

# 1900s

**Can we  
Rethink  
Ireland?**

# Contents



# Welcome

by Dalton Philips, Chair of Rethink Ireland



**hope for our readers is that at least one story stays with you and inspires you to act.**

## Welcome to Rethink Ireland's Five-Year Impact Report.

This report demonstrates our impact over the past five years. We believe we've achieved a lot. We've grown from a start-up with a €1.2 million\* turnover in 2016, to a high-growth organisation with a €19.7 million\* turnover at the end of 2020. And among our achievements are setting up a €72 million fund, supporting 246 social innovations, reaching over 400,000 people, creating over 500 jobs in the social innovation sector and supporting almost 1,000 people into employment.

Again and again we have met and exceeded our match-funding targets which are set by the Department of Rural and Community Development. More recently we've created funds with the support of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. As a result, our relationship with the Government has deepened.

Even Europe has taken note of our successes: we were recently appointed, alongside Genio, to set up a National Competence Centre for Social Innovation in Ireland.

We've risen to every challenge, taken every opportunity and learnt much along the way. This includes recognising where we might have done better because we see innovation and risk as two sides of the same coin.

My hope for our readers is that at least one story stays with you. A story is more likely to inspire action and can tell so much more than I could ever put into words.

# 400,000

**We've reached over 400,000 people, created over 500 jobs and supported almost 1,000 people to overcome challenges and gain employment.**

# €19.7m

**We've grown from a start-up with a €1.2 million\* turnover in 2016, to a high-growth organisation with a €19.7 million\* turnover at the end of 2020.**

Having had the honour of serving as chair of the grant-making committee at Rethink Ireland, I've been inspired countless times by the conviction, courage and stories behind the many social changes evident across our country.

To the innovators, collaborators and to everyone who played a part in our five-year journey so far – our donors, advisers, staff, board, the Government – this report is a testament to you and your work.

To those we haven't met yet, we hope you enjoy the read and that you might join us for the next part of our adventure.

**Dalton Philips**  
Chair of the Board, Rethink Ireland

# CEO Introduction

by Deirdre Mortell, CEO of Rethink Ireland



**Our vision is for an Ireland open to ideas, that is more just, equal and sustainable. Will you join us?**

In January 2016, our former chair Terence O'Rourke and I stood on stage and proudly introduced Social Innovation Fund Ireland to the world.

2015 had been an unforgettable year. It was the year when communities got together to protest the water charges; when Ireland voted Yes to marriage equality; when a windswept Theresa Mannon appeared on our TV screens mid-storm and begged us not to take 'unnecessary journeys'. Change was happening in our homes, on our streets and in our climate.

Change was happening on our launch night too as former Taoiseach Enda Kenny announced the awardees of our first fund, Animate.

Thriftify had just started a website dedicated to selling second-hand books. Now known as 'Ireland's online charity shop', it works with 95% of all Irish charity retailers and sells sustainable fashion directly to consumers in our homes.

Carebright Community was planning to create Ireland's first purpose-built homes for people living with dementia. It now provides housing for 18 people with dementia in a community designed to give residents a sense of comfort, security and belonging. It has also created 40 jobs in Bruff, Co Limerick.

A small group of brave philanthropists came together to create that first fund. I will be forever grateful to them for taking that first bet on Social Innovation Fund Ireland.

Since then we've created 30 funds by partnering with Google.org, Mason Hayes & Curran, Medtronic, IPB Insurance, Tomar Trust, Bank of America, AIB, State Street, Cork Chamber of Commerce, Z Zurich Foundation, the Peter Kinney and Lisa Sandquist Foundation, our Innovators Circle members, and many others.

The Department of Rural and Community Development matches this philanthropic funding via the Dormant Accounts Fund. Through these special public-private partnerships we have created a €72 million social innovation fund for Ireland. This funding has allowed us to support 246 social innovations reaching more than 400,000 people and creating over 500 jobs.

These projects include household names like FoodCloud which has just reached the incredible milestone of redistributing 100 million meals that might otherwise have gone to waste. Smaller organisations you may not have heard of have achieved great impact too, like the Amal Women's Association, a Muslim-led service, which responds to the needs of women linked to the Muslim faith and culture in Ireland.

But it's never just been about the social innovations we've supported. It's about igniting that social innovation spark throughout Ireland. It's about working with others to advance the social innovation ecosystem. It's about bringing clusters of innovations together to break down barriers and end the issues they are tackling for good.

