Enterprise Northern Ireland and the LEA network: Social Entrepreneurship

Programme – Developing social enterprises across Northern Ireland



## Enterprise Northern Ireland – who we are, what we do

Enterprise Northern Ireland is the representative body for the network of Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs) across Northern Ireland and as such, is at the heart of a dynamic, high profile network of enterprise support providers. Enterprise Northern Ireland is unique amongst other organisations working in the small business or enterprise development sector as we are dedicated to working with pre-entrepreneurial start-ups and early stage business ventures within the private and social enterprise sectors.

The Local Enterprise Agency network is an integral part of Northern Ireland's successful social economy. Each LEA is a locally-based, profitmaking but not profit-taking company, based at the heart of their local business community. LEAs are the first point-of-contact for new start-ups, existing businesses wishing to develop and grow and for social entrepreneurs wanting to make a difference. LEAs deliver a suite of pre-start, startup and business development interventions as well as offering flexible and low-cost accommodation and access to loan fund products.

Just as the organisation is committed to encouraging and supporting new business formation and supporting business growth through the delivery of small business support interventions, Enterprise Northern Ireland is similarly committed to the development of the social enterprise sector. We recognise that social entrepreneurs are important components in achieving the Northern Ireland Executive's stated priority to rebalance and rebuild the region's economy.

## What is social entrepreneurship?

Social enterprises are businesses with primarily social objectives. Social entrepreneurship is important as it provides a framework for businesses to find their own niche, and create their own successes, in the pursuit of helping others. Just like any other private sector business, social enterprises compete in the wider marketplace to deliver goods and services and to make a profit – the difference is that profits are principally reinvested towards achieving their social, community or environmental purpose rather than being directed towards shareholders or owners. Social entrepreneurship therefore ensures that business success is not solely measured in terms of financial performance.

Social entrepreneurs bring innovative business ideas to some of the most pressing issues affecting society and to the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland, and their entrepreneurial efforts are likely to become even more important as pressures on welfare payments and public expenditure take effect.

# Why social entrepreneurship is important

As society struggles with a range of problems including poverty, unemployment, social and educational disparity, environmental concerns, climate change, health inequalities and so on, social entrepreneurship is coming to the fore. Social entrepreneurs can be described as 'change agents' as they:

- Prioritise improving society as being among the most important things they seek to achieve;
- Adopt a mission to create and sustain social value, opposed to just private value;
- Pursue new opportunities to serve that mission;
- Find new, innovative ways of making social improvements.

## Social entrepreneurship and economic development

Social entrepreneurs create important economic value in terms of:

- Job creation: providing job opportunities and training to people, including segments of society who find themselves at an employment disadvantage (for instance, long-term unemployed, disabled, homeless, at-risk or excluded youth, gender-discriminated women);
- Innovation: apply innovative thinking to the development of new products and services, particularly those important to social and economic development (for instance, new ways of tackling societal problems such as poverty, crime, physical and mental ill-health and social exclusion);
- Social enterprises create business solutions to social problems and unmet social needs – social entrepreneurs frequently work in sectors and with target groups who are often excluded, ignored or sidelined by the private sector as they are not seen as being popular or profitable enough to engage with;
- Enhanced social capital: social entrepreneurship starts at a grassroots level and creates huge amounts of social capital in the form of enhanced networks and relationships which are forged amongst people working together for a common purpose;
- Promotes equity: social entrepreneurs foster a more equitable society by addressing social issues and trying to achieve ongoing sustainable impact through their social mission rather than solely working to achieve profitmaximisation.

## The Social Entrepreneurship Programme

The Social Entrepreneurship Programme (under ownership of Invest NI until July 2015) was established to address difficulties and inefficiencies which social enterprises faced when starting up, including access to business support and finance. Enterprise Northern Ireland held the contract for the Social Entrepreneurship Programme, which provided businesses within the social economy with the help and support needed to overcome barriers to their establishment, development and growth.

The Programme was managed by Larne-based Local Economic Development Co Ltd (LEDCOM) and delivered via Enterprise Northern Ireland's network of LEA members throughout the region. The programme provided:

- Business support and mentoring to social economy start-ups;
- Access to sustainable models of finance;
- Ongoing training to help sustain and grow these businesses.

Across Northern Ireland, the outputs of the Programme have been very encouraging:

- 154 new social enterprises set up, creating over 360 jobs and with a combined projected turnover of £20million;
- Export sales of around £8 million;
- Strong social impact 83% of social enterprises set up in the top 300 SOA of disadvantage in Northern Ireland;
- 30 participants in the Social Entrepreneurship Programme have become Invest NI mainstream clients.

