

# The SOSE Spotlight podcast

## Series 3, Episode 1 transcription – JagArt82

### Host – Sarah Lunney

Hello and welcome to Series 3 of 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're 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 all about putting the spotlight on the inspiring businesses we have supported and highlighting our hidden heroes.

I'm Sarah Lunney, the Net Zero SOSE Modern Apprentice and with me today is James Gaffney, the owner and founder of JagArt82.

James is a neurodivergent artist whose motto is inspire to be inspired. With his team, he offers workshops and personalised mentorship in creative fields for various groups, including children. And they're about to grow their business as they move into the Scottish Borders.

Hi, James. It's great to have you here.

### Guest – James Gaffney

Thanks for having me. So my full name is James Alexander Gaffney, so that'll answer the JagArt82 bit that everybody asks me. Thanks for inviting us along, you know, it's nice to be thought of, so aye thanks for that. I can get to use my accent, you know, being in this part of the borders, people will understand me.

### Host

Exactly! Well we're really excited. So, do you want to just kick us off with telling us a bit about the story of how your business was formed?

### Guest

Aye. So, the business was formed in 2020, so that date will probably rhyme for people because it was back in COVID land. My story is, as a neurodivergent I was an alcoholic

and a drug addict. I'm not ashamed that. That's part of my past, you know, and it set the foundation.

So on the 7th of July 2020, I sought help and I got clean and sober. So I've been sober ever since. And I think the 27th of July 2020, I started [laughing] I'm laughing cause I started to question myself and say what else you been lying about? You know, I didn't want to admit about my neurodivergence so I chose alcohol and drugs, you know, and that's a part.

So when I was tidying up, I found a wee canvas and this story is just so...aye it set the precedence for what we do now, but I decided to paint it black, so I painted it black and I painted this wee cockerel. I'll say it's magnificent, you know, my first painting. Then you know somebody said this about me the other day, I'm a risk taker, so I put it out on Facebook. You know how hard that is to put something out on social media when you've never done it, but you've pretended you were able to paint. You know, it's like...oh...and after I done I was like oh, it's done. Then my friend messaged me and said 'who painted that?' And I said, 'it was me', [he said] 'no it wasn't'. And I said 'it was me!' So you know, all the years that I was lying that I couldn't paint, it turned out I could paint and you know, it literally happened like that.

And then all of a sudden, fast forward to now we're doing everything that we do. It's, and, you know, I tell people. It's not been easy, but it has been certainly worth it, you know. From painting to writing to doing everything that's to do with art. You know, I do that because I want to lead from the front. I want to be...I want to be the example that I always thought people were, you know, like looking out there and saying to people, you know, I do this and I do that. And if there is anyone listening to this that has met me, you know, when I said in 2020 everything that I was going to do, everything is starting transpire now so at JagArt82 we are about to, we don't say global because we're already in 15 different countries with the paintings. I just mean we're about to set the precedence for things that we've been working hard on and I know that's a big massive ADHD answer for what you were asking, I hope I've answered it.

## **Host**

No, you have and thanks for sharing cause it can be hard to like talk about your experience kind of building... But it's important to know because it...it's what started the business, so it's...

## **Guest**

It's the foundations.

## **Host**

100%. We're talking about a little bit of how the business has developed. You've got some new projects coming up. Do you wanna share a little bit about what's coming up for you?

## Guest

Aye. I know this Podcast will come out a wee bit later so I'll be able to... I'm gonna do a couple of exclusives cause nobody knows this yet.

So, projects that we work on it isn't just painting, it isn't just writing you know. I have been working hard alongside our amazing team and we are fully AQ accredited. Now what that means is we can then take people, kids, adults everybody up to level 2, which is a world renowned accreditation. So this is a qualification that they'll get under JagArt82. You know how proud that makes me feel, you know, it's like I was a bad boy at school I was labelled this and that and you know. Now I'm able to guide people in the way of JagArt82, you know, it's a massive thing.