Last year, we changed our name to Rethink Ireland. We were acutely aware of the systemic racism facing communities in Ireland and across the globe, the alarming rise of the planet's temperature, and structural inequality that has been worsened by the pandemic. We knew we couldn't tackle these issues alone. That's why our decision is so much more than just a name change for us. Yes, Rethink Ireland is our call to action.

It's my call to action to you reading this report – to ask yourself: what part will I play in rebuilding our country after the pandemic?

Our vision is for an Ireland open to ideas, that is more just, equal and sustainable. Will you join us?

**Deirdre Mortell**  
CEO, Rethink Ireland

€72m

**We have created a €72 million Social Innovation Fund for Ireland.**

# About Rethink Ireland

## WHO WE ARE

Rethink Ireland (previously Social Innovation Fund Ireland) supports the most innovative non-profit organisations working in communities across the country.

We believe that a team effort is more effective than working alone. So joining forces with the Government, companies, families, individuals and foundations, who understand as we do that lasting change demands new thinking, is how we do business.

Together we create funds to help innovations rise to the challenges of our most pressing social and environmental issues.

Our cash grants and business supports enable social innovations to develop and maximise their impact. This is our venture philanthropy model. The groups we support and the donors who support us don't just think differently. They act decisively on their ideas to build a more equal, just and sustainable Ireland.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL INNOVATION?

At Rethink Ireland, we define social innovation as the successful delivery of new approaches to meet social needs more effectively and sustainably than those currently available.

Just as innovation is necessary for economic growth, we believe innovation is critical to societal and environmental progress.

## WHAT IS VENTURE PHILANTHROPY?

Venture philanthropy is a funding method that uses the tools of venture capital investing, alongside grants to support long-term social and environmental impact.

**We create funds to help innovations rise to the challenges of our most pressing social and environmental issues.**

## Our Values

We work with our heart and our heads – we value compassion, passion and fun.

We take smart risks and we allow permission to fail because we know that innovation and risk are two sides of the same coin.

We believe that social change is a team sport – we use influence and engagement to build trusted relationships, and we choose to work with others to achieve our goals.

We demonstrate curiosity and a hunger to learn.

We value bold ideas and bold leadership, and we develop remarkable people.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to support the best social innovations so that they can grow and maximise their impact across Ireland.

## Our Vision

Our vision is an Ireland which is more just, equal and sustainable because of social innovation.

# How we work

At Rethink Ireland, we work to find and back Ireland's best social innovations. We encourage the kind of philanthropy that will help transform exclusion into inclusion, and we demonstrate success through social impact and job creation.

# 1.

## Stimulate Philanthropy that Transforms

We encourage businesses, small and big, as well as individuals, families and foundations to invest in innovative ideas that will make a long-lasting and transformative impact in Ireland.

# 2.

## Provide Growth Capital

Our grant funding fills an important gap in the capital market for social innovation in Ireland. Financial support helps organisations that are awarded funding to invest in testing, piloting, measuring and growing their social innovations.

# 3.

## Provide Game-changing Programmes

We believe that the skills it takes to develop an innovation are different from the skills needed to grow it. Our capacity-building programmes and supports help awardees to develop these new skills. They receive support which allows them to make a step-change in impact and which prepares them for the next stage of growth.

# 4.

## Build a Flourishing Network

By constantly reviewing and renewing our own practices, through collaboration and by promoting our partnerships, we aim to contribute to a flourishing network of social change.

### BECOMING RETHINK IRELAND

In 2020 we changed our name from Social Innovation Fund Ireland to Rethink Ireland. And in the past five years we have encouraged our staff, awardees, supporters and partners to find the ambition and courage needed to rethink the country we work and live in.

We will now outline our strategies and their outcomes, during that time. By reading this, we hope we can persuade you to reimagine an Ireland where everyone thrives, an Ireland you are willing to play a role in achieving.

# A New Way of Giving

## A 'VENTURE PHILANTHROPY' APPROACH

Rethink Ireland is a venture philanthropy fund. In plain English, our grants system is similar to that of venture capital investments – and we measure a project's success by the change it generates.

**We exercise the same discipline and rigour expected of venture capital funds, searching for the most remarkable and provocative schemes to invest in.**

We have a wide reach. This lets us back those high-risk high-reward investments with potential for game-changing results. Other choices are lower risk to ensure a necessary level of impact.

