

Championing mental wellbeing at SBS event



Able Futures joined hundreds of small business owners and partners at this year's Small Business Sunday (#SBS) event on the 20th February, standing proudly alongside the UK's most resilient and innovative entrepreneurs at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham. Able Futures, led by Ingeus, delivers the Access to Work Mental Health Support Service on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

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The 2026 Small Business Sunday event marked the 16th year of #SBS and its 13th annual event.



Hosted by retail entrepreneur and SBS founder Theo Paphitis, it centred around a fitting theme: “Resilience Rocks!”, a message that resonated strongly with the Able Futures team.

With small businesses continuing to face daily pressures, from economic uncertainty to operational demands, the role of strong mental wellbeing has never been more crucial.

Able Futures attended the event to showcase its no-cost, confidential mental-health

support designed to help employers and employees thrive through challenging times. Throughout the day, the team connected with business owners, sharing how the service can help improve wellbeing, boost productivity and strengthen workplace resilience.

The atmosphere at the ICC was buzzing with creativity, determination and community spirit, values that sit at the heart of the SBS network and mirror the Able Futures mission.

Able Futures looks forward to continuing its work with small businesses across the UK. Find out more about Able Futures and the support available.



“A huge thank you to the entire SBS community for the warm welcome. It’s inspiring to see just how much resilience truly does rock when small businesses support one another and champion the importance of mental wellbeing.”

Debbie, Business Account Manager for Able Futures



CONNECT TO WORK IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

From March, we will be delivering the new Connect to Work programme in North Yorkshire.



The programme will continue building on the success launch of Connect to Work with the South London Partnership and the recent introduction of the programme across Lancashire.

This latest launch extends the reach of Connect to Work across another key region, strengthening our mission to help people access sustainable employment and improved life opportunities.

Specifically designed to help people overcome the challenges that can come with health conditions, disabilities or complex barriers, Connect to Work will support 1,500

people in North Yorkshire into sustainable employment over the next five years.

The initiative provides voluntary, personalised, and flexible support, including one-to-one coaching and job matching with a range of local employers. Giving people meaningful support to access the local job market. For those considering a different route into work, specialist self-employment guidance is also available.

Alongside tailored support for those out of work, Connect to Work also offers assistance to people at risk of losing their roles due to health conditions or other needs, providing

early intervention to help them remain in work.



Scan to find out more about Connect to Work

THE RIPPLE EFFECT IN OSSIAN'S CAREER

Making a difference is what Service Excellence Director Ossian says has driven his 24-year people career.

Seeing the ripple effect of one good appointment helping an individual, which in turn helps families, communities, society, and the country, has motivated Ossian's transition from a frontline employment advisor, through to a variety of Ingeus leadership and senior management roles in the employability and justice teams.

That progressive ripple has been a hallmark of his own career, 18 years of which have been spent at Ingeus.

Working in the employability division as an advisor and team manager, Ossian gained valuable experience of launching and leading new contracts which he took to the justice division ten years ago. He now oversees all resources utilised by the team, from learning and development and quality and auditing; to supply chain partners and the business support team.

"It may seem like quite a lucky career but in each role, I was

laying the groundwork for the next one, even if I wasn't sure what that might be," says Ossian, who is 46 and lives with his family in Nottingham. "The nature of delivering contracts means there's a timeline to everything. There's often risk of redundancy in our sector, but equally there's always something new in the pipeline. It's important to develop practical and people management skills, to make connections with colleagues, and show an interest."

"If you're open to change and step into a space where you see an opportunity it's recognised at Ingeus. Personally, I enjoy seeing contracts run from end to end, to see the difference we've made."

That inquisitive nature extends to home, where Ossian's love of board games and Lego gels well with his three young children. He also finds time for another favourite activity – learning.

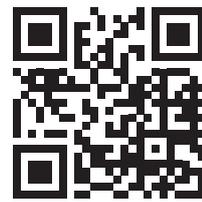
Ossian signed up for an MBA in 2022 unaware at the time that his attention would soon be diverted by drastically

different family matters: the arrival of his baby daughter and his mum's terminal cancer diagnosis.

"I completed the first module while my mum was very unwell," recalls Ossian. "The support from Ingeus throughout was amazing. I had flexibility to work from home, or mum's, and studying with the Open University meant the learning was remote and could be done at my own pace. It was tough but the support was there to get through it."

When it comes to being curious, doing more, and being ever resilient, Ossian

ticks all the boxes. If you too are a 'go to', 'can do', 'sure thing' person, then a career at Ingeus sounds like just the path for you.



