

Edinburgh Napier student to open new legal business



Edinburgh Napier student Daniel Donaldson found that some people simply fall outside legal aid entitlement categories and during his studies decided to do something about it.

The young entrepreneur plans to open a new legal practice with stakeholder and community membership to ensure high quality legal services are available for everyone in Scotland, regardless of cost and access barriers.

Qualified solicitor, Daniel Donaldson will open 'Legal Spark' in Glasgow, together with his original base at Bright Red Triangle Craiglockhart, and hopes to be operational within the next 12 months.

Daniel is one winner of 38 from this year's Young Innovators Challenge, an entrepreneurial competition which rewards students who have business ideas which have a positive impact on society. The Young Innovators challenge is run by the Scottish Institute for Enterprise through the Scottish Funding Council, on behalf of the Scottish Government and is part of the Scotland CAN DO approach.

As part of his prize Daniel was awarded £2,000 of funding to help develop Legal Spark and will attend intensive workshops over the summer to help take his business to the next stage.

Legal Spark will address a growing problem in Scotland where groups who require legal support simply can't afford it. This might include:

- Families and individuals where legal aid is unavailable
- Musicians and other Creatives
- Social enterprises, charities and other third sector organisations
- Community groups
- Small businesses and start-ups

The practice will primarily operate under a regular “law centre” model in order to build a client base and engage stakeholders and community groups. At the point it becomes established, community and other stakeholder groups will be invited to take a stake in the business*. Although the service won't be free, through shared ownership these third parties will have the option to determine their own legal service needs, contribute to costs involved and receive a proportionate discounting of legal fees. Any profits generated from the practice will also be reinvested into causes which help promote access to justice such as offering a complimentary system of legal aid to individuals.

Edinburgh Napier University student, Daniel, already offers free legal advice to communities in Edinburgh and recently provided legal representation for the People and Planet Group who were protesting against the University of Edinburgh's investment portfolio which included fossil fuel companies. Legal Spark was also appointed as the official legal services partner to Pride Edinburgh, which runs the annual Gay Pride festival.

Daniel first identified the lack of high quality legal services in Scotland when he was studying a masters in commercial law. He said:

“There has been no increase in the level of civil legal aid since 1994 and as a result, in 2015, many firms no longer undertake civil legal work as it is not viable to do so. Likewise, certain areas of law such as intellectual property protection, equality and employment law are only available to

those who can afford to pay privately, which can cost upwards of £250 per hour. Thus, there are lots of groups who are therefore unable to access legal advice or representation.

“Legal Spark will help address this issue, providing high quality legal services under a community owned scheme to ensure people who need access to justice but can’t afford to go private get the best service possible.

“The Young Innovators Challenge recognises my aims and has been extremely supportive in building my confidence and business skills to take Legal Spark forward.”

Fiona Godsman, chief executive of competition organisers, Scottish Institute for Enterprise, said:

“Legal Spark is a prime example of a business which can make money while also giving back to the community and have a positive impact on society. We will continue to provide business support and advice to Daniel over the summer, and as with all winners, he is invited to pitch for a further £5,000 in funding from the Young Innovators Challenge in August.”

Daniel is also currently crowd funding to support the launch of Legal Spark. More info can be found at www.gofundme.com/legalspark. He is also looking to recruit potential partners, including other likeminded lawyers who can contact him on: contact@legalspark.co.uk.