All our investments are cash grants and business supports. This way we ensure our awardees get maximum impact from our grants which are specifically targeted towards growth.

We have found this approach can create real and complex social change. Most importantly, it is long term and effective.

## BUILDING A €72 MILLION FUND

In 2012, philanthropy in Ireland was in crisis. Two of the largest foundations – Atlantic Philanthropies and the One Foundation (comprising between them 85% of Ireland's organised philanthropic funding) – were winding down. The recession was at its height and the climate for fundraising at its most punishing.

The Government's response was to set up the Forum on Philanthropy and Fundraising to explore the situation and recommend solutions. Four suggestions emerged, one of which was to create a national social innovation fund. The original target for this was €10 million rising to €30 million as time went on.

And so Social Innovation Fund Ireland emerged in 2013. Three years later, we became fully operational with Government pledging to match any funds we ourselves raised.

In 2021, we are now a €72 million fund – an achievement that has well outpaced the Forum's goal.

## A NEW WAY OF GIVING

While we feel privileged to have played our part in addressing the philanthropic gap in Ireland, our pioneering role in creating space for a new culture of giving is one we prize most.

We have found donors who, just like us and our awardees, think outside the box. They include multinationals, SMEs, families, individuals, trusts and foundations. Together we work to make sure their donations – and the decisions and investments they allow – have a long-term legacy.

**“Through our partnership with Rethink Ireland, we collaborated to create the Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund, which is designed to support 1,000 women experiencing disadvantage into sustainable employment. Since its inception in 2019, the Fund has gone from strength to strength and the results have been life-changing.”**

Fernando Vicario, CEO, Bank of America Europe DAC and Country Executive of Bank of America Ireland

We love it when donors return to work with us again.

In 2018, for instance, we created a pilot Equality Fund with the Peter Kinney and Lisa Sandquist Foundation and with the Government. What began as a €400,000 fund in year one is today a €10 million commitment over five years.

**“Rethink Ireland brings a level of experience, professionalism and due diligence to our philanthropic giving that a modest foundation could never replicate... Philanthropy done well is hard, so having a partner such as Rethink to guide and help us in every step is invaluable.”**

The Peter Kinney and Lisa Sandquist Foundation

**But our job is also to stimulate and encourage giving, not just be a vehicle for it. We enjoy generating all types of donations in and for Ireland, with or without our final input. We publicise our partnerships widely to inspire others to follow suit.**

Our programmes aim to help awardees become ready for investment and we measure the funding they secure for one year after our initial support.

So not only has Rethink Ireland created a €72 million fund for social innovation, we are also proud to have supported our awardees to collectively raise a phenomenal €17 million in follow-on-funding since 2016.

## THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Since creating the Forum on Philanthropy and Fundraising in 2012, the Government has played a critical role in the sector.

Rethink Ireland has been mentioned in the two most recent Programmes for Government clearly showing the priority given to social innovation at the highest levels of decision-making.

Our match funding primarily comes from the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Dormant Accounts Fund.

We have also received match funding from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. In 2021 we were appointed to run a dedicated €600,000 Children and Youth Digital Solutions Fund.

We see tremendous possibilities in cooperating with other Departments on similar initiatives. In whatever ways are open to us, we want to continue helping Government find and support projects with the greatest potential for societal change

**In whatever ways are open to us, we want to continue helping Government find and support projects with the greatest potential for societal change.**

€17m

**Our awardees, between them, have raised a phenomenal €17 million in follow-on funding since 2016.**

# Impact: more than numbers

Rethink Ireland puts a lot of effort into measuring and reviewing our impact. We've learnt much over the years, in particular the need to update our methods to keep pace with international best practice.

In five years, we've reached over 400,000 people by supporting 246 projects. But for us, the numbers are only a part of it.

We want to measure the effects of our investment on real lives. Who benefits from our help? What effect has it had? Why is this important? What follows is an outline of the measurement tools that have helped us to help others.

**“Situating (the Animate Fund) in the context of the SDG’s was inspired. (Rethink Ireland) is a great example of SDG 17 which is all about building partnerships to achieve the SDG’s.”**

David Donoghue, co-chair of the historic intergovernmental negotiations which led to the creation of the UN’s Global Goals.

## SOCIAL VALUE

We all place a value on any improvements to our everyday lives. Whatever measures create more fairness in society – better mental and physical wellbeing plus a healthy balanced environment – are cherished. We offer awardees special training to recognise, assess, name and improve their social value.