The achievements of Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agency network in boosting the social economy can be witnessed in the following success stories, which represent the vibrant and dynamic nature of social enterprise start-ups across each of the new eleven Council areas. Each new social economy business profiled started with the support of the Enterprise Northern Ireland network of Local Enterprise Agencies and the Social Entrepreneurship Programme.

Love Hockey, Ireland

objectives for the future, to allow for the achievement of key performance targets in relation to finance, people and service development. The Rink plans to be self-sustaining by the second year of its operations, and be in a position to reinvest surpluses the following year in the community through their own programmes.

### **ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE & CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA** Social enterprise:

'The Rink', Love Hockey Ireland, Portadown

The Rink has been developed as a social enterprise by a local community-based charity, Love Hockey Ireland, which was founded in 2010 to develop the physical, emotional and social skills of children and young people through community development in the form of sport, and in particular, in-line hockey.

The Rink offers a range of sports and leisure services which have created employment and training opportunities for local sports clubs, enthusiasts and young people aspiring to try a new sport. In addition, the facility has attracted teams from across the island of Ireland, the UK and around the world, bringing with it financial benefits. It is managed by a voluntary board of internationally experienced business and community representatives supported by the management, volunteers and an Invest NI mentor.

Through their involvement in the Social Entrepreneurship Programme, the Love Hockey Ireland team were able to develop a detailed five year strategy, enabling the team to identify key stakeholders, a clear vision, goals and SMART

## ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA Social enterprise: Extern Group, Mallusk, Newtownabbey

Extern provides services in partnership with commissioners to a range of vulnerable and marginalised people including children, young people, adults and families. Extern's service provision focuses on the following key areas:

- Outreach and accommodation services for those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness;
- Early intervention and prevention for children, young people and their families affected by social exclusion;
- Supporting community and public safety through outreach and accommodation services;
- Monitoring and supervision of those who have offended and are resettling in the community.

The new social enterprise seeks to invest a portion of Extern's unrestricted reserves to purchase properties and create a stock of housing accommodation which will be used to provide long-term accommodation to people who are currently homeless and, potentially, to offenders when they leave custody. The new business also provides training and work opportunities for offenders within Extern's client base. Income generated by the Fund, which will come from rental allowances and subsidies from statutory authorities and agencies, will be reinvested to purchase more property to enable Extern support more people in need. The Social Entrepreneurship Programme helped Extern develop a business plan and financial projections, examine appropriate governance and funding models for the social enterprise business, and map out the various break-even levels at different asset prices and rates of return to potential investors.

This important project helps its various beneficiary groups in the following ways:

- Growing individual self-esteem and autonomy;
- Enabling people to develop their problem solving skills and social competence;
- Promoting family and social relationships;
- Building individual protective factors;
- Improving resiliency to enable people to better deal with the challenges in their lives.

All of which ultimately impact on the lives of children and families through:

- Increased parental capacity;
- Keeping children safe and reducing offending rates;
- Improving school attendance;
- Increasing community involvement and social inclusion.

#### DERRY CITY & STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

## Social enterprise: 4r's Reuse Workshop, Derry

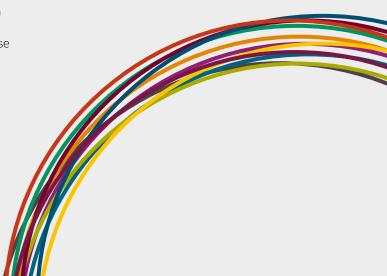
The 4r's Reuse Workshop was opened in April 2013, a pioneering social enterprise run by the Resource Centre, Derry in conjunction with Derry City Council. Located near the amenities sites at Pennyburn Industrial Estate in Derry, the mission of 4r's Reuse Workshop is to reuse unwanted furniture and electrical goods and to upcycle these goods for retail re-sale. In so doing, 4r's Reuse Workshop help enhance:

- Environmental well-being, by prolonging the life of furniture and reducing the amount of waste going to landfill;
- Economic well-being, by helping reduce landfill costs on the local rate payer and producing low cost items available for sale to the public;
- Social well-being, by creating training opportunities and reinvesting proceeds from all sales back into the 4r's Reuse Workshop.

Tutors work alongside young trainees from all over the city to transform once-unwanted pieces of furniture, which are then resold. Money from sales is reinvested into the Resource Centre Derry organisation. Opportunities for training are also provided in administration, sales and customer services.

