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It's just the start

STUART and Jenny Daniels had to go on the dole when they and their four children moved from New South Wales to Maleny in the Sunshine Coast hinterland eight years ago.

Today the company of which they are joint managing directors, Trailers 2000, is the biggest trailer maker in Queensland and is about to embark on a new expansion phase.

It turns over more than \$2 million a year and employs 16 people at its modern 1300 sq m Beerwah factory.

The success of the Daniels is testimony to drive and commitment — and a little-publicised federal government scheme with a high success rate.

Since the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme began in pilot form in 1985, it has helped almost 58,000 unemployed people start up small businesses, 6600 in the year to last September.

To be eligible for the scheme, you must be over 18, unemployed and have a viable and original business idea.

The business must satisfy unmet demand and not be in direct competition with an existing business.

The scheme's success is due in part to high entry hurdles — only

Unemployed and with a great idea for your own business? You might be able to put it into practice while living on social security for a year, as BRIAN THOMAS reports

about 20 per cent of first-time applicants get into the training program. Once they have gone through the program about 95 per cent qualify for the Income Allowance (equivalent to the single adult rate of the NewStart allowance, \$357.80 a fortnight), free business advice and support for the first year of operation.

The training course is designed for people with no business knowledge and covers market research, business planning, legal and administrative requirements, marketing, pricing and costing, financial planning and record keeping.

Trainees are assessed mainly on their business plan, which is worked on during the course and presented first to students and then to the independent NEIS advisory committee.

Stuart Daniels is a boilermaker by trade but during slack times in his apprenticeship his boss had him making trailers.

That gave him the idea for his business plan. It was accepted, but that was only the first hurdle.

"We had to sell a car and a few

other things to scrape up \$7000, which together with a bank loan was enough to get things started," Stuart says. "I made the first few trailers in a shed out the back and Jenny did the office work at home. Then we leased some premises at Maleny."

Success was by no means overnight.

"It was a struggle," he says. "For the first few years, we could barely feed the family.

"And it was four or five years before we could see light at the end of the tunnel."

Stuart, now 39, says the business plan he had drawn up under the incentive scheme was never really the way things worked.

"We were constantly having to make changes. But NEIS gave me a few insights into what to expect and what would be expected of me.

"You can only give someone so much information. There's only one way to find out — and that's by doing it."

What he did find out was that the business initially required

total commitment and meant long hours for not much money. The turning point came when he realised that there was no way he could work longer hours but he could see possibilities for the business if they could fund expansion.

About five years ago, he and Jenny brought in brothers Darren and Craig Henderson as partners.

They provided the money to buy machinery to automate the process and Trailers 2000 began pulling much more than its weight.

It now builds 3000 trailers a year and has agents in northern NSW and throughout Queensland.

The trailers are not masterpieces of innovation, nor are they the most expensive on the market.

But Stuart says they are known for their finish and durability.

"We employ people whose sole job is to make sure there are no rough edges and we do everything better than our competitors."

Last year the company won a Family Business Association award recognising its dynamic growth.

Stuart and Jenny are not resting on their laurels. On the day of this interview he had begun work soon after 8am and at 11am was preparing for a round trip to deliver a shipment of trailers to Bundaberg, expecting to be home about 9pm. Jenny, 37, works a six-day week.

Training and support for NEIS is provided by about 70 organisations including business centres, technical and training colleges and adult education centres, under contract to the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business.

Departmental monitoring shows that three months after the successful completion of the NEIS program, 85 per cent of people are either self-employed, employed or undertaking further education or training.

This "positive outcome" rate compares with 41 per cent for its Intensive Assistance program, 49 per cent for JobSearch training and 36 per cent for Work for the Dole.

An audit 12 months after people have completed the program is about to be done.

The last such figures the department produced, in 1993, showed 54 per cent self-employed and 9 per cent in other employment a year later.