## ACADEMIC EVALUATIONS

Rigorous appraisal of our collaborative efforts with awardees is equally important to Rethink Ireland. We currently do this through a series of three academic evaluations (for our Education Fund, our Youth Funds & Children and Youth Funds) with the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in NUI Galway.

Central to this and all our processes is the participant voice.

## SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

We use a Social Return on Investment Framework for some of our Funds which is a rigorous methodology that calculates the social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of impact grants and investments.

## UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Finally, we track our outcomes using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These 17 interlinked and internationally recognised objectives are an internationally agreed roadmap to a better, more sustainable future. Devised by the UN General Assembly in 2015, their deadline is 2030. We use them as a practical guide to quantify Ireland’s progress in sustainable global development.

246

400,000

INVESTMENT OVERVIEW

Over five years, we've opened 30 funds, reviewed 2,606 applications and made **€47 million** in grants to 246 social innovations across Ireland.

Together our awardees have...

**Reached**

408,624  
people

**Supported**

972  
people in employment

**Created**

553  
jobs in the social innovation sector

Where are the social innovations we support based?

The social innovations we support have nationwide impact. Here is where they are based across the country:

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-160



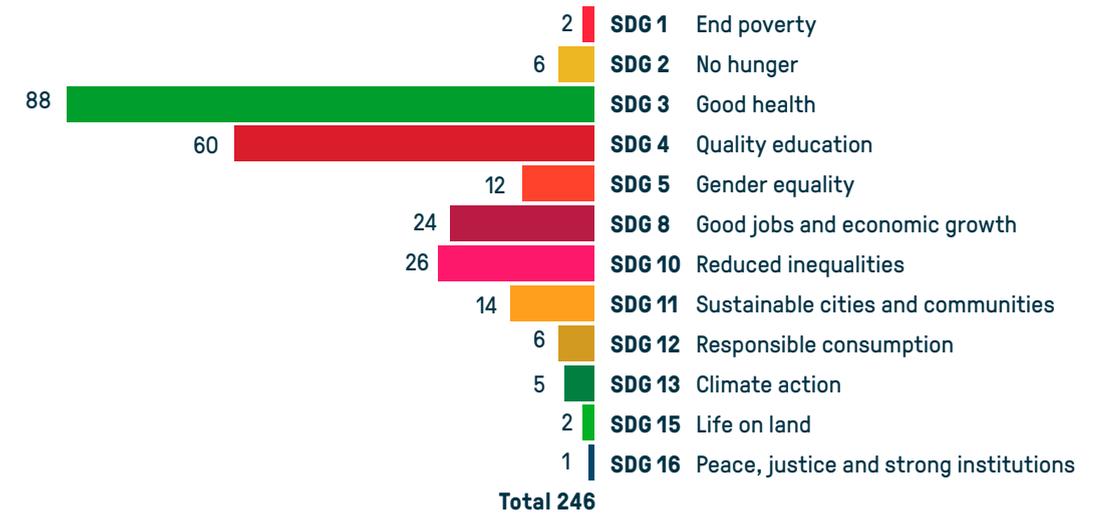
Carlow	1
Clare	5
Cork	18
Donegal	4
Dublin	151
Galway	17
Kildare	3
Kilkenny	1
Leitrim	1
Limerick	13
Longford	1
Louth	1
Meath	3
Monaghan	1
Offaly	3
Roscommon	1
Tipperary	6
Waterford	8
Westmeath	4
Wexford	3
Wicklow	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>

Do our social innovations fulfil the UN's Sustainable Development Goals?



THE GLOBAL GOALS

They fulfil the requirements of 12 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals as follows:



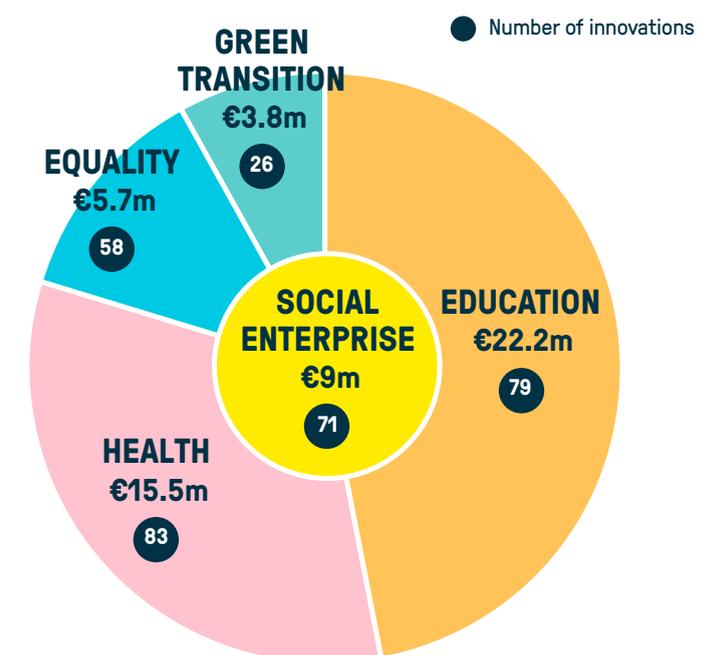
Rethink Ireland contributes to: **SDG 17** Partnerships for the Goals

Which areas have we invested in?

We have invested strongly in education, health, social enterprise, equality and the green transition.

Of these projects, 71 are social enterprises which puts our grant funding in this sector at €9 million.

Our impact in these five areas is outlined over pages 16 to 25.



# An Education for all

Education has an enormous say in people's life chances. Those who leave school early are much less likely to find well-paying jobs, and are at more risk of poverty. In Ireland, early school leavers are three times more likely to be unemployed than someone aged 18-24 who remains at school<sup>1</sup>.

The good news is that almost half of Irish 25 to 64-year-olds completed third-level education (one of the largest shares across the OECD)<sup>2</sup> and Ireland's rate of participation in third-level education is the fourth highest in the EU with an attainment rate of 55% in 2019<sup>3</sup>.

But while Ireland has a high post-primary completion rate with 92.3% of students completing the Senior Cycle in 2018 or 2019<sup>4</sup>, the school completion rates in schools serving areas of acute economic disadvantage are statistically and significantly lower than in schools serving more affluent populations<sup>5</sup>.

Rethink Ireland holds an understanding of the interconnected or intersectional nature of race, socio-economic status, gender and health and their relationship to discrimination and disadvantage. As such we understand that standard formal education may not work for all groups of people.

We seek out socially innovative solutions which offer equal opportunities to education for all citizens.

## OUR APPROACH

Rethink Ireland encourages philanthropists and Government to support projects addressing these education gaps. We also invite innovative projects who are interested in developing 21st century skills such as empathy, resilience and digital skills to apply to our funds. Above all, we recognise that intersectionality is key to understanding how to tackle educational disadvantage.

We want our funding to achieve:

1. 20,000 more students each year move through all stages of Ireland's primary, secondary and third level education system.
2. More innovative pathways to education enhance equal access to education for all Irish citizens.
3. More people experiencing disadvantage find employment.
4. More people leave poverty behind, often bringing their families with them.
5. Ireland becomes a learning society.\*

\* A learning society, according to its advocates the OECD and UNESCO, is a philosophy that sees education as the key to a nation's economic development. Further, education should extend beyond formal learning as practised in traditional institutions such as schools, universities and so on.

# €22.2m

**invested in education since 2016, supporting 79 projects in this area.**

1. Central Statistics Office. (CSO 2019) *Educational Attainment Thematic Report*.  
 2. OECD. (2019). *Education at a Glance. OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing.  
 3. O'Shea, M. (2020) *New HEA data provides in-depth insight into the socio-economic profile of our universities and institutes of technology*.  
 4. Department of Education and Skills (2020) *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second-Level Schools. Entry Cohort 2013*. Dublin: DES  
 5. Houses of the Oireachtas (2019) *Joint Committee on Education and Skills Report on Education inequality and disadvantage and barriers to education*. Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas.

## WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

We have invested €22.2 million in education since 2016 supporting 79 projects and helping us to reach at least 120,000 people.

We've supported 6,056 students to achieve a QQI qualification, 567 of whom achieved a level 3 QQI (Junior Cert level). A further 1,680 reached levels 4 to 5 (Leaving Cert level).

But at Rethink Ireland the individual student and their progress interests us, not just the raw statistics. Let's take an example. In 2017 we created a €7.5 million Education Fund that has been evaluated by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway. The evaluation presents the findings from a major national three-year research and evaluation study.

The report showed that moving students along from level 3 (Junior Cert) to level 6 (post Leaving Cert) of the QQI framework profoundly affected their lives.