Through the Social Entrepreneurship Programme, Resource Centre Derry were supported at every stage – from the initial development of the 4r's Reuse concept, securing initial capital investment, right through to developing the operational aspects of the new social enterprise.

Paddy McCarron, Training Manager with Resource Centre Derry described how the 4r's Reuse Workshop is a valuable asset to the local community: *"This workshop not only helps to give people a set of skills but it also helps to reduce the amount of discarded materials going into landfill. ... If we can use something that's been thrown away and change it into something that people are willing to pay money for, it not only helps the local community but it also reduces the amount of waste the Council have to deal with".* 



Specialisterne NI

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL AREA Social enterprise: Specialisterne NI, Belfast

Specialisterne NI, which translates from Danish as 'the specialists', is an innovative social enterprise that provides assessment, recruitment consultancy and support to talented people on the Autistic Spectrum with regard to jobs in the IT sector.

Established in April 2014 as the local expression of the Specialist People Foundation which started in Denmark in 2004, Specialisterne NI is a notfor-profit community interest company. Locally, Specialisterne NI aims to secure and support employment for at least 80 individuals on the Autistic Spectrum over a five-year period, and to improve pathways to employment to help address the imbalance that is currently represented by the high level of unemployment among this group of people.

Specialisterne NI recruits locally for market leaders such as Total Mobile, Intel, Tascomi and Liberty IT to provide talented people on the Autistic Spectrum for IT roles. In their first year, Specialisterne NI's innovative Lego Assessment

Workshops and Working with Autism Framework training has been delivered to public and private sector clients throughout Northern Ireland and caught the attention of a National Autism Project which was launched in the House of Lords in April 2015. Specialisterne NI was also selected to provide advice on the development of a UK strategy on adults with Autism, and delivered two government pilots in its first year, supporting four participants in the DEL/INI Software Test Academy. Specialisterne NI also organised a flagship event for DCAL/Arts Council Creativity Month, which focused on the business benefit of diversity, and is an approved supplier on DEL's Access to Work scheme which helps companies access support for employees with a disability.

The Social Entrepreneurship Programme helped Specialisterne NI achieve its overarching aim to create a better Northern Ireland for adults on the Autistic Spectrum. Specialisterne NI were assisted in the development of a detailed business plan giving a clear vision of sales targets which need to be achieved to ensure the social enterprise achieves long-term sustainability. The SEP mentor also helped in the recruitment of a strong board and put in place governance structures which have allowed the organisation to scale in a responsible and planned way, resulting in Specialisterne NI being able to deliver on government projects at a relatively early stage of their development. HR support and advice on business planning and financial management provided tools for scaling-up activities and provided good practice for future development. Sharon Didrichsen, Specialisterne NI Manager commented, 'Without the support of the Social Entrepreneurship Programme, Specialisterne NI may have looked very different now. The Programme provided a good foundation to create a business which can start to meet the scale of need and opportunity to make a difference to our social aim, that of bringing adults with Autism and work environments closer together by reducing social and perceptual barriers".

### ARDS & NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA

## Social enterprise: Rathgill Solutions, Bangor

Rathgill Solutions is owned by Rathgill Community Association and is located in the heart of the Rathgill housing estate in Bangor. The social enterprise provides homes and businesses in the Rathgill, Conlig and Bangor area, with a specific focus on elderly and vulnerable people, with access to a full maintenance service including:

- Handyman service;
- Garden maintenance;
- Car valet;
- Community transport;
- IT service;
- Small conference and meeting room hire.

For instance, Rathgill Solutions have helped elderly and disabled residents living in the area by installing concrete ramps, support handles and hand rails whilst, at the same time, providing training and employment opportunities for local people and generating income for Rathgill Community Association. The parent organisation has also played a key role in the redevelopment of the area, employing local people to deal with litter, graffiti and weeds which helped Rathgill estate win the prestigious Supervalu Best Kept Large Estate award in 2009, helping to boost community pride.

Mentors provided by the Social Entrepreneurship Programme gave Rathgill Solutions help and guidance on the recruitment of key staff, the development and implementation of HR policies and procedures, the corporate governance of the social enterprise and completing application forms for external funding.

According to Gary Sullivan from Rathgill Solutions, "without the excellent support and guidance provided through the Social Entrepreneurship Programme, we would not have progressed through the business journey as effectively. We benefitted greatly from all the help including the formation of a good business plan which assisted us to broker social investment".