You can see why we've kept it really, really quiet but you know we also have our own Academy, which is the junior JagArt Academy. These are wonderful, amazing wee people, wee kids that are just...like they...they deserve an opportunity. Now, what happened there was we have been to 67 schools, maybe a wee bit more and that's a great honour, you know, for somebody who was not a big fan of schools and now as an adult later, or sorry as an adult man child, I get to...I get to go round. So I hand pick these kids because they have a quality, it's just, it's gonna be amazing. And this year we're working on something fantastic with them. But, and again I can say this because their graduation is in two weeks time, they have passed their entry level in art under JagArt82, you know this is...this is something that's amazing. I find things in the world that need filled with things, you know, like it's a hard world out there right now. Education systems are hard, you know. So we can maybe alleviate a wee tiny bit of that by guiding these kids and adults and giving them a wee boost into whatever. Now, some of these junior JagArtists, they are not all artists. Some of them have been picked because they are artists, some of them are writers and some of them are talkers, you know, I'm putting them together. You can imagine. I'm getting excited about this because these kids are amazing. They're already amazing and they're gonna be even more amazing. And they'll also house our name, JagArt82.

We're also working on a production that we've been working on for a wee while. So we've got 5 episodes to film 5, 10 minute episodes of Shadows of the Boat House. And again the name...the title, Shadows of the Boat House, it's a period drama with a wee bit... because I'm a bit crazy, it's got a bit of craziness in it and Shadows, because everything I do, I mean, I don't hide from my past as we said it shapes the foundations of who I am. And if I'm true to my word, you know everything I do has a shadow. So it's like whether it be addiction, whether it be neurodivergence, whether it be... But I don't hide it, I put it in plain sight. So it felt right that I called it Shadows of the boathouse. I mean, back to the kids books there's a Shadow in that, and even in the paintings and etcetera, etcetera. And you know somewhere along the line, neurodivergent me has literally just went for it and been leaving all these bread crumbs, but not just for people, for me. When I find a wee bread crumb I'm like [to myself] did you mean you put that in there is that there or is it just there? It's like, you know, I did [mean to put it there]. It's just great. The books are fantastic as well. You know, I have to say it because I wrote it, I wrote them, but they're

kids books and, as I was saying to you whilst we were introducing ourselves, it's like these books are so much more than kids books. There's another story inside them. I was able to adapt my sobriety, which has been a fantastic journey but not all easy, into kids books and we're now on our third book. But you know how hard it is to be... to get published. So I decided to just as in typical JagArt82 style, decided to just do all our own stuff. So we get them printed, we illustrate them, we get them all done. You know, it's like, but if anybody's listening, I am absolutely out there for a publisher. You know, it would be fantastic to add that to what we're doing. So if anybody does know of anybody that can put us in touch with that, because we give our time everywhere. So it would be nice if that wee part of me could just let me paint and let me write and then just give it to somebody. And it's been great that we could do all that and we have fantastic fans out there that are really solid and they love everything we do. But it'd be great that I could owe it to them, by having somebody who is a publisher who could help us with that.

**Host**

It sounds really exciting. There's a lot coming up. Maybe you're teaching the future Picasso. Who knows?

**Guest**

Funny, that's my cat's name, 'Picatso'. Because that's my...that's my favourite artist.

**Host**

That's brilliant. And you've just moved to Kelso for the business.

**Guest**

Yeah.

**Host**

Do you wanna talk a bit more about that. What's that going to open up for you?

**Guest**

So, aye I'll just tell everybody.

So I've been keeping it quite secret because as I said, there is a negative shroud cause I've found in this world that people are... I think probably they're scared of success. They don't ever ask you...and that's why when people like yourself ask me on things like this, I absolutely jump on it because it gives me an opportunity to say, you know, these people don't like success because they don't understand it.

You know, all the times when I've cried myself to sleep or I've thought of myself not worthy of these things. So now it's our time to show the world, you know, in a nice, humble way that we're ready to grow as a company. And, you know, over the borders, into Kelso, which is a fantastic place. Kelso stole my heart probably 4 1/2 years ago. When I went to a wee meeting there and Kelso is just one of they places that...I was really adamant that it was Kelso, and if you've ever been there and you've been in the

courtyard and the...[I meant] the square sorry, and the sun comes out and you just stand there and as a neurodivergent, I get that. People would have been staring at me and they're like 'that guys just standing there' cause I don't smile on cue. So it was like the sun coming [out] it was just nice it felt right. So when the opportunity came up and our amazing co-founder now, Jan, found this place I was like 'this is it. This is the place'.