These students experienced 'a personal transformation' evident in increased maturity, independence, confidence and the student's sense of achievement.

Using a Social Return on Investment framework (SROI), evaluators explored the outcomes that participants found most valuable. Analysis shows that the awardees in the Education Fund delivered a total of just over €68 million in social value for their participants so far. Furthermore, awardees now know what participants value most and can adapt their programmes to deliver 'more good.'

The participant voice was as essential to the evaluation as it is to Rethink Ireland. We believe all strategies for change must include the input of those most affected by that change.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

Our plan for the next three years is to help 70,000 more people with their education. But so many more need support. We continue to call for investment in education. Without equal access to learning, an equal Ireland is a pipe dream.

# 6,056

**students supported to achieve a QQI qualification.**

iSCOIL

iScoil is an online learning community offering young people an alternative path to learning, accreditation and progression.

**Q. WHY WAS iSCOIL SET UP?**

A. In 2007, we identified a cohort of young people who, for a range of reasons, had disengaged from mainstream school and had no access to education.

With the emergence of digital technologies, we saw an opportunity to respond to this need in an innovative and transformative way.

**Q. WHAT IMPACT HAS RETHINK IRELAND HAD ON iSCOIL?**

A. Support from Rethink Ireland has laid the foundation for our success in recent years. It has enabled us to enhance our offering, develop scalable systems, innovate and pilot partnerships that have become sustainable income streams. **During this time we have seen a 300% increase in the number of young people we work with annually.**

**Q. WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR iSCOIL'S FUTURE?**

A. As a national service, our vision is simple: we want to be able to respond to the increasing demand. Despite iScoil's growth in student numbers, we continue to turn down high numbers of referrals each year due to a lack of resources. We know that behind each referral is a young person, a family, a community, and we will not stop until we can offer young people access to a quality education they deserve.

Interview with  
Brian Fitzsimons, CEO

**Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO BUDDING SOCIAL INNOVATORS?**

A. Make your decisions with the user in mind. At iScoil, we keep our students at the centre of our organisational decision-making. This value system allows us to partner with like-minded organisations, improve our service and bring people with us as we innovate and grow.

**Q. WHAT IS YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE WITH iSCOIL?**

A. The best experience is, without doubt, when we hear from our past students and their families. Our students have gone on to become builders, vets, computer programmers, hairdressers, and personal trainers. For many, the opportunity to access iScoil can come at a challenging time in their lives. To hear from past students about how iScoil gave them the opportunity to believe in themselves again, and to change the trajectory of their lives is powerful and energising.

**“iScoil is more enjoyable because we get praised for the things we do and it makes us feel more confident to keep going.”**

**“By far the best education experience I've had.”**

– Quotes from students



Brian Fitzsimons

# Health: Dream Big

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, according to the World Health Organisation. Rethink Ireland agrees.

So many factors can impair health and wellbeing: financial insecurity, lack of education, poor employment, bad housing conditions, discrimination and access to health services are a few.

Our focus in the past five years has been mental health. Anxiety and depression are a feature of all cultures and Ireland is no exception. These emotional states can lead to suicide, which internationally is the second leading cause of death among those aged 15-29<sup>6</sup>.

Clearly, the Covid-19 pandemic hasn't helped mental health as lockdowns separated people from friends and family. Irish reports point to a worrying increase in mental and emotional distress among young people. Crisis Textlines for young people experienced an increase of 44% after the pandemic hit Ireland<sup>7</sup>. Jigsaw's early intervention service had a 575% increase in online visitors to jigsawonline.ie during March and April 2020.

## OUR APPROACH

Any civilised society is judged by how it treats its young and most vulnerable communities. Both are entitled to interventions that directly address their physical and mental health so they can live full and happy lives.

Rethink Ireland encourages philanthropists and Government to support initiatives in this area. Our vision is to:

1. Encourage more people to develop and maintain good health and mental health practices.
2. Ensure that fewer people experience physical and mental health problems in their lifetime.
3. Support people experiencing mental health issues to contribute meaningfully to society.

## WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

Rethink Ireland has invested €15.5 million in health since 2016, supporting 83 innovations in this area. These investments have helped us to reach at least 95,000 people.

In 2020, these innovations delivered mental health services in person and online to 8,674 people. Of these 5,169 participants were under 25 years – evidence of sound practice as identifying and treating mental health issues early means less chance of recurrence.

