**The SOSE Spotlight podcast**

**Series 1, Episode 5 transcription – Our Enterprising Communities team - Who are they?**

**Host – Lesley Forsyth**

Hello and welcome to the SOSE Spotlight podcast. Wherever you are in Dumfries and Galloway, the Scottish Borders or beyond. If you're a business entrepreneur, community enterprise or aspiring to be one, this is for you.

We are South of Scotland enterprise and we're all about helping people in the South of Scotland. To thrive, grow and fulfil your best potential.

Today's topic is a focus on our enterprising communities team.

Who are they?

How important are community groups and social enterprises to the people of the South of Scotland.

What support can the team provide?

I'm Lesley Forsyth and with me today is Lisa Denham, a member of SOSEs Enterprise and Communities team. Lisa lives in the South of Scotland and has extensive experience working with community groups at both Scottish Borders and Live Borders.

Hello, and welcome to the SOSE Spotlight, Lisa.

**Guest - Lisa Denham**

Hi Lesley, it’s great to be here today. Thank you.

**Host**

To kick us off, can you tell us a wee bit more about the make-up of the enterprise and communities team and its role within SOSE?

**Guest**

Yeah, so the enterprise and communities team. It sits within the place and Enterprise Directorate within the South of Scotland Enterprise. There are 7 advisors of which I'm one of those, and there's three specialists and we cover the length and breadth of the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. The advisors and the specialists, we're supported by two enterprise and communities manager and our head of Enterprise and Communities.

Because of the backgrounds that we come from, that ranges from working for charities, voluntary groups, trusts, funding bodies, public sector agencies. We understand the challenges that groups and enterprises face. As a team, we have specific skills and knowledge, whether that be from heritage, culture, sector, rural development, fundraising.

There's always someone available to help out in the team or someone that knows the answer and we work with and support enterprises of all sizes and sectors and with our knowledge and skills, we aim to help enterprises grow and become more sustainable.

**Host**

Well, Lisa, it's great to hear how much experience and knowledge the team have to help these community groups.

Why are community groups and social enterprises so important to the fabric of the South of Scotland?

**Guest**

Groups and social enterprises are so important. There's groups and organisations out there delivering a range of vital services. Enterprises selling products and goods, so really they're at the heart of the economic, social, environmental success of the South of Scotland.

It's important to us as an organisation and within the team that communities are able to grow their capacity and resilience over the long term. Last year, for example, we supported 15 new or helped improved income generating community assets and we also supported 34 community enterprises and 9 charities were supported.

Our communities generate economic activity, so they've got a really important role to play in terms of that social impact and the social and well-being of the area and these groups and organisations help bring so many new ideas and inspiring projects and initiatives to the South of Scotland.

**Host**

That sounds great Lisa and given some great examples of what work the team have done over the last 12 months, there might be some people listening today thinking hold on a minute, I think there might be something for me to get some help.

So if a community group or a social enterprise get in touch with the team looking for some help, what are the first steps you would take with that organisation?

**Guest**

So we respond to vast ranges of inquiries from social enterprises and community groups so they can reach our team by coming through the South of Scotland enterprise phone line or through the e-mail inquiries via our client hub and then their inquiry will be assigned to one of our community development advisor.

We understand that all groups and organisations are different. They could be at the beginning of their enterprising journey or that spark stage with just an initial idea, but they're not too sure how to take it forward or who to speak to. Or it might be they need specific advice or even some training, or they've been established for some time but are looking to now grow.

There are a number of steps that we go through at the beginning of a conversation with a group or enterprise but what we're really looking to find out is where are they on their journey and how can we help. Firstly, we assess the group's needs and how their activities contribute to the wider objectives of SOSE, and that could be either social, environmental or economic and then as advisors we work with the groups to find out more about them and try and find out a little bit more how they're governed, how they're set up and what policies and procedures do they have in place and how inclusive are they as an organisation. We also look at the group's finances and their cash position. The group could be purely charitable, could be grant dependent. They could be trading or do they plan to trade and that's where we can come in and help and give some advice. On occasion sometimes groups are at risk of losing their funding so we welcome organisations to come and speak to us about that and find out where they need help.

We also sign post other organisations for more appropriate support as necessary and we work closely with a large amount of funders and partners, which include Borders Community Action, Scottish Borders Council, First Port, Just Enterprise and also sector specific organisations such as the Land Funds, Historic Environment Scotland, Local Energy Scotland and that's just to name a few of the partners and bodies that we work closely with.

