

# CHANGING THE NEWS NARRATIVE

Today is Impact Journalism Day, when 50 newspapers publish stories of initiatives that are helping to change the world

## Christian de Boisredon

Today, for Impact Journalism Day, 50 newspapers including *The Irish Times* join forces to highlight stories that change the world. Beyond the constant stream of negative news, there are many stories of hope and concrete solutions.

Stories of changemakers tackling some of the world's most pressing issues with innovative ideas, in order to change the lives of millions for the better. Stories worth reading and spreading, not only to rebalance our view of the world, but to help these existing solutions be replicated worldwide.

The media can play a crucial role in telling the individual stories behind this global movement.

That's why for the last five years Sparknews - a social-enterprise news agency dedicated to "solutions-based journalism" - has invited newspapers to take part in Impact Journalism Day, harnessing the power of collaborative journalism to bring stories of change to the surface.

Every year these newspapers explore and publish an array of groundbreaking solutions in special supplements on the same day, reach-

ing 120 million people worldwide in print and digital media. Many publications have come to realise the impact of these articles, and now incorporate more solutions-driven stories into their day-to-day coverage.

For the fifth edition of Impact Journalism Day, the media are joined by organisations that believe spreading these stories is a first step toward change.

These include the United Nations as well as One Young World, which annually gathers together 1,500 young leaders from social and corporate sectors who are involved in positive innovations. We hope you enjoy the read - and that you become part of the solution. Sign the manifesto ([sharestoriesofchange.org](http://sharestoriesofchange.org)) and share the stories that impress you most on Facebook and Twitter ([ImpactJournalism](https://www.facebook.com/ImpactJournalism), [@StoryOfChange](https://twitter.com/StoryOfChange), [@Sparknews](https://twitter.com/Sparknews), [@YourNewspaper](https://twitter.com/YourNewspaper)).

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## IMPACT Journalism Day by Sparknews

Written by Jan Victor R Mateo for the Philippine Star, the Philippines

### Making the sea safe, in a land of 2,500 drownings a year

Situated in the tropics of the Pacific, the Philippines have some of the best beaches in the world. However, the country also ranks highly in the number of people - especially children - who die due to drowning. A recent study by the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that nearly 2,500 people drowned each year in the Philippines between 1990 and 2011.

Float Philippines is a recent initiative by a group of Australian students from Griffith University. In 2015 they sought to find a drowning prevention programme to be rolled out across the Philippines.

"Drowning prevention programmes are commonplace in Australia and we grow up feeling safe when we are at the beach, both as a result of our swimming culture and the incredible job our surf lifesavers do patrolling the beach," says Andrew McLean, directing manager of Float Philippines.

The organisation wants to run "learn to swim" and "surf lifesaving" programmes to decrease cases of drowning, particularly in tourist spots along the coast. Nearly two years after their initial idea, Float's local co-ordinator, Kina Santillan Pascua, says they are nearing the implementation phase of the project.

Pascua, a former co-ordinator for the Australian embassy, says she sees the importance of implementing a drowning prevention programme in

the Philippines. "I work in a lot of development projects and everywhere I go, I see a lot of communities with kids playing near shorelines. It's their backyard and we have to implement programmes that will make their environment safer," she says.

While the long-term objective is to promote a culture of safer aquatic spaces in the entire Philippines, the team behind the project understands that it has to limit its programme to make it sustainable and scalable.

Float's pilot project will be based in Baler, but the team hopes that in the long term, it will be able to provide surf lifesaving training across Aurora Province.

"We hope to ensure sustainability through training and developing skills of the local organisations we are working with. In addition to this, we want to provide local and international partnerships to these organisations running the project from the ground level to boost their knowledge and capabilities in the drowning-prevention field," says McLean.

For these Australian students, distance - and the difference in culture - is not going to be a hindrance to ensuring that Filipino children are safe in the water.

As McLean puts it: "We think that everyone should have the ability to learn to swim and enjoy an aquatic environment."



Andrew McLean discussing swimming strategies with the Zambales Swim Team



Written by Lauren Crothers for Sparknews

## Lifesaving hero rats with a nose for explosives

Merry usually wakes before the sun rises and is driven to work along with 11 of her colleagues in Siem Reap province, Cambodia. They work for a few hours, napping between shifts. Her job, detecting landmines and other unexploded ordnance (UXO), requires a laser-like focus. It also helps that at about a kilo in weight, she's very light of foot.