To get behind the figures we have teamed up with the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway, to assess our Youth Mental Health Fund. The process is focused on stakeholder engagement and continuous improvement.

The evaluation team support the awardees to define the current value of their programmes, which in turn enables the awardees to focus on maintaining and improving upon the social value their projects offer. We also learn about the unintended negative outcomes of a project which helps the awardee to address these.

The overall aim of the Youth Mental Health Fund is to provide meaningful, lasting support to innovative mental health programmes and initiatives that reach out to young people before and during the societal, academic, physical, and emotional pressures of early adolescence and early adulthood. The final report will be published by Q2 2022.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

We intend to support 50,000 people to improve their health and to address health and mental health issues over the next three years. Our capacity building programmes will enable awardees to prove and improve their impact in this vital area.

We know we could reach many more people with the support of philanthropists interested in investing in our country's health – and we encourage them to do so.

€15.5m

invested in health since 2016, supporting 83 innovations in this area.

95,000

people reached through these innovations.

Any civilised society is judged by how it treats its young and most vulnerable communities.

8,674

people accessed our awardees' mental health services in person or online in 2020.

6. Wasserman, D., Cheng, Q., and Jiang, G. X. (2005). *Global suicide rates among young people aged 15-19*. World psychiatry: official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA).  
7: SpunOut (2020).

## THE SKY IS THE LIMIT PROGRAMME

MOYROSS EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAMME

**Moyross Education Support programme is part of St. Corpus Christi National School in Moyross and provides psychological support to children and their families in a community which was identified as an area in need of assistance, under the Limerick Regeneration Initiative.**

**Q. WHY WAS THE SKY IS THE LIMIT PROGRAMME SET UP?**

A. There was a huge need in the community to address youth mental health issues for young people that were not being met by statutory bodies. Dr. Declan Ahern, a consultant clinical psychologist offered to support our principal Mr. Tiernan O'Neill to set up the Moyross Education Support Programme, known locally as 'The Sky Is The Limit programme'.

**Q. WHAT IMPACT HAS RETHINK IRELAND HAD ON THIS PROGRAMME?**

A. Without Rethink Ireland we would not be where we are today. With their support we were able to scale the depth of our impact. Rethink Ireland supported us to develop a business plan and develop our skills in pitching our vision to fundraisers. This led to us raising €0.5 million in funding to build a wellness hub, known as the Corpus Christi Family Centre, on site in the school which will permanently house all our therapeutic and wellness supports.

**Q. WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?**

A. We want to replicate our model in other DEIS schools in Limerick.

Interview with Hilary McAlea,  
Project Lead and Deputy Principal  
St. Corpus Christi National School

**Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO BUDDING SOCIAL INNOVATORS?**

A. Dream big. Take all the advice and support you can get. Be prepared to work hard but with dedicated passion and endless energy, you will succeed.

*“When my child started in Junior Infants I was homeless, and really struggling to keep everything together.*

*Four years later, Jason, the family support worker has helped me to find a home. Anne Marie from Community Companions supported me to start an access course in Limerick Institute of Technology.*

*My counsellor, Valerie, has taught me to believe in myself again. Claudine, the play therapist has helped my child to express her emotions and the sessions we did together helped to repair our broken relationship.*

*The journey began when Hilary, asked me to join the programme, I have never looked back.”*

- Quote from parent



*Hilary McAlea*

# Social Enterprise: The Key to Change?

Social enterprises are focused on social, societal or environmental change, rather than maximising profits for their owners or shareholders.

At Rethink Ireland we believe social enterprises can lead the transition to a more inclusive, sustainable and green economy. Any profit made by a social enterprise is reinvested back into the organisations social or environmental mission, allowing it to maximise impact.

This impact-driven business model allows social enterprises to create inclusive employment and hire people who may experience barriers to the labour market.

Social enterprises are often found in sectors avoided by conventional enterprises or where social services are unable to meet need. Ever the lateral thinkers, their creative solutions to what others consider impossible problems often work – and in the long term.

Ireland's social enterprises are no exception. Alas, we lag behind our European counterparts, however, when it comes to funding our relatively few social enterprises<sup>8</sup>.

Recent reports estimate that nationally the sector employs 25,000 to 33,000 people in over 1,400 entities, with a total annual turnover of around €1.4 billion<sup>9</sup>. Significant numbers, yes, but Ireland is not within the European Union's projections of the sector's potential to reach 6% – 8% of GDP<sup>10</sup>. If we did this, the number of jobs in the sector would double.

