

The Ootsider boosted by First Port funding

Livingston-based outdoor clothing manufacturer The Ootsider is to step up its help for the homeless after being awarded £40,000 grant funding from First Port.

The Community Interest Company (CIC) successfully applied to the organisation's Build It funding programme for the maximum amount, with founder John Keogh (pictured) insisting the award will be a game-changer for the organisation.

The Ootsider produces quality changing robes and coats popular with the likes of wild swimmers and equestrians, as well as bespoke coats for wheel-chair users, and all net income is invested into making ground-breaking coats which convert into sleeping bags to be donated to vulnerable homeless people living on the streets.

Since starting out in 2021, The Ootsider has relied on volunteers as it tried to reduce the vulnerability and risk of rough sleeping with donations of their protective garments.

Boosted by the funding, the company, which has donated 300 of the coats to date to rough sleepers, will now be able to fund one full-time and one part-time position as it accelerates its growth plans over the next 12 months.

John is a former head of engineering at Jabil Electronics in Livingston and devised The Ootsider concept after a chance encounter with a homeless man on Glasgow's Buchanan Street in

December 2021.

Welcoming the award, John said: “This will make a genuine difference to how we operate, and more importantly, to those sleeping rough on the streets.

“We have been relying on the goodwill of so many people to get to where we are but this is a game-changer for us and will allow us to put so many plans into place.

“These include updating the approach to manufacturing and distribution to operate at increased volumes, developing more collaboration arrangements with partners and delivering more fundraising events.”

First Port’s Build It initiative aims to help early-stage social enterprises with a track record of trading and social impact which need funded resource and support to take the business to the next level of financial sustainability.

It offers up to £40,000 in grant funding to help the enterprise increase its income, become financially sustainable and continue to deliver social impact without relying on grant funding.

