

# CROSS PARTY GROUP on WOMEN IN ENTERPRISE

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

### From the Convenor - Gillian Martin MSP



The Cross Party Group for Women in Enterprises continue to go from strength to strength as we go into our second parliamentary session as a group. I am delighted that we have my colleague Michelle Thomson MSP as my Deputy Convenor and she brings with her years of experience as a businesswoman. Our parliamentary influence doesn't stop there as we are privileged to have the Convenor of Economy and Fair Work Committee Claire Baker MSP as one of our regular members, as well as a raft of MSPs elected in 2021 who all bring their own experiences and influence to the table for Session 6. We've got off to a great start doing sessions on the women getting us to Net Zero, the impact of the pandemic, wellbeing and procurement. We are still online, which has its advantages and disadvantages. I am sure those who were used to attending in parliament do miss the opportunity to network at the end of the meeting and we need to find a way for that to continue. However, I know that the meetings being online have meant that women from all over Scotland have felt more able to attend without the need to travel long distances to Edinburgh. I think we need to find a middle way to harness the benefits of both better accessibility and being in the same room as one another. As always, I continue to be filled with admiration of the achievements of our secretariat, Women's Enterprise Scotland, and hugely impressed with the contribution women entrepreneurs and WES ambassadors make to our Cross Party Group. It's been great to see new faces at our meetings, and I encourage regulars to invite their contacts so we can widen our discussion and inspire even more women in business. It's a tough old world out there for women led businesses, but it's made considerably better by us coming together and sharing our experiences and continuing to support and inspire one another.

### The Cross Party Group

Women's Enterprise Scotland established the Women in Enterprise Cross Party Group 5 years ago to provide a platform for Scotland's women entrepreneurs to advocate for their needs. In those years there have been 5 annual reports, amplifying the voices of diverse women, 20 sessions of cultivating collaboration across the political spectrum and 20 topics tackled,

including access to finance, internationalisation, minority ethnic women in enterprise, older women, disabled women, rural based women, Brexit, Covid recovery and Net Zero.

The Cross Party Group (CPG) for Women in Enterprise was set up to –

- Establish a forum for the sharing of experiences and information on the landscape for women in enterprise in Scotland.
- Enable discussion and debate on the enduring gender gap in enterprise participation and seek solutions on how this might be tackled.
- Bring partners together with an interest in women and enterprise to develop a collaborative approach towards solutions and action.

Each year a number of themes are chosen which are important to the discussion on women in enterprise and speakers and guests are invited to take part in the meetings. Organisations and individuals with expertise and interest in each theme are invited to attend and participate in the CPG. This enables relevant and structured discussion on a thematic basis and allows for varied attendance at each meeting.

This year, meetings focussed on – Women to Net Zero, Wellbeing and Procurement.

### **November 2021: Women to Net Zero**

For this meeting we were joined by Sara Roberts, founder of Healthy Nibbles and B Corp ambassador and Wendy Pring, Climate Ambassador and founder of The Way Forward 2045 to share their experiences and thoughts on Net Zero.

Sara Roberts began the journey of becoming a B Corp with her business, Healthy Nibbles, in 2019. In order to achieve Healthy Nibbles first net zero year in 2020, the company reduced travel, engaged in supplier education, changed energy providers and delivery companies, switched to UK-manufactured plastic free packaging with water-based ink. However, Sara highlighted the challenges within the sustainability journey, the key issues being that for companies with diverse supply chains and a focus on championing SMEs, it can be more challenging to track carbon emissions. Another being without a sustainability background, the net zero journey is challenging because of convoluted information from government resources and that this, along with the many other factors to consider when working towards becoming a B Corp, can feel very overwhelming. Sara called for a centralised resource, which would list experts in the area, examples of net zero journeys and case studies. She feels clear, standardised data and insights are crucial to helping businesses improve their actions.

Wendy Pring presented on her experience as a sustainability driven start-up. Wendy suggested ways in which Net Zero could be accelerated which included building networks of support for businesses on sustainable journeys, providing salary and other incentives in businesses such as improved working conditions, status and security for sustainable jobs, effective company policy and administration. She also highlighted that women need to be enabled with a suggestion

that the Women's Business Centre and Women's Enterprise Scotland could participate through outreach centres as for her, women are the glue around her sustainability mission: networks and childcare are required to empower women to take part. In these rural communities, men have left for working opportunities, women could create business ecosystems, contributing to their communities with the suitable tools. In her own journey, Wendy has felt empowered by access to education and Women's Enterprise Scotland. She has felt supported by knowing that other entrepreneurs face challenges in their journeys. Wendy also reflected on her time at COP 26 with her main takeaways being opportunities for learning from indigenous groups and the importance of resilience.

Other key issues raised by various members was the lack of education surrounding sustainability and specifically an issue raised by Timi Adegunwa from Black & Scot on the topic of education that in Black communities she works with, sustainability conversations are limited as people are still focused on finding jobs and steady income from their businesses. She wonders how to begin these discussions with such significant socioeconomic issues. Carolyn Currie, in response to Timi's point, called for increased intersectional data and support for these communities to find work.

## May 2022: Wellbeing

For this session on wellbeing, we aimed to present the challenges that entrepreneurship poses on the wellbeing of women highlighting the gendered pressures of caring commitments, experiences of bias and isolation. Drawing from the first-hand experiences of women entrepreneurs and lessons learned through the pandemic, this session sought to explore policies and practices that can support the mental and physical wellbeing of Scotland's women business owners.