So on the ground floor...So ground floor is for business...So ground floor we've got a big table, so that's the boardroom. I keep calling it a living room, but I need to say it's a boardroom [laughter]. So the boardroom is a big table. And again, thank you very much to SOSE for that because SOSE stepped in and they gave us the funding for the table and the chairs, and it's amazing you need to come and visit. So ground floor, and it's accessible as well, so for me that's really important. And then upstairs we have the office where Jan will... I was going to say live [laughter] Well, I'm sure we give her some time off. So Jan will be in there and then we have an amazing costume designer, so she will be in our other room, as well as an artist this girl is amazing and she is very, very back office, but she's fantastic. If you get a chance look at the website you'll see the costumes. She's amazing. I can't wait to see her work and steal some ideas from her. Aj she'll not like that. And then on the other level, you've got me and Ian, and that's Jan's husband as well as an amazing artist. He's just he's...he doesn't even know his own skill and we...well I call it the penthouse. So we're on the top and we get to see the river and all that stuff and it's just exciting.

But you know a bit selfish of us cause you know we are there to grow, we're there to grow. Not only as a company, but as human beings, you know I want to learn for these guys as well and it took me 4 1/2 years to find these amazing human beings. They...they just fit in and the company is...the company logo is a square and everybody...see every time I do an interview I say it's like...that's the only box I'll put myself in. When people say 'oh, you're always thinking outside the box' and I'm like there's no box, but I needed four people including myself in order for this to transpire. And we've found a place and it feels like home. I know that sounds cheesy, but see when you've been out there in the wild with whatever neurodivergence or the other bits. This feels like home. I mean, I'm smiling the now cause, this is exciting. We'll also be able to offer classes there, you know, the Junior JagArt Academy in Berwick, that will continue to do what it does there.

But here's the exciting part we are moving...I always message the guys and say, 'right, get your stuff, we're heading for the Borders at dawn'. And literally that's what we're doing. This is like we are putting our stuff, we're going over the borders, but here's the great part, we're also bringing all the other stuff that we've yet to show people. You know, we have a, as you said earlier, we have got a fantastic photographer, Nicole. She's a young girl, 19 and we went to another school over the borders in Eyemouth and they said, 'oh, we got this girl [who wants to work with you] would you mind?' and at that time it was just me and Jan and I said lets have a wee word [with her] and we met her and she was just exactly what we were looking for. She fits in like a wee jigsaw piece. You know and her photographs and like...My team's amazing and I don't mind telling people that. And this girl took a photo of the production team and gave the production team

characters, their soul. If anybody gets anything from that, that was just, that was such a moment that she was able to put a camera on, take a picture. And I was like a printed it all off to show everybody. And I was like 'see the faces that you made, that's what we need for the production. That's it'. And it was just...there's loads of stuff, man, that is...

We're all about giving away. That's why [the motto is] inspired to be inspired. I'm inspired today by coming here. As you can tell earlier I was excited and it's like, it's right that if we are anything who we say we are the motto inspired to be inspired. When I go places I'm inspired. I'll go home and I'll start writing tonight or I'll sit and paint and you guys have inspired that. It's the same everywhere we go, but I go back and tell people, like, this painting I painted because you said that or this part of the writing in that book.

So nobody knows [this] but the kids books I write, are actually based on real people. Some of them who have made me feel uncomfortable, which is alright because there's growth in that, but only I know the true characters, but they're based on real people. If anyone wants a wee Easter egg it's in and around Berwick. You know, and it's like that's...is it a gift or is it just something I like doing? I like to be able to show people what they can achieve because somebody along the line like Jan and Ian and our amazing Roz. They believe somewhere along the line that what we're doing is worth it and it's like, so again and having SOSE to come and show us things, that's amazing. Like when you said you wanted us on a podcast I was like 'right let's do it'. And you seen the video and we were in a car park [laughing] and I was like Jan, the phones not working and then all of a sudden we're on.

These things mean to me because, we get to become a voice for people, whether it be neurodivergent or neurotypical, just being human beings, you know, I get to, to be able to be somebody, and it not all about me I need to make that clear. A lot of people think that this is the James Show. It isn't the James Show, it's the everybody show. It's like that's why we do all the stuff. That's why we protect what we've got because we want to be able to show everybody, this is what we're doing and you contributed. That's the whole point. It's probably the most unselfish thing I've ever done in my life is to have the company in the way I've set it up. So yeah, hope that answers it.

