



COVER STORY **BLUE SEA THINKING**

# SERO TO HERO

Our former Wales Policy Officer Laura Parry and partner Liz Mogan decided to open a zero-waste shop during a global pandemic. And that may be the secret to success as Laura told Clare Fischer



Clare Fischer



**When did you decide that rather than just shopping at a zero-waste shop, you'd open one?**

I spent a lot of my time at MCS working alongside local communities in their efforts to become either plastic-free towns or simply create a bit more excitement around sustainability and offering plastic-free alternatives to their residents. I was in awe of how passionate these community groups and businesses were and the difference they were making. Zero-waste shops and green community groups, with the right support from the likes of MCS, were making behaviour change happen whilst educating people on issues surrounding pollution and our ocean. It eventually became clear to me that I wanted out from behind my desk to get on the ground and make a difference

▲ Trading at pop-up events has built up Serò's customer base

**LIKE EVERYONE ELSE DURING COVID, I WAS SUDDENLY INVESTING A LOT MORE OF MY TIME IN MY LOCAL AREA**

for my local community. Like everyone else during Covid, I was suddenly investing a lot more of my time in my local area and it was clear that Newport lacked a zero-waste shop that was going to be convenient and affordable, and provide the kind of support that, up until now, people were having to travel outside of the area to receive.

### Why Newport?

My friend and now business partner and co-founder of Serò, Liz Morgan, was also waiting for something like this to come to Newport and with her background in working for small, independent businesses and our motivation to start something from the ground up, the decision to make this happen was easy for both of us. Liz was born here and I've been here since I was six and





we try to live a sustainable and responsible lifestyle but the simple fact is that Newport doesn't have anything in place to help us do that. We had to travel to Cardiff's Ripple or Crickhowell's Natural Weigh to do our zero-waste shopping. We carried out a survey to see if other people in Newport were feeling the same and got over a thousand responses in 48 hours! Eighty-three per cent of those that responded actually wanted a zero-waste shop in Newport. And so Sero (Welsh for zero) began.

### So what's the ethos behind Sero?

We know it's tricky to start and maintain a plastic-free lifestyle in today's world and we wanted to make plastic-free shopping as convenient as popping to the supermarket, and as affordable too! We need to see single-use culture replaced by a reusable model – where recycling is the last resort and landfill doesn't even enter the equation. Wherever possible, we source locally, supporting other local businesses and keeping the carbon footprint on any of our produce to a minimum.

### You said you were surprised by the results of your survey; what was the reaction when you announced you were actually getting Sero off the ground?

Due to Covid, our outreach initially was mainly restricted to online. We used Facebook and all the community outreach that had been particularly useful during lockdown to chat to the Newport community. The reaction to even the idea of setting this up was outstanding. As restrictions relaxed, we've started trading at pop, up events as well as our website. People aren't afraid to ask for what they need and let us know when things

▲ Laura and Liz will run green workshops when things return to near normal

**EIGHTY-THREE PER CENT OF THOSE THAT RESPONDED ACTUALLY WANTED A ZERO-WASTE SHOP IN NEWPORT**

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aren't working and so we've been able to build Sero into something that truly does support people and provides them with what they need to start or maintain their zero-waste journey.

### So the pandemic hasn't dented the success of Sero?

People called us 'brave' for starting up in this unpredictable time but honestly, we have found plenty of positives. Lots of events moved from face-to-face to online which meant they were much more accessible to us. Many Business Wales webinars which we attended on Zoom were initially scheduled to take place in North or West Wales – a long way to travel when you're starting out. We engaged with customers via social media, and so we managed to build up a following before we started to trade. When our physical store is open, we hope to provide deliveries and click and collect services like other zero-waste shops have done, especially if more serious lockdown restrictions are reintroduced.

### Is zero-waste shopping more expensive or is that a myth?

There are plenty of financial benefits to shopping zero-waste. For starters, you will be buying your food by weight, not the pre-packaged quantities available at supermarkets. This means you're going to save money and avoid food waste by only walking out of the shop with what you need. Zero-waste shops also encourage reuse so you're investing in items that will last and you won't be spending money replacing on a regular basis. For example, buying one beeswax wrap instead of regularly topping up your clingfilm or foil. We also encourage secondhand over new by providing access to things such as repair cafes that allow you to fix things instead of throwing out and buying new, and clothes swaps that encourage our customers to move away from fast fashion. Our green workshops that will be run out of our shop will also allow local residents to learn new skills in making their own soaps, etc.

### What have been your best sellers in these early months?

Our kitchen cleaning and bathroom refills have been really popular. Things such as body wash, shampoo, conditioner, multipurpose cleaners and washing up liquid are notoriously difficult to buy plastic-free so offering customers a way to continually reuse these containers has been really well received. Some of our reusable 'eco swaps' allow our customers to buy reusable alternatives to single-use items – our beeswax wraps are a really easy place to start in the kitchen so first-time shoppers generally pick them. 🐝

Find Sero at [serozerowaste.com](http://serozerowaste.com) and on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram @serozerowaste