## **LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL AREA** Social enterprise:

## Resurgam Community Development Trust, Lisburn

The Resurgam Community Development Trust oversees the betterment of disadvantaged communities within the Lisburn area. The organisation emphasises building alliances and relationships with locally-elected representatives across all political divides, and builds good working relationships with statutory, community and voluntary sectors in the area.

The Trust has developed a number of new social enterprise businesses, including:

- Laganview Enterprise centre (Laganview Community Gym);
- Resurgam Security services (Servo Contract Services);
- Resurgam Thrift shop (The Thrifty Corner);
- Lisburn Community Self-Build;
- Laganside Business Services.

Across all the businesses created by the Resurgam Trust there are clear social advantages to the local community as well as other beneficial outcomes, including providing employment in areas of high unemployment; the regeneration of an area which has pockets of deprivation which helps boost levels of community pride; and the provision of training opportunities which help to enhance personal empowerment of local people.



The Social Entrepreneurship Programme has given Resurgam Development Trust a wide range of assistance including detailed business planning for four social enterprise ventures, mentoring support in sales training for key staff, marketing and PR to raise awareness of the businesses, website development , and HR policies and procedures specifically tailored for each individual social enterprise. Adrian Bird, Director of the Trust, said, *"The support we received from the Social Entrepreneurship Programme has been excellent and has helped us develop our business model more effectively"*.

#### FERMANAGH & OMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

## Social enterprise: Tyrone Donegal Partnership, Omagh

Tyrone Donegal Partnership is a well-established cross border development company which, since its establishment in 1994, has delivered over 67 programmes and levered almost £4 million of funding. Their new social enterprise is VISTA (Virtual Incubation and Software Training Academy) which was set up with assistance provided through the Social Entrepreneurship Programme.

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VISTA is an innovative model which is based on the need for more trained software development professionals throughout Ireland. VISTA equips people with the ICT software development and technology skills needed to find employment within the software development industry. It does this by providing participants with work-based projects from commercial companies on which to refine and further enhance their software development and testing skills. VISTA also provides incubation support to encourage participants who wish to start their own businesses. These activities ensure the new social enterprise plays a vital role in creating employment and boosting entrepreneurial activity, thus increasing the economic value of the local area. In addition, VISTA has the potential to increase the productivity of other software companies by providing a skilled and experienced workforce.

The Social Entrepreneurship Programme helped Tyrone Donegal Partnership build a robust business plan which finely tuned the services that VISTA offers. The Programme also assisted with the development of a marketing plan which helped strategically place VISTA within the market place and helped identify potential funders.

### **CAUSEWAY COAST & GLENS DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA** Social enterprise: Ashes to Gold, Coleraine

In November 2013, the charity Ashes to Gold purchased '2nd Chance', a community-based workshop which was established to provide 'purposeful' activities to individuals in the area by repairing, upcycling or recycling donations of unwanted, pre-owned household items. These pieces are then sold on in '2nd Chance' retail outlets in Coleraine and Ballymoney. There is also a Ballymoney-based waste management centre which accepts furniture beyond repair, dismantling it to sell or re-use component parts.

Ashes to Gold, Coleraine

Slack Press, Newry

The aim of '2nd Chance' is to offer a wide range of programmes to help individuals grow in confidence, motivation, self-belief and to have the opportunity to learn new skills which will help them gain future employment and improve their quality of life. Through 2nd Chance, Ashes to Gold seeks to provide those who are unemployed with the opportunity to be reintegrated into the working community and be given a muchneeded second chance themselves.

The Social Entrepreneurship Programme enabled Ashes to Gold to expand the business side of the '2nd Chance' social enterprise whilst keeping a focus on their aims by developing a detailed business plan. The programme has helped management become aware of opportunities to grow the social enterprise whilst keeping a focus on current activities. Their mentor also assisted Ashes to Gold with completing and submitting funding applications in order to support the continued delivery of charitable aims and objectives.

#### **NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA** Social enterprise:

## Slack Press, Newry

SlackPress is a media production social enterprise launched in 2013. The organisation began with three out-of-work graduates with skills in media production, who aimed to gain experience by producing video content for community and charitable organisations. Their reputation for producing quality output saw SlackPress quickly gaining clients from all over Northern Ireland, ranging from small businesses to big players in the corporate world.

