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Intro jingle

Matthew:

Hello, and welcome to the W-power podcast series. I'm Matthew Comber, and I'll be your host. The W-power project works with women entrepreneurs in sparsely populated areas across Northern Europe and Arctic communities, encouraging them to set up and develop and grow their own business. The project is funded through the Northern periphery and Arctic program of the European development fund. One of the challenges facing female entrepreneurs in rural regions is the lack of support networks with over self-employed women to help address this problem. The W-power project set up a peer to peer mentoring program, which aimed to bring together women from different countries so they could share their knowledge and experiences and can make useful contacts in a similar industry. Successful applicants were matched together in pairs or teams based on the type of business they run. In this episode, we'll be speaking to three female entrepreneurs who run successful handicraft businesses in Northern Europe. Kate MacDonald from Needlesmiths in Western Scotland, Julia Allemann from the Lauri Guest house and handicrafts from Finnish Lapland and Katarina Spik Skum from Doudje Saame Crafts in Swedish Lapland. All three of these women participated in the peer to peer program working in the same team

Jingle

Matthew:

Julia, perhaps we start with you. Um, would you like to introduce yourself, tell us about where you live and about your business.

Julia:

Yes. Hi everyone. I'm Julia. I live in Lapland, Finland, and I'm running a small business together with my partner. It's an accommodation business, and also a handicraft factory shop where we are producing some handmade items. There I can represent my culture. I'm Saame from Russia. And, uh, we are more oriented on tourism in this area and it's a very small family business. There are only three there.

Matthew:

And what type of goods do you make?

Julia:

Knives. Lapland Knives. We are making some jewellery and some kitchen supplies and, um, and some hobby supplies for people's meetings. We make everything by hand and everything is made from boot, antlers, leather or reindeer.

Matthew:

Okay. Katarina, if I could turn to you now, if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself please and telling us where you live and about your business.

Katarina:

Yeah. My name is Katrina Spik Skum, and I live in Jokkmokk in the Northern part of Sweden. My business name is Doudji Craft, so I work with some Handicrafts for a traditional Saame handicraft like for interiors for houses. Also, I started to make some products for the house. So I work not just with traditional doudji but also a new, newer style of doudji.

Matthew:

Okay. So could you tell us a bit more about the product that you make?

Katarina:

Yeah. I work a lot with the tend reindeer skins that I do on my own. I also use a lot of beauty trends. It's a long Saame tradition to use pew to dread it's like when a collar on Lynette was up to Lapland, he wrote about it. So it's really about hundreds of years, a long tradition to work with pure to dread. And I also, and I also use a lot of yarn here to tread and reindeer skins.

Matthew:

And, and do you sell to... Who is your main market?

Katarina:

Eh, it's like a, it can maybe treat different markets, traditional doudji I sell for Saames and other products for other people, so I want to sell to everyone all over the world. And I also have, uh, started to do some for companies, like bigger products, so they can have interiors in there. Yeah. Buildings like Sammy centers or something like that.

Matthew:

Okay. Thank you very much. Um, Kate, welcome, please. Could you introduce yourself and tell us where you live and a little bit about your business please?

Kate:

Of course. Hello, I am Kate MacDonald. I live in the west, the west of Scotland, and, um, my business is called Needlesmiths and I teach adults and children sewing and creative textile skills. And I also wrote a magazine called the Needlesmith journal of a creative, which has a lot of, um, creative activities and some logical aspects to it as

well. Um, I'm also a textile artist. I make lampshades and art using painted fabric and pitching.

Matthew:

Thank you very much. Um, could you tell me, um, about why you applied to be part of the PTP program and what you were hoping to learn and to get out of it generally?

Kate:

Um, I was part of the women, uh, the W-power project, right from the beginning, which was, um, partly because I run another networking group called WRENS, a women's Royal enterprise networks, Scotland, and the, the P2P, um, program really appealed to me, um, on many levels meeting other women doing similar things, always interests me, cause I want to know how they do it, how they, how they get around the difficult bits, how they, um, what inspires them, how they do it. And so then coupled with, uh, uh, potentially travelled to an area of the world I have always wanted to go to. It was just a no brainer, really. Um, that's exactly what I would want to do. Um, and so I was really, really sad. It was that weekend, the weekend I was due to travel that we all locked down and couldn't go anywhere. And given that I hadn't been able to travel for quite a long time due to my husband's illness, there was a double whammy, and I was really disappointed about not being able to go, being able to meet the girls, um, electronically. Um, that's been wonderful and we've had some really nice, um, craft sessions. Um, and, and so it has been an absolute joy, um, even though we haven't been able to, to meet face to face yet.

