**The SOSE Spotlight podcast**

**Series 2, Episode 4 transcription**

**Presenter – 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.

This series is focused on Pathways, the Scottish Government funded pilot that has been delivered by South of Scotland Enterprise, which aims to help aspiring entrepreneurs across the region to find the confidence and strength to begin their business journey. In these six episodes, we will be speaking to SOSE staff, our dedicated Pathways coaches and the clients to find out all about Pathways and their experience.

We will be finding out: What is it? Why is it critical for aspiring entrepreneurs? Why now? What opportunities are there for you and how can South of Scotland Enterprise help?

I'm Lesley Forsyth and with me today is Susan Harkins, Head of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at SOSE. Susan was involved in ensuring the South was chosen to lead the Pathways pilot by Scottish Government. We will find out more about how Pathways came about and what it plans to achieve. Hello and welcome to the SOSE Spotlight Susan.

**Guest – Susan Harkins, Head of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, SOSE**

Hi, Lesley.

**Lesley**

So I'm going to jump right in and ask you to tell our listeners what is Pathways?

**Susan**

So, Pathways is a funded pilot for a year, funded by the Scottish Government, and it's to support people who are exploring self-employment, who might have an idea, wanting to start up in business. And we have a team of coaches who will help people explore that option. And we also have a grant of up to £1000 that can support that

**Lesley**

Brilliant. So there's a lot of support out there for people at the minute, isn’t there?

**Susan**

There is a particularly in that early stage. We had identified a gap in support and we felt that this was pre-, sort of, Business Gateway support where people were really exploring. It was more about the focus on the individual, what they wanted, how it would affect them for starting a business. So, really that coaching helps people identify more about their mindset, why they want to set up a business and then they can access all the great support that Gateway have around cash flows and business planning, but we really focused on the coaching of the individual to get them prepared for starting a business.

**Lesley**

It's excellent that the South of Scotland has been chosen to deliver Pathways. Can you explain why you think the South is an ideal place for this type of project?

**Susan**

Yes. So, South of Scotland is a region of entrepreneurs. We are a rural area, so naturally, people will set up their own little side hustle to compliment maybe their employment or they'll set up in business because they might not get a job with their skills, you know, that meet their skills. So there's a lot of entrepreneurship going on. What we wanted to do was reach out even further and tap into really that untapped market of individuals that wanted to start up in business. And sometimes individuals find that quite difficult. Where to start? So the play space coach approach is a good way of getting people to engage and explore their business ideas.

**Lesley**

For any of our listeners today who might be thinking “this is for me”, but just not sure what the programme involves, can you tell us a little bit more about the support people will receive through Pathways and their dedicated coach?

**Susan**

Yeah. So we've got a team of 12 coaches across the region, all with dedicated areas. So, the idea is that they are in the place, they get to know the community, they're easily accessible by people. And you'll have up to six hours coaching. We have that as a guidance. Some people might need a little less. Some people might need more.

So we're very much driven by the individual and what they need. So you'll get a dedicated coach who will work with you. Also, you can claim up to £1000 to purchase things to help you start up in business. So, maybe stock or things like that and also the coach will then get you connected to what the next path is within your journey.

We also have various partners, so like Volunteer Matters. So we have had some clients who have came in who are not quite ready to start the business because they might need a driving licence for example. While they're waiting to do their tests and sit their tests they can go to Volunteer Matters and get some experience in volunteering so that they're they're still keeping that idea going. So that kind of thing.

**Lesley**

So, it's brilliant to hear about the levels of support and that one to one support that people in the community are getting. And the focus on under-represented groups and how we can help them get their business idea off the ground. Can you tell us a wee bit more about why it is important to offer these programmes that are dedicated to under-represented groups?

**Susan**

It's to give everybody a chance to explore self-employment for starting a business. And what we tend to find is under-represented groups are not well-connected and particularly in a rural area it can be even worse to be connected. So, the idea of Pathways is to get people who wouldn't normally come forward because they either don't know about it or they might be a bit less confident or they just don't think it's for them but they've always had this burning idea that they'd like to start a business, but they just don't know where to get started, where to dip their toe into. So, the coaches, the Pathways coaches, the Pathways programme is about attracting people so everybody gets the opportunity.

