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COVID-19 changed how Small Business Enterprises (SMEs) operated in Kawerau during lockdown. Local businesses were left out in the cold with no visible support or communication on the pandemic available to them as they went into Level 4. Industrial Symbiosis Kawerau (ISK) developed a database by securing phone numbers listed on shop frontages, via websites and social media, this formed a Kawerau SME directory allowing COVID-19 updates to be sent directly to local businesses keeping them abreast of any situation coming to hand.

Of the Kawerau SMEs 14% operated at Lvl 4 as essential businesses, 68% operated at Lvl 3 allowing phone and online orders with contactless delivery or collection, Lvl 2 saw a huge increase to 93% allowing customers to physically shop with social distancing. The government wage subsidy was taken up by around 93% of the Kawerau SMEs. Businesses found innovative ways to continue trading without opening their doors and adapted their products or services using social media, websites. Phone ordering combined with home delivery proved most successful and well received within the Kawerau community.

The EBoP Civil Defence and Chamber of Commerce worked alongside the neighbouring towns to provide financial and pastoral support. Kawerau SMEs were grateful for the assistance that the Chamber provided during COVID-19 ensuring they had the tools necessary to re-open for business.

The Eastern Bay Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with Industrial Symbiosis held their first meeting of Kawerau SMEs to secure a steering group, it was encouraging to hear from local business owners that the support the chamber has provided so far has been beneficial. The Chamber looks forward to continuing conversations with the steering group which will drive what business support will look like in Kawerau

The Eastern Bay Chamber of Commerce values the relationships that have been built during the COVID-19 business support response. "It has provided an opportunity to work together to support, educate, connect and build business capability in the Kawerau business community" said Lucy Devany, General Manager Chamber of Commerce, "we will continue to deliver services such as training workshops, business support and networking opportunities going forward".

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