

Food & Footprint

Case Study

The power of coaching
for rural businesses



Sarah Heward began her journey as Founder and Co-Owner of The Real Food Café in Tyndrum in 2004 and has been driving growth and success for the business for the last 20 years through innovative thinking, a commitment to rural tourism and an unfaltering vision of what hospitality should be for her customers, staff, local supply chain and the wider community.



therealfoodcafe.com

Since then, the business, the team and their food have gone from strength to strength, winning multiple awards (National Fish and Chip Awards, Thistle Awards, Great Taste Awards, Great Outdoor Awards), accreditations (National Federation of Fish Fryers Quality Accreditations, Accredited Caterer from Coeliac UK) and recommendations.

Sarah and her team have also worked to expand and modernise the café, with a renewed focus on equality and accessibility – in 2018 all staff undertook VisitScotland Disabled Access tourism training, for example – following a period where Sarah had to stop working for 12 months to care for her terminally ill father. By 2024, the team had built more than a business, they created a community and accessibility legacy which includes years of community litter picking, community sponsorship, fundraising and the creation of a new community charity, the Tyndrum Infrastructure Group (TIG).

The customer challenge

It was in her role as Regional Food Tourism Ambassador for Scotland Food & Drink (SF&D) that Sarah first met Kerry Hammond, Principal Consultant on the Food and Enterprise team at SAC Consulting.

At that time, Sarah wanted to work with Kerry, specifically tapping into her extensive knowledge and skills in the art of pitching. Kerry has a lot of experience as a pitching coach for hundreds of Food & Drink entrepreneurs in Scotland, and she designed and delivered a bespoke and discrete six session coaching package, designed to improve Sarah's confidence, pitching structure, delivery, and content. Upon successful completion of this pitching coaching program, impressed by Kerry's deep understanding of rural businesses and hospitality, Sarah asked if Kerry would work with her one to one.

As an entrepreneur in rural Scotland, Sarah faced the same challenge that hundreds of others do – she was alone and isolated in her challenges. She recognised the value of having a coach on-hand; someone to check in with once a week, to run issues or problems by, or talk through new opportunities or strategies.

The brief was for Kerry to support Sarah with emerging issues in the business, leadership challenges, strategy decisions, and her individual pursuits, in the charitable and community sectors with our 1-2-1 Business Coaching service.



Our solution

Over the last two years working together, coaching challenges have included hospitality sector-wide skills and culture projects through her SF&D ambassadorship, preparation for engagements at the Scottish Government Hospitality & Skills Group, developing and refining presentations and strategies for the Loch Lomond & Trossachs's National Park Destination Group, helping to pursue funding pots, and supporting TIG. Their work has enabled the business to achieve a place in The Caterer's prestigious 'top 30 best places to work in UK hospitality' list in both 2023 and 2024.

Other successes include supporting Sarah to secure over a quarter of a million pounds to build a 'changing places toilet' in Tyndrum. CPT (Changing Places Toilets) offer facilities for those living with, and those caring for people with, profound life-limiting disability, providing safe clean places with specialist equipment so that they have dignity and support. Without this win, there was a black hole the size of Wales in Scotland with no facilities for disabled people and their families. With a shared passion for accessible tourism, and rural Scotland, Kerry coached Sarah along her journey, facing uphill struggles, rejections, barriers, and disappointment throughout. The value that coaching brought for Sarah in this period was keeping her motivated, positive, suggest new and alternative routes, and keep her persistent until she achieved her target milestone. Work has now started to build the life changing facilities in Tyndrum.

During their work together, Sarah chose to add some further life coaching alongside the business coaching, helping her to maintain a better work-life balance – which is no mean feat as an entrepreneur and rural business leader. This included identification of appropriate boundaries, passion projects, and time management, to ensure her wellbeing did not drop to the bottom of the priority list.