Merry is an African giant pouched rat, or *Cricetomys gambianus*, a docile and exceptionally smart rodent with superior olfactory abilities. She is one of a team of "HeroRATS" bred, trained and deployed by the Belgian non-profit APOPO, which is headquartered in Tanzania. After working successfully for more than a decade, and in Angola since 2013, the organisation partnered with the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) in 2015.

Cambodia is one of the most mine- and UXO-contaminated countries in the world. At least 500,000 tonnes of ordnance were spilled over from Vietnam, while decades of conflict after the 1970s saw millions of mines laid throughout the country. More than 1,600sq km of land are still contaminated by mines and other explosive remnants of war.

The impact on communities has been nothing short of devastating. According to

the latest figures from the Cambodia Mines/UXO Victim Information System, more than 64,000 casualties were recorded between 1979 and February of this year. Nearly 20,000 of these people were killed.

**Paws on the ground**  
The Cambodian village of Dai Ouv lies about 25km from the Thai border. It is home to more than 2,000 people and a 3,000m-long minefield that has blighted the tranquil landscape for decades. By April 8th of this year, Merry and her clawed comrades, along with their human counterparts, were expected to have cleared the entire area.

Pok Nin, a resident of Dai Ouv, always had a heightened sense of fear when he tried to grow crops; one man he knew was killed after stepping on a landmine, while another had a very close call when his tractor triggered one in a field.

Like others, he was sceptical about the rats' ability to clear mines. "Cambodian rats run everywhere and eat everything," Nin says. But in February, he was handed a mine-free plot of land that the rats had cleared. "It has changed my life," he says.

Tethered to a cable that extends across a 10m x 20m grid and attached to handlers on either side, they work the ground with their noses, inch by inch, back and forth. They do

this swiftly: the rats are able to check an area the size of a tennis court in 30 minutes.

When a rat smells TNT, the explosive compound found in most landmines, it will stop and focus on that one area before scratching lightly at the soil. Once the scent is confirmed, the teams begin a careful excavation to uncover what lies beneath.

"The impact has been big," says Vendeline Shirima, APOPO's international mine-detection rats supervisor from Tanzania. "People would say it was crazy, but when we started clearing Mozambique, they saw it was pretty amazing. We never miss mines using rats." Mozambique was officially declared mine-free in September 2015.

**Detection rates**  
Specially trained HeroRATS have also proven successful at sniffing out tuberculosis in Tanzania and Mozambique. According to APOPO, the rats have identified more than 11,000 TB cases missed by government clinics, increasing detection rates by more than 50 per cent in 2016.

Sr Denise Coghlan works in Cambodia as part of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines team that was awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. "They're interesting-looking creatures," she says of the HeroRATS. "I think anybody that can contribute to mine

clearance and eradication of the problem is an asset."

Coghlan and Shirima both note that funding is one of the major challenges in mine clearance. Despite this, rats are cost-effective in the long term, as their basic needs - water, food and a clay pot to bed down in - are inexpensive. They are also able to cover more ground in a shorter amount of time than a person with a detector, speeding up operations and leaving funds for further tasks, or for checking a wider area for explosives.

Back at home in their freshly cleaned clay pots and sated by a hearty meal of banana and peanuts, Merry and her colleagues settle in for the rest of the day. Come sunrise, they'll be back out in this quiet corner of Cambodia again, noses to the ground. [apopo.org](http://apopo.org)

Read Catherine Cleary on FoodCloud, *The Irish Times* contribution to Impact Journalism Day, in today's *Irish Times Magazine*

Written by Manon Masset for the Franco-Russian newspaper *Le Courrier de Russie*

## Tattooing over the scars of domestic violence

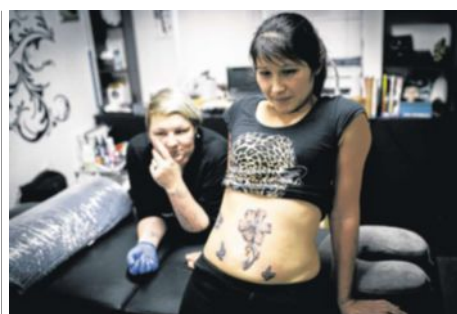
Somewhere between counsellor and tattoo artist, 33-year-old Evgenia Zakhar transforms the scars of domestic violence victims into works of art in her tattoo studio in Ufa, Russia.

