so it was really useful." The hard work paid off as Rubies in the Rubble won the Ben & Jerry's Sustainable Business award in 2012.

Business started to grow, and in summer 2013 the company received its largest order after placing an advert in the *Daily Mail*. "We were excited, but it ended up being a hoax order," she says. "It was worth about £9,000 and we weren't paid for it." Eventually the company got its money, but it was a tough time. "Feeling that we were in demand, but then to find out it was a scam was hard," she says.

Despite the setback the firm has grown steadily and now has an annual turnover of £200,000. Dawson was a finalist at last year's NatWest everywoman Awards and her products are now stocked in Harvey Nichols, Selfridges, Fortnum and Mason and around 250 delicatessens in London. "We've outsourced our production to a manufacturer in Devon, so it's just my business partner, Alicia Lawson, and I running everything," she says.

As well as delving into new products created with the same ethos, Dawson has hopes of developing an advocacy brand that can help with education on food waste, while also becoming international. "I'd love to use fruit and vegetables from all around the world in different areas where they might have odd-shaped or ugly fruit that can still be great produce," she says. "I'd love us to become a brand that makes a difference."

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