



JUNE 23, 2019
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Startup Gippsland 2019 culminates in dynamic pitch night -
prize winners announced

The newly reborn West Gippsland Arts Centre provided a fittingly brilliant stage for the grand finale event of the 2019 Startup Gippsland program. Over 300 guests came to celebrate and the hear the Startup Gippsland pitches, some travelling hundreds of kilometers and interstate to be part of the night. There were four major prize winners:

Annebelle van Tongeren, Fern and Frost
Most Improved Entrepreneur
\$3000, sponsored by TAFE Gippsland

Kristen Robbins, The Worksheds
Best Social Impact
\$3000, sponsored by Commonwealth Bank

Lucy Nijam, CheckIt
Most Innovative Idea
\$3000, sponsored by Regional Development Australia

Laura Eddington, Little Bumble Reusable Food Wraps
Best Overall
\$5000, sponsored by GippsTech

Laura Eddington, founder of Little Bumble Reusable Food Wraps won the major prize of Best Overall, on the exact two year anniversary of founding her business!

“Winning gives me an opportunity to spread the message that there is a better way to store food. It’s the highest compliment and validation that you’re onto a great business idea.”

Laura Eddington, Founder, Little Bumble Reusable Food Wraps

The money is important to Laura as it will enable Little Bumble Reusable Food Wraps to take part in major wholesale trade fairs. However, Laura believes that her new community bring her the greatest value.

“It’s such a great program because it is local to the region. You have to have the support of the community around you in order to collaborate on ideas, strategies and goals. The program works by building your community.”

Dr Elena Kelareva also spoke of the importance of community and about uncovering the international business 'gold' in the region to support the Startup Gippsland program.

“This is also about population attraction - to bring people to Gippsland we need not just nice houses and infrastructure but also a great community. Through Startup Gippsland, we found that there are so many people right here already who are building global businesses and changing the world, but because their customers are global, they promote themselves online rather than within the local community. Our mentors and startups were like little specks of gold that we found and connected together so they could help each other grow and succeed and become something so much more than they could be alone.”

Dr Elena Kelareva, Founder and CEO, GippsTech.

The night was a euphoric celebration of smarts, inclusivity and community, hosted by charismatic MC Anthony Mayer, an enlivening expert speaker and innovative thinker. Originally a Gippsland boy, Cnr Graeme Middlemiss, Mayor of Latrobe City Council, good humouredly named Anthony Yinnar's favourite son! Anthony highlighted the success of the program, calling it the best regional startup program in Australia and noted it's value.

“A comparable Victorian program to this with 47 participants cost close to \$6M, this program has 46 participants and was funded for only \$400,000. I guess that 47th guy must've been hard work!”

Anthony Mayer, Startup Gippsland MC, Serial Entrepreneur, Founder, Online is Easy

40 of the 46 participating startups presented pitches. In a rapid fire, two minute rolling format the pitches tore through a gamut of spectacular ideas, competing to win great prizes and calling out to the audience for specific needs.

The mayors of the four shires auspicing the program lent their support and took the stage throughout the night: Cr Brett Tessari, Mayor of Bass Coast Shire Council, Cr Alan Hall, Mayor of Wellington Shire Council, Cr Mikaela Power, Mayor of Baw Baw Shire Council and Cr Graeme Middlemiss, Mayor of Latrobe City Council.

The judging panel included national startup authorities and local business experts: Colin Kinner, founder and CEO of Startup Onramp; Jordan Green, founder and President of Melbourne Angels, Trustee of the Angel Resource Institute (USA), Chairman of the Asian Business Angel Forum, Chairman Emeritus and a Fellow of the AAAL; Tim Weight, Executive Director, Strategic Engagement with TAFE Gippsland; Nikolle Mauchline, Relationship Manager for Regional and Agribusiness Banking at the Commonwealth Bank; Loretta Willaton, Regional General Manager for Telstra; Dr Abdel K Halabi, Senior Lecturer in Accounting at the Federation University Australia, Business School and Executive Board member of the Islamic Council of Victoria.

The judges' pitch assessment criteria included the problem being solved, the solution and unique offering, validation and traction to date and the overall quality of the presentation.

It seems fitting to give the last word to the participants, through Carmelina Manzo who spoke on their behalf.

“I would like to thank two absolutely remarkable ladies who have led the Start Up Gippsland Program: Elena Kelareva and Stephanie Thoo. We would like to thank you for your support and guidance throughout the program. We are extremely grateful that you brought Startup Gippsland to our beautiful region.”

Carmelina Manzo, Startup Gippsland Participant, Founder, Nourished by Carms

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGERY AND TO ARRANGE INTERVIEWS PLEASE CONTACT:

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IMAGE ATTACHED

Dr Elena Kelareva, Founder and CEO, GippsTech and Stephanie Thoo, Program Manager, Startup Gippsland.

Startup Gippsland 2019 team and participants

Laura Eddington, Founder, Little Bumble Reusable Food Wraps, Lucy Nijam, Founder, CheckIt, Annebelle van Tongeren, Founder, Fern and Frost, Kristen Robbins, Founder, The Worksheds

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