Matthew:

Okay. Well, could you, um, Kate describe some of these, um, online workshops that you've been having cause they sound great fun.

Kate:

Sure. They were um, uh, we did it lovely. I'm looking, I'm looking around my little workshop because I actually have the hanging, um, oh, Julia, you'll have to tell me what it's called, cause I've currently forgotten. That's it? Thank you. Um, I still have them hanging in my, my, uh, my room. Yeah, that was great fun. I, interestingly, I went on to then teach, um, another group how to make them, so that was, that was nice. And we also did some pin weaving, uh, pin loom weaving and fabulous little silver, tin bracelets with reindeer skin, which was, um, which was just lovely and a really interesting use of material that I hadn't ever used before. So that was, that was very good.

Matthew:

Okay. So now I want to talk to you about the, uh, the peer to peer program or P2P as it's known for short. So both of you, uh, were successful applicants for the program. Uh, you worked on the same team. So when you applied for this program, what were

you hoping to learn or to get out of it? Why did you apply? Julia, do you want to start?

Julia:

I can start, I wanted to be inspired for new products, maybe for new services. And it was very successful in this, in these jobs because even though we didn't meet each other in person, we knew we could meet online. And also we knew like I was watching what Katarina was making and formulating online and also Kate. And, uh, I learned a lot from them, both because they are so talented and especially from Katarina, she's so amazing about it's like interior in some Saame style or some small Saame details in interior and how to use them. And I also use this idea to decorate our rooms in the hotel, also the event center. I tried to follow this idea.

Matthew:

So when you joined the program, um, where you're hoping to learn more about, um, your craft and, and, and, and, and how you work from someone who worked in a similar industry who has similar skills.

Julia:

Exactly. Maybe not to learn, maybe new things to do, but it would also be a very big plus. And, but just how to be present in this market. From Kate, I learned a lot about how to be, even more visible, because she's such a talented writer, and just to follow her online about in social media, um, can motivate you just to write more, to publish more.

Matthew:

Thank you, Katarina. Um, what, uh, what were you hoping to gain from the program?

Katarina:

Uh, when I applied for the program, I already had my business for about one year and I was really stressed because I didn't feel that I managed it so well. So I applied because I want to have someone to talk about how you can deliver for the company and the financing and how to come out on the market and everything. I was like a really new beginner in that. And I was like, okay, I don't think this way we went so well, but it has been really good to have this group. And we have talked about everything and not just companies, but our, when you like working on your own, you are your, uh, um, pride that life could be really, my mother passed away this year. So I was really tired and it was really good to be in this group. You talk, oh no, what should I do now? And how can you organize your life? And like when you have your own business. So I have learned a lot.

Matthew:

Ah, that's really good. So, I know that the original idea for the peer to peer program was that people would travel to different countries and meet entrepreneurs in

different countries who did similar things. But of course, we unfortunately had the pandemic to deal with. So perhaps that wasn't possible. So, can you tell us how you got around that? I mean, how did this program actually work when, when you know, travel was such a problem?

Julia:

Well, I remember how exempted we all have been in the beginning. We just started to plan how we will meet and we wanted to meet in March and then came the lock down. It was a huge disappointment, but we wanted just to continue to meet online. It was just about the exchange of nice emotions, like continued to introduce each other and introduce our lives and business styles. And then we decided, okay, we come to me, then let's maybe make some workshops online. And we also, maybe three times it was that we did learning hours in handicraft. That was nice. And it's really like so friendly and loving each other and dusted then to be offline, like one week.

Matthew:

Oh, that's great. So, I mean, I understand that you had to initially do, um, a learning work plan at the start to, to write what were your objectives, what you hoped to get out of the program. And then from there, I guess, instead of having the visits, then you, you sound like you've arranged these online workshops through video calls. So that sounds fantastic. Um, so Katarina, how, how did those work, did they, have you described how they went.

Katarina:

Uh, yeah, it was actually Julia and Kate, they had sent some package, small package. So we worked at home at them. Like workshops, but by the doctor and it was really nice to be a new beginner. I haven't ever done anything like the finish himli that Kate sent to us in a little decorating thing. And Kate did, like, we would have to croquet do some croqueting and I never have done it.

Matthew:

Wonderful. Well, listening to all three of you talk about these on online workshops. It sounds like you've all, not just had fun, but learned some really great skills to use it in your own businesses. And you've learnt from each other and also earlier we were talking about how it's great to have this, this peer support meeting women in similar industries and how you go about living your lives and running our businesses. So that must have been, um, very helpful for you. What else do you think you've gained from this program apart from those things? Was there anything else that you weren't expecting to gain out of it that you've, you've gotten? Um, Julia, do you want to start, if you have anything to add to that.