Our speakers for this session were Ayse Basak Cinar Lowe, Leadership development and wellbeing coach, Melanie Macintyre of Mel Macintyre Coaching and Liberty Bligh, an Experienced founder and disabled entrepreneur.

Ayse Basak Cinar Lowe discussed the context and need for a focus on Wellbeing in women's entrepreneurship. The Covid pandemic has seen women more vulnerable to economic impacts, juggling primary care and facing challenges of adapting to digitalisation. She explained that self-care is not a solution to the rise in burnout, but instead, we must adopt preventative measures as a priority and chronic stress has systemic, socio-cultural, business environment related dimensions that need to be addressed to facilitate sustainable health and wellbeing for individuals. She describes resilience and agility as the key to building sustainable workplace mental well-being which will foster the long-term, consistent success of SMEs.

Melanie Macintyre also touched on the topic of burnout as she presented that three quarters of the UK are experiencing burnout with 41% of the workforce expecting to leave their jobs. This 'great resignation' is described by Melanie as a mass awakening, as priorities like freedom,

balance and meaningful impact are taking more precedence which presents an opportunity for growing entrepreneurship. We should aim to create an entrepreneurial landscape and culture with wellbeing at its heart as this is crucial to support businesses to give time, freedom and financial freedom, being profitable, whilst still offering balance. Melanie proposed five pillars of performance for going forward: positive psychology, healthy physiology through habits and practices, connection with purpose and productivity.

Liberty Bligh reflected on her own shift in wellbeing, before and after experiencing Covid, as she has had to implement new strategies for recovery, which have also proven useful in business. Likewise, her experience as an entrepreneur helped her to effectively approach and innovate her recovery plan which highlighted to her the potential for successful interplay between entrepreneurship and wellbeing learnings. Consequently, Liberty found her business is in a stronger and more sustainable position than ever before. However, not so positively Liberty shared figures which should make Scotland concerned about with workforce wellbeing with figure in June 2020 being at 1 in 5 adults reporting having suicidal thoughts whilst at work. It was also reported women were more than twice as likely to develop mental ill-health at work and that poor well-being is statistically linked to poor mental health. Liberty proposed that embedding well-being at work and in enterprise, will boost cardiovascular and immune health, providing an opportunity for improvement going forward.

Other key issues raised during the discussion were systemic failure and the systemic change that is needed in order for wellbeing to become a priority. Lynne Cadenhead highlighted that establishing women's businesses centres will encourage this systemic change, by designing spaces and services which address systemic issues. They would be a vehicle for women to be successful in business.

## **November 2022: Procurement**

To discuss the topic of procurement our speakers were Ann Johnson from Blaze Manufacturing Solutions, Pauline Macdonald from Ferguson Marine and Ruth McElroy from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB). In this meeting we explored the challenges within the procurement process as experienced by SME's, with a particular focus on women's experience with tendering and securing contracts.

Ann Johnson highlighted that there is hardly any work in oil and gas currently as operators have publicly declared they are not going to use the SME community and instead give work to tier ones. This means the SME community is suffering as there is no work or feed down for them. She explains the reason operators use the method of tier ones is, so they only have to manage one vendor instead of multiple which understandably is a supply chain strategy however, if companies don't support the SME community which there are a lot of women in, there is less competition in the supply chain. She also noted a lack of being given notice about local authority contracts which makes it hard to bid. Ann also discussed a presenting opportunity that she has turned down and given to one of her male counterparts due to the networking

part of the event will be done in the pub. Her industry is very male dominated and is not comfortable networking in a bar/pub with lots of men. With her business based in Aberdeen, Ann confirms there is still a real issue of 'old boys' network' there, with friends giving friends contracts which then freezes the market.

Pauline Macdonald spoke from the perspective of procurement and the supply chain having been in Canada for the past 6 years. She was on the board of directors for WBE Canada helping women owned business specifically – the CEO of the company was working with the government to mandate that a certain percentage of all public sector bids went to women owned businesses. In Canada 5% of every single public sector contract has to go to indigenous suppliers and so she was fighting for the same for women owned businesses. WBE Canada helped certify suppliers so they could use the WBE Canada logo so that when the public sector went out to tender, they could ask if they were certified which tackles the issue of making sure due diligence has been done. Pauline suggests having a register of how many SMEs suppliers are in Scotland would be helpful to get people signed up and show the public sector these women owned businesses have gone through due diligence and they are certified it as would minimize risk for them so offer more chances of winning business.

From FSB, Ruth McElroy presented data to show that despite making up about 93% of the entire business community, micro businesses only get less than 5% of procurement spend by value but largest companies get more than half which is a huge disproportionality. She highlighted that a major policy directive of the current Scottish Government is Community Wealth Building – a commitment to growing and maintaining the wealth of local places so FSB have assessed for every pound that is spent with a small business roughly 67p of that goes straight back into the local community – whereas spending it at a large multinational only 40p of that goes into the community. This proves a real and tangible benefit to local areas in increasing procurement spend of local businesses. Ruth explains from a small business perspective, there are countless barriers to procurement such as the time it takes to complete and submit a procurement application, the complexities of projects that run across areas and larger suppliers failing to pay subcontractors on time. FSB propose an introduction of statutory targets for local spending to allow for benchmarking and public buyers should be compelled to examine payment practices of larger providers at the bid stage to ensure subcontractors will be paid on time.