In a small basement at the corner of the main road, Evgenia is painstakingly outlining flowers along old scars. Facing her, an outstretched Dinara, nurse in training, has her hand on the young woman's shoulder. "I can't bear it," she says. "I feel so ashamed, I can't bear it."

Two hours of work later, the scars are completely covered with small delicate flowers, tinged with blue. The traces of Dinara's injuries actually make the insides of the flowers look more realistic.

Warm and naturally optimistic, Evgenia has been working as a tattoo artist for 10 years, alongside her partner, Alexei. "It was the natural choice for me to become a tattoo artist, because I liked drawing but I did not want to curb my creativity at art college," she explains.

Last August, Evgenia came across the work of A Pele da Flor (Flower-like Skin) by Brazilian tattoo artist Flavia Carvalho, who covered over the scars of female victims of



After being stabbed by her husband, Laysan receives a tattoo to cover the scar in Evgenia Zakhar's tattoo studio in Ufa, Russia

domestic violence. Inspired, the young Russian decided to follow her example by offering her services for free via the Russian social network, Vkontakte.

The tattooist was surprised by how popular her offer was. "In just one week, I already had 50 requests," she says. Over six months, more than 200 women found themselves beneath the expert hands of

Evgenia, who dedicates every Monday to these tattoos. She offers them for free, covering all the costs involved.

Tattooing victims of domestic violence has come to be more than just a job. "On top of helping them, I leave my mark on the world. The majority of my clients are younger than I am, and when I am gone, they will continue to bear my tattoos, which

reminds them that a new start is possible," she explains.

For the women who come to the studio, Evgenia is unmistakably an artist, but also a counsellor. "To start with, it was terrible to hear all these stories, but bit by bit I learned how to listen. Now, I even suggest that they tell their story one last time - before leaving it behind them forever once the tattoo is finished," she says.

**Offer services**  
In the future, Evgenia is hoping to set out on her motorcycle with her partner on a tour of Russia, so that she can offer her services to abused women from other regions.

Evgenia's commitment is even more symbolic in a Russia which has recently introduced a law decriminalising domestic violence.

Since February 2017, some domestic violence cases, such as those where blows are cast for the first time and do not affect the health of the victim, are considered an "administrative" misdemeanour rather than a criminal offence. These cases are penalised with a fine between 5,000 and 30,000 roubles (€75-€452).

The Bill provoked strong reactions among the public, some fearing it might trivialise the phenomenon. According to the Russian ministry of internal affairs, every year 36,000 women are victims of domestic abuse and 12,000 women die as a result of violence from their partners.

In Russia, 97 per cent of domestic violence cases are not taken as far as court.

## IMPACT Journalism Day by Sparknews

İ HASETİ E SUBİH *El Watan* LA NACION AZERNEWS DELO *The Daily Star* LE SOIR L'ÉCONOMISTE DU FASO 10VOR10-SRF *Le Messager* EL TIEMPO POLITIKEN *KOMPAS* RESPECT AI Masry AI Youm LE FIGARO Mon Quotidien El Heraldo *Fotemité* *Matin* *Pactu* THE IRISH TIMES L'Œrient LE JOUR *L'express* EL PAIS L'ÉCONOMISTE THE NATION FOLHA DE S.PAULO The Asahi Shimbun DONG-A-ILBO RZECZSPOLITA *le soleil* *Kommersant* THE STRAITS TIMES *Le Courrier de Russie* *City Press* THE PHILIPPINE STAR 24 heures *Anges-Dispatch* *la Regione* *Khao Sod* THE HINDU T24 *Tribune de Genève* *The China Post* USA TODAY HAARETZ La Presse AJ+ EGYPT INDEPENDENT *Les Échos du Nord* *Positive.News* *Daily Monitor* Η ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ *CORRIERE INNOVAZIONE* *JEUNE AFRIQUE*

Today, 50 of the world's leading newspapers are publishing, in more than 40 countries, 60 positive innovations that are changing the world. #StoryOfChange



Written by Hassan Karimi for Hasht e Subh, Afghanistan

# Orchestral manoeuvres in Afghanistan put girls first

In one of the many practice rooms of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM), Zarifa Adeb is playing the violin with admirable dexterity and concentration amid a group of students. While this Afghan girl has long dreamed of becoming a pop singer, her passion for classical music has emerged more recently. When she was only one year old, Adeb fled with her family to Pakistan where she stayed until she was 15, before deciding to return to her own country. "I came here at the end of 2014. When I was looking for a music teacher I found this music institute, where you can come and learn music in a professional way."

