

# The SOSE Spotlight podcast

## Series 3, Episode 3 transcription – Julia Muir Watt, Building Futures Galloway

**Host – Kenny Paterson**

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, community groups and social enterprises we have supported and highlighting our hidden heroes.

I'm Kenny Paterson and this week we're at Building Futures Galloway with one of its volunteers, Julia Muir Watt who helped create the project which led to Building Futures Galloway.

Building Futures Galloway was created in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as a youth employability scheme which offers young people the chance to be trained in traditional construction skills, ranging from joinery to masonry and blacksmithing.

And their work has recently been recognised through a national award. But more on that later.

Firstly, Julia, thanks very much for letting us come here today and great to speak to you.

**Guest – Julia Muir Watt**

No problem.

**Host**

We'll just start off by finding a bit more about why and how Building Futures Galloway was created. Can you tell us a bit more about that please?

**Guest**

When the pandemic was at its height, the Whithorn Trust was deeply concerned about the rise in youth unemployment.

It's always chronic in the South Machars area, however, by that time, it had risen several fold.

And it was of interest to us to see if we could engage directly with youth by employing them in what was at the time archaeological reconstruction.

And we took advantage of kickstart funds in 2020/21 and we created a project known as Whithorn Rebuild, which is still its name.

**Host**

The amount you've achieved over the last number of years is quite incredible, which has had a huge economic impact on the Whithorn area.

Would you tell us a bit more about the number of people you employ and also the number of people you have so far trained?

**Guest**

So currently we have 11 employees on the books, but we also have a number of specialists who are contracted in.

So that does make us of the bigger employers in the area and the impact has been the renovation of derelict workshops and indeed a couple of derelict buildings.

**Host**

And one of the recent projects you've just completed was the creation of a boat building workshop, which I believe got a bit of support from SOSE, could you tell us a little bit more about this project?

**Guest**

Yes, it's one of the more unusual things we do.

We began, as I said, with archaeology and the team constructed a bronze age log boat.

But there was then an aspiration to produce a much more sophisticated boat and we drafted in some help, which we were very fortunate to get, and that comes from Gail McGarva, who is the only woman in the UK who builds traditional boats.

After that, we wanted to find a home for this as an ongoing skill that we can offer. And we were lucky enough to secure again another empty building which was the old fire station in Whithorn, which had once been a Victorian school.

So that's where Gail is training currently, three young people, aged 16 and upwards.

**Host**

One thing I've noticed that is really key to Building Futures Galloway diversity and inclusion.

Can you tell us a bit more about how you incorporate that into the organisation, but also what benefits that provides to the overall organisation?

**Guest**

The aim of Building Futures Galloway is very specifically for those who have not, for whatever reason, reached a positive destination.

They may have left school without qualifications. They may have one or more barriers. It can be a disability, it can be a mental health condition.

We are very deliberately employing those who have not found a pathway and particularly interested in working with their hands – that is the only criteria we have.

We do not ask for qualifications and we do not ask for great achievements in their past.

All they have to do is be interested in construction, particularly of the heritage kind.

**Host**

Is there any examples of young people who have come in and thrived here and gone onto make a career or to further education?

**Guest**

So many of our original trainees have stayed with us.

Obviously some move on into different pathways in their life, which is always very positive considering when we meet them first they perhaps have no idea what they want to do.

But we have examples of people who started, for instance with no qualifications, no driving licence, stuck at home, have had short term employment just a couple of months here and there.

And we are now looking at people who have driving licences, maybe excavator licences.

We have taken them abroad and got them passports and taken them to a ship museum in Denmark.

We have young people qualifying in Health and Safety and our biggest aspiration is that we will become an awarding body, giving SVQs in joinery, boat building and masonry.

**Host**

That is really inspirational to hear.

Another really key aspect of Building Futures Galloway is around sustainability.

Can you tell us a bit more about how you incorporate that into the organisation and why it's so important?

**Guest**

It is a key part of our work and it's become increasingly important I think.

The way traditional skills actually feed into the agenda for Net Zero has become a really prime piece of what we do.

As you look around Whithorn, you see over 50 per cent of the Main Street are listed buildings, most of them are pre-1830.

If you walk up and down you see many of them have defects to roofs or chimneys or perhaps the odd bit of rot to windows.

And all of these things contribute to emissions.

They are also buildings that are going to suffer more impact as we get higher energy storms.

The care and repair for these buildings - which make up around 450,000 buildings in Scotland - is going to be key if we are to reach Net Zero.

So the team have been studying retrofit, some of them are actually studying for formal qualifications.

But they're learning on live projects, what you do for older buildings, which is not at all the same as you do for modern buildings.

So you must use breathable materials. That means using something like wood fibre for insulation rather than PIR.

It means using limecrete for flooring because concrete has such a huge environmental impact.

And we are currently working on a project with Scottish Power and Energy Networks where we are using lime-based plasters which are infused with cork, and they actually have insulating properties.

So the aim is to show how a building that was built, maybe at the start of the 19th century, can actually achieve U-values that are akin to a modern build.

And what we're learning is we must not fit older buildings with the kind of materials that we could use on modern properties.

So its very key to achieving our climate goals,

### **Host**

That work that you've talked about actually led to you picking up a VIBES Award.

It must have been a great to be recognised by a national award for the great work that you're doing.

### **Guest**

It really was.

It came as a surprise, but I think the alliance between bringing young people in who may not otherwise reach a positive destination and bringing them in to learn skills which we absolutely need to deal with the climate crisis, meant that the judges picked up that this was a good project for the Just Transition category of the VIBES Awards.

It certainly put a spotlight on that by taking us up to the Scottish Parliament.

And we're very, very keen that traditional skills are recognised nationally for the role they can play in reaching Net Zero.

### **Host**

Congratulations to everyone involved at Building Futures Galloway for that award. Much deserved.

Final question - I know a lot of blood, sweat and tears goes into organisations such as Building Futures Galloway and I just wondered if there's any sort of piece of advice you would give to someone who's looking to make a difference in their community, In the way that Building Futures Galloway have?

### **Guest**

Two qualities you probably need.

One is resilience. So it's not going to be easy if you're sticking in for the long term.

You really need long term projects. You need to plan ahead.

It's no good to the young people if it's a six month wonder and they're back on the labour market again or back where they were when they started.

But it's not going to be easy, but you also need ambition.

We're in a very small town in a remote part of Dumfries and Galloway and yet what we've done has peaked interest among policymakers and we are talking to statutory agencies, MSPs.

So there's a lot you can do and remoteness doesn't have to be a barrier.

## **Host**

Thanks very much Julia for allowing us to visit you at Building Futures Galloway to hear more about your impressive and important work.

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.

I'm Kenny Paterson. Thanks for listening to The SOSE Spotlight and do join us again next time for more inspiring business and community stories from across the South of Scotland.