Scan to find out more about Ingeus careers



The previous year, Ingeus funded my Level 5 Diploma for Leaders and Managers. The step up to an MBA would have been much more daunting without having done that. I could see much from my MBA could be applied at Ingeus and that it would help me add more value once I completed it – which I did in 2025."

Ossian, Service Excellence Director



HOW MATT IS CONQUERING **THE LONG DARK** WITH ABLE FUTURES

Matt loves playing Xbox survival game The Long Dark with his teenage son, but for the 48 year-old who lives in South East London, the game is more than just entertainment – it reflects his own long and challenging journey through mental health battles that have affected him for half his life.

With the support of Able Futures, Matt is now making real life-sustaining choices and has set himself a new challenge: a year of no days off work due to his mental health.

Matt was in his mid-20s and living the life of a young, up and coming graphic designer in London when his growing sense of depression resulted in his first mental health breakdown. Diagnosed with acute schizophrenia,

it marked the first of what would become a 20-plus year history of often severe mental health episodes. Matt would respond to medication, then his mental condition would ‘bring him to his knees’ again.

By 2024, Matt was working in retail and despite enjoying his job took prolonged time off sick due to mental health breakdowns. When a healthcare worker suggested he contact Able Futures, he says he expected similar

therapy to the countless cycles he’d attended before but ‘had nothing to lose’.

He was soon pleasantly surprised at the impact of speaking with his Able Future’s mental health coach, Anita. With no wait times, and nine-months of government funded support, he believes Anita has put him on a path away from future breakdowns.

“Anita has, hands-down, kept me in work,” says Matt. “I haven’t had any mental health issues since working with her. She was so personable but professional – everything she said was very relevant and geared to me. She had lots of information and advice to give but just let me talk, I never felt rushed. It didn’t feel like therapy, more like talking to a friend through a professional lens.”

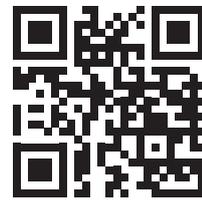
“We talked on the phone and actually that was very refreshing. As a massive over-thinker, I wasn’t looking for body language or facial cues. I felt I could just say anything. Having dreaded past therapy, I began to look forward to my Able Futures calls.”

Able Futures, led by Ingeus, delivers the government-funded Access to Work Mental Health Support Service. It provides no cost, vocationally focussed, and nationwide support to anyone currently in work, apprentices, and self-employed people.

“Having someone to talk through my problems in and out of work was hugely reassuring,” adds Matt, who also utilises his love of street photography and regular gym visits to aid his mental health.

“It’s different to speaking with friends and family, with whom you might put on a ‘I’m OK’ front. Anita helped me normalise my thoughts and

realise how far I’d actually come. She gave me practical tasks to consider that gave me food for thought and helped me identify work triggers. I’d never had therapy before that looked at the positive aspects of work on your mental health.”



Scan to learn how Able Futures can support mental health at work



People have so much buzzing in their heads. You’ve got to get it out, say everything. Don’t hold back or you won’t get the benefit of help. My family and employer can see me trying hard to get better. With all the help Anita has given me, I’m well on the way.”

Matt, Able Futures Participant



YOUTH VOICE'S JEFFERSON SPEAKS OUT

“I felt like I was the only person in the whole world dealing with this and that to reach out to anyone to talk about my struggles seemed weak.”

This was Jefferson, struggling with anxiety throughout his teenage years as he adapted to life in a new country. Professional and personal support helped him turn a corner and acted as a prompt for him to become an Ingeus Youth Voice Ambassador. He's now determined to shape services for other young people and carve a career where he can “be that person that I needed the most, for other people”.

After years living in the Philippines, and then Spain, Jefferson moved to the UK, quickly learning English and heavily supporting his less-fluent parents.

After completing a BTEC in Business, he found himself unemployed and was introduced to Ingeus through the Restart Scheme, an employability programme that helped him gain a catering role. In early 2025 he was invited to an Ingeus workshop to feed into the government's emerging Youth Strategy and from there his public interest – and voice – grew.

Jefferson's time with Youth Voice sees him attend youth workshops, co-design Ingeus programmes and processes, attend meetings with fellow Ambassadors, and access training and development

opportunities with partner organisations. He is in line to complete mental health first aider training and is building his public speaking abilities with a view to teaching or delivering training in the future.

“Joining Youth Voice gives me the chance to meet other young people, to have discussions, and share opinions about the many things that influence us,” says Jefferson, who is 20 and lives in Wandsworth. “I get to be involved in change that affects young people – it is very inspiring.”