Zarifa Adeb, now in her final year, has been studying the violin for two years. She is ambitious and hopeful. However, only 10 years ago, these music lessons would have been completely banned.

ANIM was opened in 2010 by Ahmad Naser Sarmast, the current director, although its history goes back even further. The institute is rekindling a musical teaching tradition that was severely weakened over the course of recent political upheavals.

With the original creation of the music school in 1974, music became a part of the national curriculum in Afghanistan. The school held classes until 1988 when it closed due to war. It stayed shut throughout the rule of the Taliban, since music was made illegal. The school only reopened after former president Hamid Karzai came to power.

Sarmast then began the "Reconstruction of Afghan Music" project in 2008, which was funded by the World Bank. Two years later, the music school became ANIM and began teaching courses in both classical western and eastern music.

These include lessons in the violin, viola, guitar, piano, trumpet and flute, as well as more traditional instruments such as the robab, ghichak, tambour drum, qashqar-cha, the three-stringed sarod and the detroba.

## Exclusively girls

Currently ANIM has about 250 students, including 75 girls. From the ranks young women have pooled together their respective talents to form the Zohra Orchestra, the first Afghan orchestra made up exclusively of girls. Started in 2014, this musical group held its first event at the Canadian embassy in Kabul – not exactly a small-town crowd.

Zarifa Adeb talks about these first days: "When I first joined the school there were only five girls in total. We wanted to organise a group for women since, that same year at the institute, the boys were allowed to create both rock and pop groups. It was like a competition. So we created a choir. As time went on, other girls came to join the group. That's when, only three weeks later, we changed from a singing group into an orchestra."



■ Afghanistan National Institute of Music: currently the institute has about 250 students, including 75 girls

A teacher at the institute, Mohammad Murad Sharkhush, says: "The original idea for the Zohra Orchestra came from a young girl called Mina who was a student here. The idea was taken up by Dr Naser Sarmast and, today, we're witnessing the orchestra's success."

Unfortunately, due to family problems, the girl had to return to her home province, and then her family refused to let her return to Kabul.

Musicians in the orchestra range from 12 to 21 years of age. Recently, they had the opportunity to participate in various international programmes, such as the

## IMPACT Journalism Day by Sparknews

Davos forum in Switzerland. "One of our main successes so far was being able to show to the world a positive image of Afghanistan and its culture. This orchestra has been supported by several countries and is also known as the "Angels of Music," Sharkhush adds.

Every year, between 300 and 400 applicants take the institute's entrance exam and only 50 of them are offered places. About 50 per cent of the candidates are homeless or orphaned children and are put forward by NGOs working on children's rights in Afghanistan. As well as the Zohra Orchestra, the institute has 11 other

music groups. Sharkhush continues: "When a change occurs in a country, it's better not to worry; you should be positive, and I am optimistic. Afghanistan is a country where art occupies a prominent place in people's lives."

At the institute, both rich students and orphans attend music classes under the same roof. They express their emotions – whether that means pain, hope, joy or grief – through music, so that one day they will be able to fulfill their childhood dreams. Sarmast ANIM "is like an island of hope in the dark. This institute is the symbol of the Afghanistan of tomorrow."

Written by C Hallé for Mon Quotidien, France

## Sustainable streetlight switches on when it sees you coming

Engineers in Las Vegas, Nevada, are testing a new system to illuminate the streets of the city: solar-powered streetlights that can switch themselves on and off when people pass nearby. The aim of this invention is to reduce both pollution and electricity costs.

Located in the middle of the desert, Las Vegas enjoys high levels of sunshine throughout the year, making the city an ideal place for solar energy use. For this reason, the company EnGoPlanet installed four eco-friendly streetlights on a busy square in the city.

