



## Celebrating the Humber's Lockdown Entrepreneurs

Lili + Mila provide unique handstamped dog tags and walking accessories. Inspired by a dog, designed by her hu-mam for your pet!

Lili + Mila offers a wide variety of handmade pet accessories for cat and dogs, as well as new human apparel and gifts!



### **Why did you decide to take the plunge and set up your own business?**

I have spent many years in the pursuit of happiness, trying to decide what I enjoy - in my career, hobbies etc. but I could never seem to find 'the thing'. Then I met Mila my Jack Russell/Chihuahua cross - she changed everything. I had thought about starting a dog business for a while but I decided to take the plunge and start my venture in 2020.

I think that 2020 was a testing year for everyone, but one positive I found is that it gave me time to reflect. I believe that if you do more of what you love you will feel happier. I also strongly believe that life is too short to spend time being unhappy in any aspect of your life, it is hard but sometimes you need to take control and make the changes you need to.

I have always loved sewing and I am a self confessed dog and cat lady so making pet accessories seemed like a natural progression.

### **Do you think the Humber has been a supportive place to start and grow your business?**

Absolutely, I think Hull being the City of Culture in 2017 has really impacted the growth of small businesses. The redevelopment of Hull with Humber street and Trinity market has provided platforms and networks for small businesses. Unfortunately, Covid has had an impact on events, such as markets and fairs but hopefully these events will be allowed to take place soon when everything is safe.

A lot of effort has been made to connect small businesses online. Small businesses have had to adapt and as a customer I have enjoyed supporting other businesses by click and collecting at Plant and Paint one of our favourites, and participating in online activities such as Stretch pizzas masterclass.



Lili + Mila



We are so happy to be stocking at Art and Soul in Beverley who was brought to my attention by a friend who I studied with at the University of Hull.

### **How has the local response and support enhanced your experience?**

I think the key to the growth of any small business is loyal customers and word of mouth. In starting our business during the pandemic, we have been overwhelmed with the support we have received from our local community and customers further afield.

### **What was the inspiration behind your business?**

Lili + Mila was inspired by a maternal bond between a mother and her dog. I do not have any; human children but Mila is my furchild and I am a proud dog mam.

Mila has been a massive part of my self-discovery, she has enabled me to learn who I am and has inspired me to take a new path relating to my love of dogs, knowing their ability to change our lives. Mila loves to style accessories. She has great ideas for products, prints and designs she wanted but we could not find them online ... so we decided to make our own accessories.

Now we offer a wide variety of handmade pet accessories for cat and dogs, as well as new human apparel and gifts! Our range of handmade products include pet ID tags, collars, bandanas, bows, toys as well as keyrings, wax melts, mugs and jumpers!

### **What do you love about what you do?**

Everything! I love the ability to be creative and love making people happy. I put a lot of work into new products, hunting down patterns and starting collaborations with other small brands. My favourite part of my small business other than meeting new people, dogs and making things is definitely being spammed with the absolute cutest photos of our customers.

## **What are some of the biggest lessons you have learned when setting up and running your business?**

It is hard work. I think I have learned so many lessons but I still have a lot to learn. I think there are lessons I have learned from initial mistakes of buying waaaay too many meters of material. Yes, I did buy 12 meters of one fabric as my first fabric. Do I still have some of it left? .. maybe.

A vital lesson I have learned is that social media is extremely powerful and again it is hard work. That said, it is helpful to build your visibility and also helps to build supportive small business networks.

## **What has been your business highlight so far?**

I mean we are still relatively new to the small business scene. Obviously our first sale was a big moment. Our first international sale was amazing. Recruiting our first furry brand reps was a big one...I mean dogs actually want to apply to rep for our small business.

Instagram has been a great social media platform for us. We now have over 2000 followers, we recently reached 50k plays on one of our reels and we have made friends and customers worldwide.

## **How has your business had to adapt to the COVID pandemic?**

I started my business during the pandemic so I would say I knew what I was going into. That said, I think a heavy focus has been trying to make ourselves virtually visible as we could not go out and meet people.

## **How do you see your business growing/what are your plans post-COVID?**

Meeting my customers in person at markets and hopefully expanding by stocking my accessories in dog groomers and other shops. This is a big goal. I would love to have Lili + Mila pet accessories stocked in lots of shops and I would also like to have an actual shop myself that dogs could come to with their pawrents.

## **What advice would you give to other people looking to set up their own business?**

I think first thing I would say is go for it .. now! A lot of people look to start their business for a long time and do not take the plunge, a lot of entrepreneurs say they wish they had started earlier (including myself).

Another piece of advice I would say is when you do start your business stick with it, there are lots of ups and downs and learning experiences. It is easy to become disheartened if you have a week with no sales but then you could have lots of sales or there are other positives like you use the quieter times to develop new products.

It is important to adapt to situations, there are lots of initiatives you can start to prompt sales, offers, new products. There is a constant need to keep the momentum moving that is prompted by you.