"I think of the areas I struggled with, like mental health awareness, emotional intelligence, and financial literacy. I'd perhaps like to deliver workshops on those topics, or support people with language barriers via training or interpreting," adds Jefferson, who speaks English, Spanish and Tagalog.

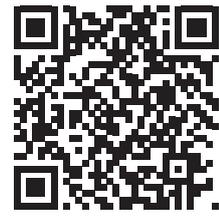
Volunteering has also opened unexpected doors. "Youth Voice projects are broadening my interests and skills. I'm developing different communication skills and a real interest in working in

marketing. It's win-win: I add my voice to projects that matter to Ingeus and young people, while being around others that I draw inspiration and motivation from. It's a real learning experience."

Jefferson balances his work and Youth Voice duties with a range of creative hobbies – particularly dance. Interested in hip hop as a form of self-expression, he's currently exploring involvement in the dance community.

For now, Jefferson is finding his feet, discovering what energises him, and working

towards his ambition to "be that person that I needed the most, for other people." Through volunteering with Youth Voice, he's not only speaking out – he's finding a voice that others can lean on too.



Scan to find out more about Youth Voice



"I struggled with the transition into a new country, which limited me as a young person in various ways. I feel like my experience may resonate with other young people migrating to settle in the UK. I want to be helpful to those who are in a similar situation to me years ago and to reassure them that it's OK to ask for help – lots of people feel the same way."

Jefferson, Youth Voice



CELEBRATING RAMADAN

Ramadan began on 17th February and is one of the holiest and most significant months for Muslims.

We spoke with Rizwan Younus, Finance, Benefit and Debt Advisor, who shared a personal insight into his experiences and the values that have shaped nearly three decades of observing Ramadan.

Rizwan said: "I have been doing Ramadan consistently now for the last 28 years as it's mandatory, should health allow, for all Muslims.

My mother and my late father taught me about Ramadan. The beauty of Ramadan is that it makes you appreciate life and helps you understand how lucky we are in the world. If you are healthy, have a roof over your head and food on the table, what else do you need? Anything else is a bonus and this is the beauty of Ramadan. It gives you a beautiful perspective on life

and makes you appreciate it way more."

"My memories of Ramadan are love, peace, perspective and more importantly getting closer to God and thanking him for everything that I have been given."

“

When it's time to open your fast and you're sat at the table with your family all eating together, it makes you think about how lucky we all are and how we should appreciate every single moment instead of looking at what we don't have.

Rizwan, Finance, Benefit and Debt Advisor



TIME TO TALK DAY

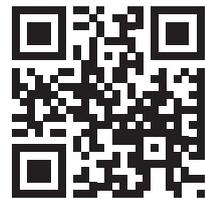
Time to Talk Day took place on the 5th February, led by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, and encouraged all of us to pause, reach out, and start simple conversations about mental health.

The day was a reminder to take those small moments to check in with one another, listen without judgement, and create space for open, honest conversations. Even the briefest chat can help someone feel supported and less alone, and Time to Talk Day highlighted how powerful these everyday interactions can be.

Across the organisation, colleagues took the opportunity to engage in meaningful check-ins,

walk-and-talks, and relaxed conversations during breaks. These small acts helped reinforce a culture where talking about mental health is not only accepted but encouraged.

Every day offers a chance to reach out, ask how someone is doing, or simply let them know you're there. By keeping these conversations going, we all play a part in building a more understanding and supportive workplace for everyone.



Scan to learn more about the help Mind offers



SHADI'S

COLOURFUL

NEW LIFE

Fine artist Shadi Shokoohi wants her paintings to speak beyond words. The emotive, swirling compositions offer a glimpse into the huge life upheavals she has faced, arriving in the UK from Iran in 2022 with no family or friends, limited English, and her possessions in a single suitcase.

Yet far from being downcast, her vibrant paintings reflect the positivity and resilience Shadi has shown, working with Ingeus and partner Momentic, to restart her fine arts career from scratch.

Shadi, originally from Tehran, is a graduate of the prestigious Accademia delle Belle Arti di Firenze in Italy, where she lived for eight years before establishing her own teaching gallery

back in Iran. She shared her knowledge and lifelong love of painting as an art instructor for 15 years before political unrest forced a drastic change. Speaking only Farsi and Italian, Shadi arrived in the UK four years ago, eventually settling in Coventry. She attended college for a year to learn English, undertook vocational courses, and attended Erdington Jobcentre to find work. Her subsequent

referral to the Restart Scheme, delivered by Ingeus on behalf of Serco in the Central West Midlands, proved to be a turning point.