The system is simple. A battery is connected to rounded solar panels above the streetlights that store the energy to illuminate the square. The battery is connected to kinetic tiles built into the pavement. When a pedestrian walks on the slabs, the energy



■ EnGoPlanet's solar-powered streetlights switch themselves on

produced by the weight of their movement is harnessed. Thanks to small generators, each step generates 4 to 8 watts, depending

on the pressure exerted. If the system proves effective, it will be extended to other major American cities. engoplanet.com

Written by Jana Klímová and Magdaléna Fajtová for Respekt, Czech Rep

## 'It changed my life': a front-loading car for disabled drivers

The Elbee is a weird vehicle. It opens from the front, and you don't climb in, but slide straight into it with a wheelchair. The small car is one of the first vehicles made solely for disabled drivers. The car is the brainchild of Czech businessman Ladislav Brázdil. When he began his manufacturing company, Brázdil decided to follow his dream of creating his own product: an urban micro-car designed specifically for drivers in a wheelchair. "This was it," says Brázdil. "It was something unique that we as an engineering business could produce."

The first model went to market at the end of 2014 and the historic first customer was František Trunda, who had lost both legs below the hips. For him the car has provided a renewed sense of freedom. "It has changed my life," he says. "I can now go for a drive out of town or go to see my brother. I don't have to wait until someone has time to go with me."



■ The Elbee: a front-loading car designed for disabled people

This direct driver access to the vehicle was a fundamental principle of the whole project. Ordinary vehicles that are adapted do not resolve the problem of what to do

with the wheelchair, if there is nobody there to help the disabled driver stow it away. A major advantage of front-end opening is that wheelchair users

Written by Priscilla Goy for the Straits Times, Singapore

## It's one smart tent: giving shelter to India's homeless

For six years, a married homeless couple were separated, forced to live apart in Delhi, India. The husband was in one gender-segregated shelter and the wife in another.

Last year, for the first time, they were able to move into their own "home". Their new "home" is a tent, designed by Singapore-based non-profit organisation BillionBricks. The tent can be set up by one person in 15 minutes without any tools. It is weather-resistant, offering protection from the city's extreme temperatures which can range from 5 to 45 degrees. It can fit a family of two adults and three children.

In the winter, its triple-layer reversible cover provides insulation, while the reflective material on the inside traps body heat. In the summer, the tent cover can be reversed to reflect solar heat,



■ WeatherHYDE was piloted in New Delhi. PHOTOGRAPH: B KRAN

helping people inside stay cool. More than 20 homeless families pilot-tested the tent in Delhi and Mumbai in India. The United

Nations estimated that there were 100 million people homeless in 2005, the last time a global survey was done. billionbricks.org

Written by Yannis Palaiologos for Kathimerini, Greece

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## Greek start-up culture battles the country's brain drain

Greece has now been in crisis for a decade. Since sliding into recession in 2008, it has seen its annual output collapse by about a quarter. Its unemployment rate has been above 20 per cent for more than five years. Close to a half a million Greeks, mostly those with the best education and career prospects, have left the country to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

There have been few rays of hope to cling to in this dark period. One of them has been the steady emergence of the Greek start-up ecosystem. In the years since four EU-backed venture capital funds started operating in early 2013, there have been notable successes, including multimillion-dollar investment rounds and buyouts by major global companies.

One active player in the Greek start-up scene has been Stavros Messinis, founder of CoLab, a co-working space in Athens, in 2009 and, in 2013, another space known as the Cube.

"We're currently hosting around 20 companies. They are mainly software tech companies but we have one or two hardware companies, a software agency and even a company that makes trendy handbags," Messinis says.

"We offer them facilities to work from, mentoring and other services such as legal and accounting. The fact that they're together in a shared office means they help each other out."

## New ventures

Technology hub Foundation, co-founded by Dimitris Kalavros-Gousiou, takes "a very pragmatic approach" in building new ventures. The team comprises business developers, operators, senior technologists, marketing and fundraising experts, he says.

Kalavros-Gousiou (29) has been involved in the Greek start-up scene for much of the last decade. "Our main priority is to choose people over ideas, and teams over individuals," he says. "We sit down with teams, and we try to examine their culture, ethics and values." Over the past five years the "team" has "matured dramatically".