## **Host**

Yeah, 100%. It is absolutely incredible. You're really open about your neurodivergence. I'm wondering if you could talk a bit more about like, the challenges and successes of being neurodivergent and an artist, trying to balance this business with your personal art and making it for yourself and making sure that your art isn't like a job, you still want to enjoy it.

## **Guest**

Yeah, but that...I mean...I don't think I've been asked that question to be fair, that's a good one. But I am very open about it because as I was saying, yeah, somewhere along the line somebody will need what I've, what I've went through I'm all about leaving bread crumbs and all about the people who are coming in behind me, and as long as I do that

to the best of my ability, then they'll get something out of it. As a neurodivergent, like I said earlier, getting sober was the start of it, and it's like, uh, you know, like I'm like, I never really told anybody I was autistic. Happy to tell you I was ADHD because I could protect myself with that and be a bit lazy and use it as a kind of excuse, but I had to be truly honest with myself from like... I'm a scared wee boy most of the time, but I'm not non... I'm not non-verbal. I'm able to talk to people and tell them things. And so my painting became my voice. My writing became the voice. It's no coincidence that there's a story inside a story. There's a story inside the painting. The paintings then became part of me, you know, I have struggled a lot of my life, but to be able to have a painting as your voice. So a lot...I'll sit with a lot of people and I always say to them is it OK if I sit and paint and then I am fully engaged, so I'll just get my bag and I'll sit and I'll paint and normally I'll give it away to somebody, so that's me giving away somebody else's problems. But I've been able to paint it, so it's partly my problems and it was like one of the light bulb moments thinking, you know, this is the rest of my life, I will paint until my wee body gives up. You know, it's like that is what it is for me.

So we know the criticism that we get. I take it on the chin. Because it is hard, I never ever say this is easy, but being autistic and ADHD, I fight with myself constantly like before I get out of my bed, you know, I have...I have things to do to take, take care of my addiction. You know, I have to get up and do meditation and calm myself and then I'm not gonna lie as soon as I get out of my bed it's like, right, let's go, what are we doing. So like the normal 9-5 jobs I can't do stuff like that. It's just like, I struggle with it and obviously addiction led me there. But let me tell you that even when I'm saying about the negative stuff it'll grow. It'll help me grow. It gives me what I've got, and see being brutally honest and humble, it leaves yourself wide open for the rest of the world to come and attack you. But you know I'm not, I'm not a bad person and never have been. It's just I've accepted that I am autistic. I am ADHD. I have dyslexia and all the other stuff. I'm alright with that today.

I think for me you've got me a right point because in 2025 I am starting to take...not control, but I'm starting to take back a wee bit, but that's very, very hard. As a neurodivergent, you know how hard that is to say no to people? Very hard, but with the help from Jan and the team I was like, you know you need to... you need to start asking more for help cause, I'm all about that and other places where I say my words I always say, ask for help and that's important being a neurodivergent. But there are days that go past and if I'm being honest with myself, I've destroyed a lot of paintings, and I tell people don't destroy anything because you need to learn how you got here. But even in that, even destroying those paintings, it'll help me grow. It helped me grow into this and I keep everything now. So painting, I'm always putting, writing and painting together when it's James's painting, if you ever get a lot of the... like there bright, there's massive blocks in it. And I'm wearing my bright orange jumper and I like, I like to be matching. So that appeases my autistic self. But the blocks are societal barriers, and I always say to people you know, go back and read the story that I've added with the painting. That's me just being able to cope with what I'm going through and the mindset and the societal barriers that are put there because they're blocks, you know, they're blocks that I've had

to come up against, whether it be relationships, girlfriends or with family and everyone says 'we understand'. Six months later, folk don't understand. I get up out my bed, I am like this, I talk like this, I just continue to go the way I'm going. But I'm humble enough if I make a mistake and I go, you know, 'I shouldn't have done that or maybe there's another way that you can do that' and I think that's the difference between, old me and me now is that I'm alright to be able to go uh, you know, 'I shouldn't have done that' because you learn from these things. If I'm true to my word and again back to the motto, Inspired to be inspired. It comes with these bits. You have to be true to yourself and say 'uh, you know that didn't work' because for every 50 paintings, there's at least...they sell one. And I've got another 50 there that, that are still in in my possession. But hey, painting is my thing. If there's anybody listening and they want to find it, try everything. To the outside world that see JagArt82 there're always...people do look and go 'ah you're always doing this, you're doing that, you're doing everything. No I'm not. What I'm trying to do is find the stuff that works for me and blueprint everything so I can say to people, hence why we've now got a building in Kelso. We've now got a place that we can go and we can call our own. But show people how we can do this.