Julia:

What we have learned from each other to stay strong. In every situation.

Matthew:

Uh, Katarina? Was there anything else that you've, you've got out of this, this whole program?

Katarina:

Yeah. Having your own business is a lot of work, but it also gets you a really big chance to, to meet people and join projects. And it's really fantastic. It was hard, hard times. Sometimes I was having another class sewing Saame costumes. And after that, we had our own class or workshop after that. So it was a really hard time, but this was so fun and nice to do it. So, it has been great.

Matthew:

It sounds very successful. I can tell you all are really happy with the results, and it sounds like there's a lasting relationship between you three, at least on your, you were saying you will actually physically meet as soon as travel is possible again.

Kate:

That would be lovely. Yeah.

Matthew:

I hope that does happen. And, um, also you've obviously got this network as well. There's this professional network that you've now got between you, um, which, which hopefully will continue to help you in, in as your businesses grow. I have one question I'd like to put to you all actually is that, um, W-power program is aimed solely at female entrepreneurs. Um, why do you think it was important to have this kind of program just for women? Um, Kate, do you have any thoughts on that?

Kate:

Yes. Quite hard to put them into words at the moment. I'm not sure.

Matthew:

Just whatever thoughts come to mind. It's fine.

Kate:

I have lots of books on it. I do. I think it's hugely important, which is why I run another network and have done for just over four years now. Um, I suppose it's to do with, um, often women in business work on your own. And certainly, here in, in rural west Scotland, the micro businesses are run by women. Uh, the men seem to work for the forestry, construction industry, um, and the hospital, I guess, and the councils. Those are our four main employers around here, but the women have all the micro businesses, all the tourism businesses, most of the craft businesses. And it was when I set up, it was following a conversation with somebody who said it was very lonely standing at her bench and she didn't have anybody to ask about accounts.

That's what we were discussing, our, our, um, financial business returns. And so I thought that we would start to get together once a month to discuss that, which led me to contact Cathy and joining W-power. The fact that it was going to be bigger and international was so fascinating because living here, you tend to feel that there isn't anybody there isn't a rest of the world. It's quite a small space. And if you looked at my GPS, I go to about three different places on a regular basis. You kind of forget that there's a world out there because you're so focused on what it is you're doing. And obviously I know that there's women doing other things in other places, but it was such a realization that there are micro businesses in other rural places, in other areas of the world that have exactly the same issues that we do. And because of family commitments, generally speaking, that's maybe a bit of an assumption, but on the whole family, women look after the family. Um, and whilst I don't have small children, I do have a chronically ill husband. And, um, both my mother and father at the start of his project, my father has now since died, but, um, I'm a career as well as attempting to run a business as well. So, um, having the support of other women with similar commitments, similar to trying to run a business and look after the family, whatever shape that might be, um, I think is hugely important. Absolutely vital, because otherwise we all end up, I don't know, flat on our backs, um, and just unable to carry on. And, um, the friends that I've made through the W-power project, um, we had in Scotland, uh, an online chat, um, platform as well with people that I wouldn't normally have met. Um, so that's been fascinating, um, and really, really helpful. And then meeting Julia and Katarina has just been lovely, sort of the icing on the cake basically would have been great to travel there and, and meet, um, women's groups that they're in as well. Um, and I think that keeping it to women only means that you can also discuss moving through grief, not just, not just business, but how also hitting midlife and menopause affects how you feel and how you're then able to run the business. And I do feel that if men were there as well, then, then we would be much more inhibited about talking like that. Um, so I, I, that's why I think women's networks are enormously important.

Matthew:

Thank you. That was brilliant. That was, that was a really good answer. Thank you very much. Um, Katarina, I know you've got a boat to catch, so you're keen to get going in a sec, but I mean, you probably agree with all of that, but is there anything else that you'd want to add about why it's so important to have these supports for women?

Katarina:

No, it was a good answer from Kate. It was everything that she said, and it has been such a good experience. I would do it again, if I have the chance.

Matthew:

That's lovely Julia, anything you would like to add to that at all?

Julia:

Kate gave the full answer.

Matthew:

Well, I won't take up any more of your time. I want to thank you all very much for your time today, for talking and, uh, yeah it was lovely to see you all.

Outro jingle

Matthew:

Thank you to all our guests and thank you for tuning into the W-power podcast. If you'd like to discover more about this project and access a wide range of material, please visit the W-power website. You can find the link below.