**"We chose to do something in a rather run-down part of the city because rent was low and we felt we could do something to uplift things"**

Messinis says the euphoria that comes after a successful investment in a local tech company is often followed by a "real slump".

One such slump was the introduction of capital controls in the summer of 2015, after the failure of negotiations between the Tsipras government and the country's official creditors. In such times, Messinis explains, a "major challenge is the significant brain drain. Most developers worth their salt will emigrate during a funding slump when entrepreneurs aren't being funded and hence can't hire them. While the universities produce very good talent, there's a limited supply of techies with project experience."

One organisation that has focused on reversing the brain drain is Reloat Greece, founded as an educational charity in London in 2012.

## Close ties

"Developing close ties with the ecosystem in Greece is key towards fulfilling our mission of bridging Greece with the rest of the world," says Effie Kyriata, the organisation's chief executive. Implementing these ties also includes taking on unpredictable challenges, such as those faced in Exarcheia – a hotbed of anarchist activism and criminality – by the denizens of the Cube.

"We chose to do something in a rather run-down part of the city because rent was low and we felt we could do something to uplift things," Messinis says. "For now, we've succeeded. We had a significant problem with drug dealing in the area but since about six months ago, we've had a significant improvement by collaborating with the authorities while also holding them publicly accountable. Given the right encouragement, they act positively."

Beyond that, what can the government do to help the 350-450 companies that make up the start-up sector? "We need to create incentives on tax, employability, ease to set up/operate and close a company," says Kalavros-Gousiou.

"And we need to do more to foster an entrepreneurial culture, that will mobilise private Greek money and even international start-ups and investors to start looking to Greece for opportunities." thecube.gr

Written by R Vedrenne for L'Actu, France

## The device that makes muddy water drinkable

The Safe Water Cube, created by French engineer Jean-Paul Augereau, is a water purification system. Some 20 of these boxes have already been installed in Morocco, India and Haiti. The 1.2m cubed stainless steel container has five filters including sand and carbon.

According to its creator, it makes all surface water, even muddy water, drinkable. It also destroys "all the bacteria responsible for diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera and hepatitis, without destroying the minerals in the water", purifying up to 1,000 litres per hour without electricity.

The fountain costs €3,500 and is sold primarily to humanitarian organisations and local authorities. According to the UN, 10 per cent of the world's population lacks access to safe drinking water.



■ A community committee in Haiti

Every day, about 3,000 children die from diseases linked to contaminated water. safewatercube.com

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# Waste not

FoodCloud has a massive new Dublin hub which shows how the food waste initiative is expanding, writes **Catherine Cleary**

**A**oibheann O'Brien still remembers that first box of food five years ago. She and Iseult Ward picked it up at the Honest 2 Goodness Farmers Market in Glasnevin in Dublin and dropped it off to the Don Bosco youth services centre.

It was a sunny June bank holiday weekend. "We thought, 'we feel great about this'. It was artisan sausages and really nice sourdough bread and I think there was raw milk as well, which is so funny, because everyone goes mad for raw milk."

The delivery was a dummy run for FoodCloud, a college project set up by the two women. It became a tech startup connecting businesses that had surplus food with charities who needed food.

Five years on and 8,300 tonnes of food or more than 18 million meals have been diverted from landfill, and FoodCloud employs 30 people tackling food waste from almost 2,000 businesses here and in the UK.

At their new headquarters in Tallaght's Broomhill Business Park, the visitor book sits on a stand made from a timber pallet, in a nod to the idea of usefulness over waste. The bright offices were painted by prisoners on day release from an open prison. A tech team is working on the ground floor while upstairs a call centre team is fielding calls from supermarkets in the UK, where more than 1,600 branches of Tesco and three Waitrose stores are posting donations of food. Waitrose is trialling it with a view to expanding it to more branches.

Until late last year FoodCloud transactions involved small consignments of food collected by individual charities from the

delivery bays of supermarkets and shops. Now in the 15,000sq ft warehouse the scale of their new operation, FoodCloud Hubs, is visible.

"There's a lot wasted at retail level but there are huge volumes that go to waste before they even get to a supermarket and they're in big bulk," O'Brien explains. So this warehouse, and two others in Cork and Galway, takes pallets of food from 100 Irish businesses including supermarket distribution centres and food producers, and deliver it to charities around the country.