"My Restart Advisor Shamone is such a lovely lady, she helped me so much," says Shadi, who is 46 and now speaks almost fluent English. "I was still learning the language, no one knew me as an artist here, and I had none of my art collections. She

gave me the confidence and practical help to start again.”

The Restart Scheme supports unemployed jobseekers to find work – including self-employment. Recognising Shadi’s undisputed artistic talent, Shamone arranged for her to be provided with a laptop, website domain name, email address, and funding for a social media course. Shadi wasted no time building her website and online followers – now approaching 30,000. Shamone also arranged for self-employment specialist Tim, from Momentic, to tutor Shadi in the essential steps

of setting up a business correctly.

Shadi joined the Momentic programme in February 2025, developing her costed business plan and successfully applying for a start-up loan to buy art equipment and professionally exhibit her work. Tim also ensured all registration and taxation regulations were adhered to.

“I am so grateful for all the help I received from Shamone and Tim,” adds Shadi, who now sells her artwork online and through prestigious UK and US galleries. “Starting

from nothing, I have been able to build up new art collections here. The UK is a beautiful country; it has inspired me greatly.



Scan to see
Shadi's colourful
world of art



“Despite the difficulties I have faced, my art is a celebration of life – the nature and beauty that surrounds us. Once I am established, I want to set up an art charity to help people with mental health issues. I want to teach again and give something back to the place that has helped me so much.”

Shadi, Artist



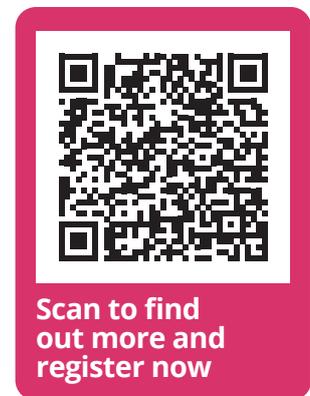
INGEUS PARTNERS WITH THE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS CONVENTION 2026

We're proud to be supporting Learning and Work Institute's Employment and Skills Convention this year, taking place on Thursday 2nd July in Manchester.

The event will bring together leaders and practitioners from central and local government, employers, training providers, and third sector organisations to explore the most pressing issues in employment and skills today.

Delegates will examine how to better connect young people with meaningful

opportunities, how technological change is reshaping skill demands, and what support workers and employers need to thrive in a rapidly evolving economy. These are just some of the vital questions we're looking to address as part of the convention as it looks toward building a more inclusive, future-ready labour market.





Getting to know you...

This month we stopped to take a minute to find out more about Niall Smith and his role at Ingeus in Communications.



Niall Smith

HAAS Communications
Manager

“My role here is to manage external communications for the Health Assessment Advisory Service (HAAS), from media enquiries to parliamentary meetings. My favourite part of the role is working with colleagues as we represent the organisation externally.

I started in November 2024 but I’ve been working in communications for longer than I care to commit to in writing (sending press releases by fax was still a thing when I first started).

I’m really proud to work here - in particular, the emphasis

everyone places on improving the service for customers. It’s hard to overstate how much I enjoy the importance Ingeus puts on people and the values we share.”

Continued on next page.

We asked Niall to answer life's essential 'this or that' questions:

Coffee or tea?

Coffee, and I'm afraid it's not even close.

Early bird or night owl?

Even as I approach the springtime of my senility, night owl still but only just (also, see "coffee" above).

Book or movie?

Movie. As a medium it still offers the best trade-off between making you think and just making you entertained.

When Ridley Scott got Russell Crowe to scream "are you not entertained?" in *Gladiator* I often think he may as well have been talking about film itself.

Pizza or pasta?

Pizza. With pepperoni. Unless I'm in Italy, in which case pasta. In my experience, they absolutely do not mess around with pasta in Italy (plus I like it very al dente).

Sunrise or sunset?

Sunset. I went on holiday with my wife to the Maldives once and I don't think there's a finer sight than a sunset on a tropical island.

Comedy or drama?

Comedy. Everything is drama, blending it with humour is surely a higher skill.

Singing or dancing?

Dancing. I have tried holding a tune on multiple occasions. Dropped it every time.

Cats or dogs?

I have a cat that I love very much called Euro, but I do prefer dogs and she knows it.

Summer holiday or winter holiday?

Both. Sorry not sorry. I learned to ski in Scotland which means I can ski anywhere, including where there's no snow.

Chocolate or vanilla?

Chocolate. I'm interpreting this question through the lens of ice cream. The effort required to make decent vanilla ice cream far exceeds the effort needed for decent chocolate ice cream.