SlackPress are primarly involved in producing video content and presentation design, along with websites, social networking and animated informational videos. They support a freelance network of graduates by providing them with work in all areas of media production and coaching them to become more entrepreneurial. SlackPress also boost the profile of, and provide great exposure for, Northern Ireland's social economy by making high quality digital media productions.

The Social Entrepreneurship Programme provided SlackPress with support in the form of a mentor, who provided advice and guidance in the preparation of a business plan and ensured that the social element of the organisation is kept at its core.

#### MID & EAST ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA

Social enterprise: Lunchbox, Acceptable Enterprises Larne (AEL)

Acceptable Enterprises Larne (AEL) was established in August 2009 to provide disadvantaged people with support to access training and employment opportunities which allows them to make a meaningful contribution to their local community. The human well-being aspect of the organisation is at the heart of its existence. Located at the organisation's Centrepoint Café, an online lunch ordering service allows people to log onto a dedicated website to build their own individual 'lunchbox', pay for their meal via PayPal and collect it from the Café at an agreed time. The new business has provided a successful new service to consumers in the Larne area and has stimulated much greater use of the on-site café. In addition, the new business is providing employment progression opportunities for adults with learning disabilities, mental ill health and other difficulties. This is achieved through the development of commercially viable products and services that enable clients to experience a real work environment whilst developing the social and vocational skills necessary for progression towards open employment opportunities.

Support from the Social Entrepreneurship Programme helped the group develop a three-year business plan with financial projections. Specialist mentoring was also provided to create a social franchise from the idea which could be sold to social enterprises in other locations.

## MID ULSTER DISTRCT COUNCIL AREA Social enterprise: Superstars, Cookstown

Superstars is a unique and dynamic organisation for people with learning difficulties which provides care, support, fun and friendship in a safe environment whilst giving members the opportunity to experience new challenges and learn new skills. The club was founded in 2005 by the family of Jon McAvoy, a teenager with Down's Syndrome and Autism, and addresses the lack of such provision whilst providing respite for families and carers.

Although Superstars is a café which provides refreshments to the general public, its raison d'être is to provide individuals with learning difficulties access to training and work experience opportunities through real-life experiences which will help build their skills base and assist them in securing future employment in a mainstream café environment. The new social enterprise therefore has the potential to not only create direct employment and increase the economic value of the local area, but directly enhances the skills base of individuals with learning difficulties who would otherwise not be able to gain the necessary experience to enter the workforce.

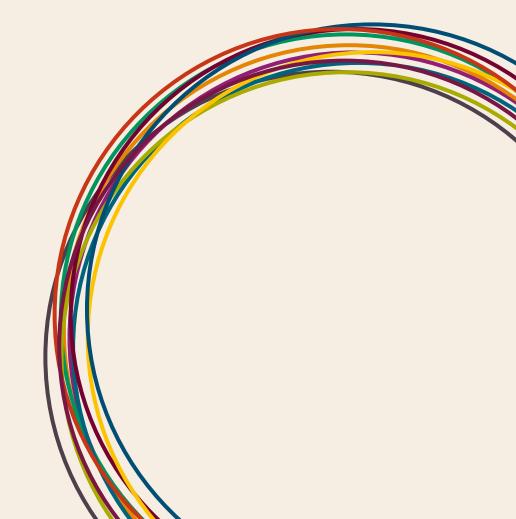
The Social Entrepreneurship Programme helped Superstars build a robust business plan which finely tuned the services that the organisation provides. The Programme also helped Superstars with the legalities involved in transitioning from a constituted club to a social economy business, secure funding and with the development of recruitment and financial policies and systems.

## CONCLUSION

The successful delivery of the Social Entrepreneurship Programme has shown that Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agency network are well placed to provide support and leadership to Councils as they take on responsibility for this important element of economic development. Enterprise Northern Ireland and our members have the experience, skills and relationships in place to assist Councils deliver support for the social economy, a business sector which is particularly important and relevant in this period of economic and political uncertainty.

Enterprise Northern Ireland's successes as a contract holder for programmes such as the Social Entrepreneurship Programme and the Regional Start Initiative demonstrates that the organisation has significant experience in all areas of programme delivery, monitoring and quality assurance. Further, the network of Local Enterprise Agencies are recognised as an integral part of the business community, fully embedded and acknowledged as the first point-of-contact for support, training and guidance for those wishing to start a new business, or develop an existing business, in the private or social enterprise sectors.

Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Local Enterprise Agency network would welcome the opportunity to work closely with all new Councils in supporting the future growth and development of the social economy sector.





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