

Mentoring partnership stories



Hannah-Ruth is the managing director of a sport and fitness business, which she co-founded alongside her brother Jonathan ten years ago. Based in South London, they provide sport and dance programmes in schools, gyms and the local community using their extensive professional sporting experience.

Founded on their core principles of discipline, commitment, and teamwork, the business model has pivoted to reflect a growing need for online fitness classes and has excitingly re-branded from JAM Total Sport to Sayaw, reflecting its evolution. Hannah-Ruth is part of the 2020 cohort of the Santander Breakthrough Women Business Leaders' Mentoring Programme, powered by Moving Ahead.

From a young age I wanted to pursue a professional dance career and travel the world using my skills. But like many artists, I faced uncertainty and at times rejection, but all of this became the catalyst to start a business which impacts people's lives through sport and dance.

“ The programme has had a fundamental impact on me and my business: it's changed me ”

Being on the Santander Breakthrough Women Business Leaders' Mentoring Programme has had a fundamental impact on me and my business: it's changed me. I knew I wasn't going to be a small business owner forever, but it's made me see myself as a female entrepreneur for the first time. It's made me realise that I can achieve what the big goals for the business are.

And that goal was simple. We want to develop positive role models, coach great athletes (maybe even potential Olympic champions), all while staying true to our principles. I've toured the world as a professional dancer and I've seen how powerful sport can be, having an instant impact of people's mental and physical wellbeing. I knew I wanted to make a greater impact, breaking the barriers between sport and dance. Creating employment for the struggling artists including dancers, footballers, martial artists, and athletes. Our programmes encourage people to move well and move often; Sayaw is movement for all.

Being part of the programme has opened my network enormously. My mentor, Hugo, is a scientist – would I have met a scientist otherwise if I hadn't been on the programme? Possibly not. It's opened up new opportunities and allowed me to take the step forward with my business.





COVID-19 has been tough; it's been tough for every business. But it also gave me the opportunity to re-strategise, to adapt and think bigger. We launched a virtual membership with a range of classes from Dance, Yoga, Martial Arts and HIIT with members signing up as if it were a Netflix fitness subscription. And then quite organically, the pivot happened, and we took it one step further. We felt like we had outgrown the business and needed to move out of the start-up mindset and into the stage of business development. I needed to work *on* the business, not *in* the business. Although the process was uncomfortable and frustrating at times, with a dose of courage you eventually come through the other side ready for the world to see the new, improved you. There were times where it felt really uncomfortable but having regular catch ups with my mentor and Maria, the Breakthrough Business Manager, who would check on my challenges, was such an important part of the support I received. If someone had told me in January that the business would develop this much, I wouldn't have believed them.

The Breakthrough community has been really supportive, too; from the resources and materials, to the events, webinars and information which is shared on FUSE. We've cultivated our connections online, championing each other and staying in touch through LinkedIn and Whatsapp. Everyone has found their own experience of COVID-19 tough, but we've been loyal and there for each other throughout the mentoring journey and these supporting mindsets from the participants to my mentor have been integral.

“ Go in with an open mind and a clear idea of the areas you want to grow in. ”

I'd encourage any female business owner to consider joining the programme in the future. My advice would be to go in with an open mind and a clear idea of the areas you want to grow in. For me, it was about strategising and seeing the bigger picture of Sayaw and developing the courage needed to take the next step in the company's evolution. It's been an invaluable programme to be part of, and I'm looking forward to paying forward this knowledge and insights in my community as well.

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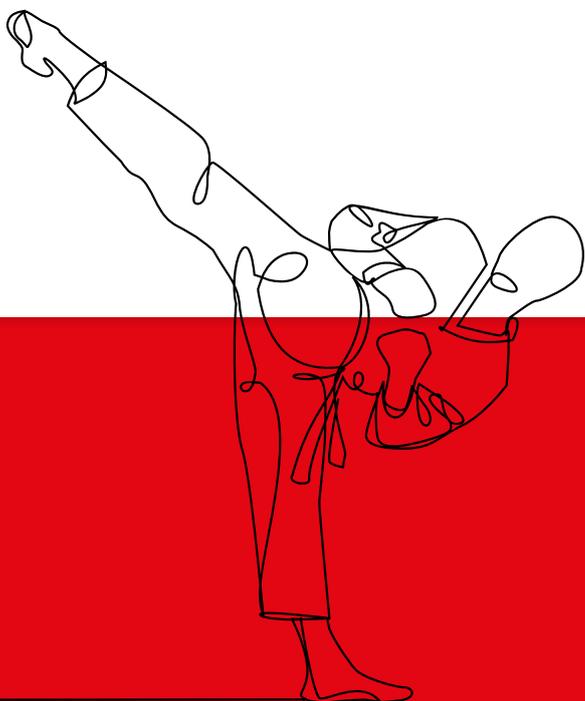
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