

THRIVE Q&A: Ciara Bow from Gledfield Distillery

Ciara Bow is the Founder and Director of Gledfield Distillery in Ardgay. Ciara attended THRIVE in 2022 as an early stage entrepreneur.

Gledfield Distillery is set to bring an ancient botanical spirit back to life, taking inspiration from heritage and local ingredients in the Scottish Highlands. Every bottle sale will generate £1 to support local charities in the rural community, the Kyle of Sutherland.

What market opportunity led you to build your own business?

Our botanical spirits are made with oats, which I believe is a world first. The idea was inspired by Marjorie MacBeath, my great, great granny who distilled spirits illicitly on her croft. She was a very resourceful lady, but she was also very crafty – using her petticoats to hide the pot still from the excisemen!

What have been your biggest wins so far?

Securing a premises for Gledfield Distillery to call home, winning a Young EDGE award, being named Young Ambassador of the Year at the Highlands & Islands Food & Drink Awards, and raising over £11k in a crowdfunding campaign are some of my top highlights so far.

What have been the biggest obstacles you've had to face and how have you overcome them?

Since the beginning of my business journey, I have struggled with confidence and self-belief. I have learned that the only way to overcome this is by pushing myself out of my comfort zone and THRIVE has definitely helped with this. Another big challenge in the start-up of my business was the product development phase. I was fortunate to receive funding from Interface, which allowed me to work with a development chef at SRUC to create the product recipes – and I had a lot of fun experimenting in my kitchen at home.

What did you gain from attending THRIVE?

Starting a new business is a scary process – but THRIVE is here to help. The programme is an amazing opportunity to learn about the different stages involved in starting a new business in the food & drink industry. Taking part in THRIVE helped me to boost my

confidence and learn more about the different stages involved in launching a new product – from branding to market trends, sensory analysis, legislation and even packaging options.

What are your next steps?

I am at a very exciting stage in my business, installing the distillery equipment and preparing to launch our first product later this year. My future plans include the creation of apprenticeship opportunities, to encourage more young people, especially women, to work in the distilling sector. In addition to this, my long-term ambition is to open a distillery visitor centre.

What are your top tips for budding food & drink and rural entrepreneurs?

1. Be passionate about what you do.
2. Ask for help and advice.
3. Enjoy the process!

To find out more about Gledfield Distillery: gledfielddistillery.com