To this end, Sarah has used coaching to its full benefit, by leaving nothing off the table. Blending executive coaching, with life coaching, and mediation coaching, Sarah feels supported knowing that Kerry is in her corner. She comes to coaching for motivation, for a cheerleader, for advice and a second pair of eyes. For someone to listen and care about her needs, keep her focused on what matters, and to help navigate challenges. Kerry alleviates the mental load when Sarah needs to set it down for an hour, helps her find the right path and gives trusted experience and advice when there is no-one else to ask.

Kerry and Sarah are now working on further plans, including a focus on her personal goals and the future of the business in areas such as business expansion, diversification or transitions.



Added value

Coaching is a multifaceted discipline with many different subtle (and some not so subtle) tactics, touchpoints, and skills. An additional aim which grew over time was to position Sarah as a 'powerhouse for rural tourism and hospitality.' This included supporting her with raising her profile and taking on wider speaking engagements such as HIT scholarship events, and the Scottish Agritourism Conference.

Kerry has also utilised her experience as a mediation coach – working between the executive partners in the business, making sure all voices are heard, and supporting collective agreement on the way forward. This is made even more complex by the fact that, like many rural businesses, The Real Food Café is family-owned, and they navigate not only the dynamics of a business partnership, but also family priorities and relationships.

Our customer says

“Through our coaching, I can say that I now view Kerry as an integral part of my inner circle. I benefit from the honesty and frankness of our discussions, she helps me see different perspectives, holds me to account in a beneficial and safe way, and challenges me in a way that I welcome. It’s the reassurance and companionship too, running a rural business is a lonely place at times. She adds exponential value to work I’m doing in all kinds of areas from written or verbal, proposals, business plans, problem solving – she is worth her weight in gold.”

Sarah Heward

The Real Food Café, Founder & Co-Owner

Links

- therealfoodcafe.com
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/frying-in-the-face-of-adversity-with-sarah-heward/id1531004878?i=1000671375538>
- www.changing-places.org

CHANGING PLACES TOILETS IN THE NORTH-WEST SCOTLAND
CHECK OUT THE BLACK HOLE THE SIZE OF WALES

FORT WILLIAM
 West Highland College
 Distance from Tyndrum: 47 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 1 hr
 Open between 9.00 and 17.00 during the week, closed on weekends

BARRA, OUTER HEBRIDES
 Garadh a Bhagh a Tuath
 Distance from Tyndrum: 130 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 6+ hrs
 Open Mo - Sat 7.00-21.00

HELENSBURGH
 Helensburgh Leisure Centre
 Distance from Tyndrum: 38 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 1 hr
 Open Mo-Su 6.30-21.00
 Located off a trunk road

CAMPBELTOWN
 Aequilibrium
 Distance from Tyndrum: 102 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 2.5 hrs
 Variable opening hours

PORTREE, ISLE OF SKYE
 Portree High School
 Distance from Tyndrum: 154 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 3.5 hrs
 Variable opening hours

ULLAPOOL
 Ferry Car Park
 Distance from Tyndrum: 157 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 4 hr
 Accessible using a RADAR key

CRIEFF
 Strathearn Community Centre
 Distance from Tyndrum: 41 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 1 hr
 Open Mo - Fr 7.00-22.00, Sat - Sun 8.00-17.00

BLAIR DRUMMOND SAFARI PARK
 Distance from Tyndrum: 46 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 1+ hr
 Open Mo - Su 10.00 - 17.30

ABERFOYLE
 Trossachs Discovery Centre
 Distance from Tyndrum: 46 mi
 Travel time from Tyndrum: 1+ hr
 Open Mo - Fr 9.00-18.00, Sat - Sun 9.00-16.00
 Located off a trunk road

Working together to build a changing places toilet in Tyndrum for the community & visitors

led by **THE REAL FOOD CAFE** **THE GREEN WELLY STOP**

THEREALFOODCAFE.COM/CPT
 Learn about changing places toilets at changing-places.org

©Tyndrum Infrastructure Group, charity number SC051750