As I keep saying not just as a neurodivergent, but as a human being to be able to show the world and go, you know, this is us. I am fully out there. This is what I do. Come along and ask us questions like these podcasts, these are really, really open.

I hope that answers it because that was a long one. That was the first, the first time that that somebody had really went for the for the question and I like that because that's where the growth is. These aren't just paintings. They're not just books. They are not just classes that we do. They're not just projects. They're a piece of me, now they're a piece of my team. It's like, you know we have a duty of care for each other to keep continuing and going and if somebody sees something, then they have a look for us. You'll see my story and you'll see others stories. As I said, it's not the James show.

Painting set me free along with everything else. But that's where I find my calmness is by painting and I'm not trained. And a good friend of mine, Jonathan. He took me to the side and said 'you're an artist. Stop saying you're not trained. It doesn't matter how you get here. You got here' and you know, that was quite an emotional thing for me that somebody took me, 500 miles an hour James, and took me and said 'James, you're an artist'. Cause see for the first two or three years of my journey of being James from JagArt82, I was hard on myself in between that and in between painting and thinking, 'Ohh, and does, and he does that. Or she does that. And that artist does this'. And it was like you can imagine being a neurodivergent, it just overloaded. But hey, it got me to where I am and I will be humbly thankful to Johnathan for a long time for that I told him that. Forever. For those words cause words for me really sink in. Again a lot of people call it a super power, but for me it creeps on me. It creeps up on me and then the next minute a painting has like released something I'm like, that was 10 years ago, [laughing] you know?

So it's like, I guess the answer is it's my form of release, but if I'm able to, give anybody anything of what we do, that's the right thing. I get a lot of people say, how do you eat?



You know, like I eat. But you know my business doesn't make an awful lot of money, but it makes, people understand that they have more qualities to them than they thought, and that's why it's right and it's acting, it's directing and it's filming and it's this, it's that it's... Because we are all different. But if I can do as many things as I can do. Then these people will find themselves, you know, that's what it's like. I don't mind being somebody's stabilisers. Like I'll help as many people as I can but here's the, the beauty of it, if I have not painted and I will feel a little bit of stress and I have to go to work on myself before I can work with others.

### **Host**

100% thank you for sharing. That's amazing. And we're going to start wrapping up there I think, but just a final question for like future entrepreneurs that are listening that they don't know where to start but they just know they want to start something. Do you have any advice for them?

### **Guest**

Yeah. So I was once where you are. Forget about neurodivergence. Forget about neurotypical. Let's just smell it a wee bit here and if you don't try, you'll never know. If there's, if there's something there that you thought you want to do, and you're constantly putting those societal barriers on yourself, never mind other people, just try it. You'll be pleasantly surprised. Remember back to what I said about that cockerel. You know, that Cockrell painting meant a lot to me. It was also the first painting that I sold, but you know, it's like you have to take the chances you have to take the risk. You know, if you don't do that, then how are you possibly gonna get yourself to another status? Here's the one bit of advice that I tell everybody now and it is, just do it, like the Nike advert. There is other trainers, but you know like the Nike advert that really sticks in for a reason, but get yourself... do it because future you is depending on you. And if you don't, well, you'll never know.

### **Host**

That's brilliant. Thank you so much for coming along and, sharing not only the inspiring story of your business, but your own story and your own personal story, and I'm sure there's gonna be loads of people listening that are inspired and maybe future entrepreneurs are going to start their Business today because of this podcast.

### **Speaker 2**

Well, here's hoping and you know, if anybody does have any questions, if you go to JagArt82.com, there should be an e-mail address. I don't answer all of them, but Jan will answer them and then send them to me and I'll answer any questions. You know, I'm just a guy. I'm just a human being. I keep saying to people it's like. This is just a journey for everybody, but I'm just that tiny wee bit in front, so aye please do reach out. That'd be great. And thanks for having us.

**Host**

Brilliant, thank you.

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](http://southofscotlandenterprise.com)

Our email address: [clienthub@sose.scot](mailto: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.

Next week we'll be joined by another business ready to share their inspiring story with you all.

I'm Sarah Lunney. Thanks for listening to The SOSE Spotlight and do join us again next week for more inspiring business stories from around the South of Scotland.