Nobody knows where the next entrepreneurs coming from, nobody knows where the next business idea is coming from. It can come from anywhere, you know. It doesn't necessarily have to come from academia. It doesn't necessarily come out of colleges. It might just come out of that individual who just has a great idea, but they just will not know where to start and it's the whole idea to stimulate that business birth rate, which then means more people starting up in business. They may want to grow their businesses. That's not always necessarily the case.

We're there to help people start businesses and be driven by what they want to do. But ultimately having home-grown businesses in the South of Scotland that might in the future expand is all good for the economy and it's good for people's well-being as well.

**Lesley**

So, the programme has been running for a number of months now. Can you tell us about any Pathway success stories so far that you're aware of?

**Susan**

Just in general, the programme itself has really been beyond our expectations. I think we've reached the 300 referral mark the other day, which was beyond our expectations. We didn't expect to have that level of interest in the programme, so it shows that there's lots of people out there wanting to explore the business.

In terms of success we've got various different success stories, a lot of them are just people feel really supported through the programme. They’re away looking and exploring their ideas.

We've had about 80 people accessing the grant and that's been from: people looking to set up their own premises to people buying stock or have got some training to get them to their business idea.

So, I'm not going to pick one person out because that's probably a bit unfair, but it really feels to us and this is the first part of it, it's a year project, so at the moment we'll be tracking to see who goes on to start. It's probably a bit early to see that at the moment, but you know track and see who'll start a business, but that's not. The ultimate aim of it is, yes, it'll be great if people start in business, but actually for us, it's more about people that do explore it, might think this isn't for me, and that's equally as important if you don't want people to set up to fail.

So, it's about really exploring the options, making that decision that go on to do something else or you might go away and do some volunteering and come back or they might access other support there or get a job. So ultimately success to us isn't just about starting a business, it's about that whole thing around maybe people realise actually it's not for them, so they maybe get a job, get some nice skills and the coaching really helps some along the way to realise where they actually want to go with their career. So success could be multiple things for us.

**Lesley**

I think as well as a success, even just realising the number of enquiries that are coming through, it's really showing people's confidence in the coaches to support them with that idea and not being scared to come forward and say I need a bit of help or I've got this idea. And having that confidence in people out in the community that are then going to network with people and build those relationships. I mean even that alone's a success, isn't it?

**Susan**

I can’t over-emphasise how important connections are. It's the way in. It's getting to know people. It gives people the confidence to take that step into a networking event or or just take that step into another seminar that might be running, getting to know other people, and then that, the networking and connections. I think sometimes it's a bit underestimated, it really to me is more about just getting to know people, getting to know what's going on in your local community. Or nationally or regionally. And that can really help people with access and support. You know, it could help your business. It could help you find your next job. You just never know who you're going to bump into. So those connections are really important. I think that's a success.

There's also just been so much great feedback for the coaches as well, which has been phenomenal and people really value in that coaching service. So that's that's been a success. The success for me is just what you said, is helping people get connected. Just taking that step and you just never then know what's going to happen because nobody can really predict it. So that's the exciting thing about it.

**Lesley**

Finally Susan, what is your message for anyone listening who thinks they may benefit from all the support provided through Pathways?

**Susan**

Get in touch. Have a conversation with us and you know it may be that when we have that conversation, it's not the coaching. You might find it's something else you need and we'll get you to that place, whether it's Business Gateway, or it's a SOSE advisor or it's one of our key partner organisations.

**Lesley**

Thank you, Susan, for coming along today and sharing the amazing work that Pathways is delivering and what South of Scotland Enterprise is doing to support new entrepreneurs. To find out more about Pathways or to sign up for more support we would encourage you to get in touch now. Our website is southofscotlandenterprise.com/pathways or send us an email to the client hub, which is clienthub@sose.scot or give us a call 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. Thank you for listening to the SOSE Spotlight. Do join us again next week for more inspiring Pathways stories from around the South of Scotland.