

New one stop shop for social businesses

A new venture called Montgomery Street Lane is launched today. It is a collaboration of four of Scotland's leading support agencies, Firstport, Challenges Group, Project Scotland and Volunteering Matters and aims to be a one stop shop for charities and social businesses.

It will also act as a focal point for impact investors targeting enterprises which are addressing social challenges.

"The vision for Montgomery Street Lane is a bold one," said Josiah Lockhart, Firstport's Chief Executive. "We're building an enterprise support network for social entrepreneurs and impact investors, for start-ups and SMEs looking to grow, expand and export. We're focused on making it a place of optimism, opportunity and outcomes."

Mr Lockhart added: "We're offering these individuals a place where key support services are in one location, and where each of the Lane residents can collaborate on offering a joined-up and partnership approach to business development and growth."

Among the four organisations they lay claim to 90 years' experience across a range of fields including business consultancy, management training, exports, seed funding, impact investment, business support services, volunteering, international development, marketing and communications, and project management.

The four founders have about 40 staff and volunteers based at a refurbished 19th-century mews house just off Elm Row.

Mr Lockhart added: "We've seen the model operating successfully and impactfully in other countries, such as in Sweden, but this is the first of its type in Scotland."

Alexandra Baker, Director of Challenges, said: "Montgomery Street Lane is where an entrepreneur can come and have their business idea scrutinised, supported, and turned into a viable strategic plan that can then grow into a sustainable business. Together, Challenges, Firstport, ProjectScotland and Volunteering Matters bring a range of business options, such as management training, internships, volunteering opportunities, project management, and of course export and international market linkages. Seed funding and catalysing is another offering, as is investment should a business owner be looking to scale up, for example."

Mrs Baker cited the example of Clean Water Wave, a social enterprise that has developed a revolutionary water filter system that can remove micro- and nano-plastics as well as other toxins and pollutants from the water supply. "Clean Water Wave were introduced to us through Firstport and, through our Scottish Government-funded Access Africa Programme, we are now working with them to explore opportunities to provide clean drinking water in Rwanda and other African countries where we have a presence."

Mrs Baker added: "Giraffe Healthcare, Lilypads and Bampoo are similar examples of social businesses that have worked with our Lane partner Firstport and then joined our AAP scheme to explore export opportunities."

Paul Reddish, Chief Executive of Volunteering Matters and ProjectScotland, said: "The collaborative culture here at Montgomery Street Lane has significant advantages and, quite simply, means our combined offering is far greater than the

sum of its parts. But it is also greatly benefits the residents here. It means, for example, the residents can partner on joint programmes, and we're already seeing the fruits of that."

Montgomery Street Lane will give start-up entrepreneurs and people from other businesses and agencies access to a fully serviced drop-in hotdesking service. There businesses will be able to network and get advice from a range of experts, while partner agencies will use the various spaces for workshops, conferences and other events.

A partnership with the city's Valvona & Crolla deli next door offers access to V&C's theatre space, as well as discounts on their coffee and catering.

"It's these unique extras that add up to create a rich and well-rounded offering for social entrepreneurs and change-makers," Mr Reddish added.



PHOTO Chris Watt