**Host**

Thank you, Lisa, and I really liked when you said about the spark stage. I think it's important that people listen today if they have got that idea, they've got that spark then please, it's time to get in touch.

Following on from that, what is the range of support your team can provide a Community group or social enterprise with.

**Guest**

So the specific support that we can provide a Community group or enterprise with and we understand that groups come in all shapes and sizes. So firstly, it could be about how to set up a community enterprise and help and could be firstly an individual or that group to identify the right structure. It could be support to a group to help develop a business plan, or if they're looking to develop some new products or services it could be advice on generating income and you know how to move away from being dependent on grants.

We do provide a lot of support in terms of Community asset development and what we mean by that is maybe helping a group to look at what's involved when taking ownership of a Community building or developing an existing building or even acquiring a piece of land. We also provide support to groups and enterprises that have hit difficulties and need help to recover and this could involve providing advice and guidance on issues around their governance and their finances. We can also help with funding for projects, in particular capital project, but if we're unable to fund something or it's not eligible, then we can sign post to more appropriate funders and overall, we can also support groups access specific knowledge within the wider South of Scotland Enterprise and this could be such as support Net Zero Project, Circular economy and also coaching too as well.

Often we're described as being the critical friend to organisations and we're often asked to help groups facilitate discussions around future planning and direction, which is sometimes questions that groups don't like to ask themselves. But often we're called in to help and give some guidance, but overall our aim is to support organisations to generate their own income and be more sustainable in the future

**Host**

That’s a lot of support Lisa and over a vast area as well, so that sounds great. There are hundreds of community groups and social enterprises that we have worked with.

Can you share with us some of your favourite stories of groups and organisations? SOSE has worked with so far from across the South. Of Scotland.

**Guest**

That's a really tricky question, Lesley. There's so many groups and enterprises that are worthy of the airtime today. If I had to choose one, the one that springs to mind is one of the first organisations that I was assigned to work with and that's Tweeddale Youth Action, who are based in Peebles and Innerleithen and they provide core youth work activities, drop in sessions to young people roughly aged between 16 to 24, and they have been on a journey in terms of looking at their business plan and their strategy and moving away from Grant income.

Over the years they've developed a really successful food punks initiative, which was outside catering, but most importantly, training up young people in terms of food preparation skills that are required to be become a chef in the longer term if they wanted to, working as part of a team. And last year, they spotted an opportunity to branch out and set up some new premises on Peebles High Street and develop a pizza training project. So we were able to help guide them on that journey with their business plan, looking at their cash flow and their finances and other income.

So they are due to open in a few weeks on Peebles High Street and they will support young people into further education, training and employment and they will also be selling pizzas to members of the public too. So you'll be able to find out more about that project on our website. Hopefully and its a really, really interesting case study and we hope that provides some inspiration to other groups and enterprises too.

**Host**

Well, Lisa, that sounds brilliant. And you know, as a parent myself and living and working in the South of Scotland, I always think it's great to hear of enterprises and project that are working alongside youth and helping them pave their way through life and what career they're looking for so that sounds really interesting and exciting.

Finally, if you are a social enterprise or Community group, listening to this podcast and looking for some help to make a difference in their area, what should they do?

**Guest**

First of all, have a look on our website, there's quite a few case studies on there on how our support has helped groups and organisations achieve what they wanted to do. It's not all plain sailing, so we do encourage groups to share their experiences, good and bad, with each other as well. If anyone's got an idea or they're stuck with something, or really just don't know who to speak to, just don't hesitate to get in touch with us. Just get in touch through the website or give us a call and your inquiry would be directed through to the communities team and we'd be ready there to help you.

**Host**

Excellent. Thank you, Lisa, for coming along today and sharing inspiring stories of South of Scotland community groups and social enterprises.

And if you are looking for support with a business idea or community project, 1-2-1 coaching, practical learning, or you’re interested in networking events across the South of Scotland, then please get in touch, and come and meet us.

Our website: southofscotlandenterprise.com

Or send us an email:
clienthub@sose.scot

Or call us on 0300 304 8888. That’s 0300 304 8888.

We’d love your feedback, and please subscribe so you don’t miss our next episode.

I’m Lesley Forsyth. Thanks for listening to The SOSE Spotlight. Do join us again next week for more inspiring business stories from around the South of Scotland.