Among the vast haul are two pallets of Nutrigrain bars, which would have ended up in landfill or in an anaerobic digester because their best-before date is looming. Earlier in the season they had a consignment of pullet eggs, deemed too small for retail, from a West Cork egg producer. In a cold store whole ducks and turkeys from Aldi's Easter range are stored frozen to extend their life. Glanbia, Kerry Group and Pallas Foods are assessing FoodCloud Hubs as a potential food waste solution for their businesses. It's a long way from that first box of bread, milk and sausages.

O'Brien first got excited about food and sustainability when she was living in London on a graduate scheme with investment bank, JP Morgan. A law and accounting graduate she returned to Dublin to do a masters degree and decided to volunteer with a food waste project in Dublin. The nearest thing was a redistribution hub run by the charity, Crosscare.

She went to pitch the idea of a surplus food cafe at a social enterprise event and met Trinity business student Iseult Ward,



“

You had all these multiples [throwing out food] and then you'd walk down the street and there'd be a sign for raising money for St Vincent de Paul

who loved the idea. The two women decided to start FoodCloud as a college project.

"We spotted a gap in the market for this supermarket-level surplus," O'Brien says. "That's where we thought it was really interesting because in the same communities there was surplus and scarcity. We thought, wouldn't it be amazing if you could bring it all together. You had all these multiples [throwing out food] and then you'd walk down the street and there'd be a

sign for raising money for St Vincent de Paul."

They quickly learned that in the complexity of the modern food system there were barriers to that simple idea of connecting surplus to scarcity. "In the US there was a guy doing it in Chicago so we spoke to him, but when we talked to a more established hub model they said, 'oh retail is very difficult because it's small volumes, end of life. It's more hassle than it's worth in terms of the food. And it's just really tricky to do it.'"

But they were undaunted. Instead each barrier became a problem to be worked out. With solicitors A&L Goodbody they drew up legal contracts so charities agreed to be responsible for the safe delivery of the food once they received it in good condition. The not-for-profit ethos of sharing meant they could tap into other resources.

"The guy in Chicago was like 'here, use my app'. The guys in London were giving us their contracts."

In October 2013 they got their big break when Tesco Ireland came on board. "Until then it would have plodded along with a couple of cafes and bakeries." They quickly went from one to 13 stores and by the following summer they had a national roll-out with Tesco, and they hired their first staff. Now 274 Irish food retailers connect with 303 charities through FoodCloud.

There are still plenty of challenges as FoodCloud grows, not least keeping the operation financially sustainable and getting food out quickly so it doesn't go to waste in their warehouses. They are, O'Brien says, just one strand in a massively complex

## 274

Irish food retailers connect with 303 charities through FoodCloud

## 8,300

tonnes of food or more than 18 million meals have been diverted from landfill in the past five years





**FoodCloud co-founders Iseult Ward and Aoibheann O'Brien at the launch of the FoodCloud Hub in Tallaght, Dublin 24.** Photograph: Naoise Culhane

problem. But the feedback has been encouraging.

One Dublin charity has saved up to €9,000 on its annual food budget by incorporating waste food ingredients into its menu. The chief executive of a women's shelter told O'Brien that the FoodCloud initiative was one of the most powerful things it had done. "Because all of the women come out of their rooms to see what's there, have a chat, have a laugh about what food is there, because it can be quite random. They get to engage with each other and talk about things. So they [the shelter] said it just shows the power of food. It's not just food. It's about bringing people together and sharing."

Running a growing business is a huge leap from a college project but O'Brien and Ward are still excited about its potential to reach other sectors.

The new hub enables them to work with businesses at several levels "whether you're an egg producer or a massive manufacturer or a store manager in inner city Dublin, that's really exciting to us. It fits in with the Origin Green idea of sustainability. Food waste and food poverty have to be

part of that sustainable food conversation but that's where we see there's huge potential for Ireland to be a leader in that."

Ideally they would like to see food waste eliminated and the data they've gathered will help do that. In the meantime they try and ensure surplus food gets to people who need it.

"There's a lot of energy and loads of people behind it. That's what's really amazing. You can start something but you need a lot of people throwing their weight behind it to keep it going.

"You see all of these diverse people getting behind it, from a Tesco senior leadership team to the charities that put up with the teething problems and stuck with it. People felt intuitively that this was a really good thing to do."

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