As we weather Covid-19 and its economic fallout, we'll need time to reflect on how society can be fairer and more accepting in an evolving Ireland. The voice of social enterprise is essential to this reflection. Its population is familiar with economic uncertainty; they've had to learn to be flexible; dignity and fairness are in their DNA; and most importantly they are skilled innovators in ensuring the needs of people, society and the planet are met in tandem.

## OUR APPROACH

Our goal is to find and back Ireland's best and most promising social enterprises.

Our vision is to lay the groundwork for:

- More social enterprises setting up, surviving and thriving.
- More consumers buying from social enterprises, contributing to their communities and society at large by helping to create an economy based on reusing, sharing, repairing and recycling – called the circular economy.
- More people using their social services, getting access to them faster than public services and at more affordable rates than private services.
- More social enterprises employing people who face high barriers to the labour market.

## WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

In 2018, in partnership with IPB Insurance, we set up Ireland's first and largest dedicated Social Enterprise Development Fund. Its initial €1.8 million increased to €3.2 million in over four years. IPB Insurance is owned by Local Authorities who can and have played a sterling role in supporting local social enterprises, making this partnership a perfect match!

So far, we've provided €9 million in cash grants and business supports to 71 social enterprises in every county. Many have increased their traded revenue, developed their services and grown their impact statewide.

Sensational Kids, for instance, has grown from one to four centres across the four provinces; Grow It Yourself's retail income grew by over 100% in 2020; and Bounce Back Recycling diverted 20,000 mattresses in 12 counties from landfill while 10 Travellers joined its workforce.

Now in its fourth year, our Social Enterprise Development Fund has uncovered a big appetite for social enterprise in Ireland.

It has helped us support 40 awardees to offer services to 266,674 people. We've helped create 191 jobs – always a key measure for the sector. In 2020, the social enterprises we supported through this Fund had a combined turnover of €18 million\*.

We have also worked in partnership with the Department of Rural and Community Development to conduct research on development of an appropriate legal form for social enterprises for use when they set up in Ireland.

In 2020, we received funding from the EU Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme, alongside our partners Dublin City University and Community Finance Ireland, to run the 'Financing Social Enterprise in Ireland – Models of Impact Investing and Readiness project'. Its objective is to identify the finance practices most suitable to sustaining social enterprises at all stages of their development.

\* This income figure is based on self-reported data via our Annual Survey 2020.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

We will continue to find and back the best social enterprises in Ireland. Our goal is to support them to increase their traded income by 20% during any grant's lifetime.

Another is to work with our partners to promote social enterprise to the wider population.

We are dedicated to supporting Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Offices to provide the right help at the right time to early-stage social enterprises.

Finally, as a member of the National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group, we will work with sector stakeholders to help ensure government policy on social enterprise is fully implemented.

€18m

**Social enterprises supported by our Social Enterprise Development Fund in 2020 had a combined turnover of €18 million.**

71

**Social enterprises provided with a total of €9 million in cash grants and business supports.**

8. Borzaga, C. et al. (2020). *Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Comparative synthesis report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

9. O'Shaughnessy, M. (2020). *Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report. Ireland*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

10. European Parliament. (2020). *What future for the social economy*. Briefing.



*Martin Ward*

## BOUNCE BACK RECYCLING COMPANY

**Bounce Back is a recycling company whose aim is to divert as many mattresses and furniture away from landfill as possible.**

**They use a social enterprise model to provide employment opportunities and job training for people with high barriers to employment.**

### Q. WHY WAS BOUNCE BACK SET UP?

A. Our motivation was to create employment opportunities for members of the Traveller community who could not gain employment in the mainstream labour market. We wanted to inspire the wider community and promote the visibility of our work in order to challenge racism and discrimination.

### Q. WHAT IMPACT HAS RETHINK IRELAND HAD ON BOUNCE BACK?

A. Rethink Ireland helped us set out clear indicators for growth across our social, economic and environmental impact. The marketing support helped to generate leads in almost every county in Ireland. After working with Rethink Ireland our vision changed from working on a regional level to becoming a national social enterprise.

### Q. WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

A. We will deliver our services to 26 counties and recycle 100,000 mattresses per annum, employing 30 members of the Traveller community per year.

Our longer term goal is to create a social investment fund to deliver the social objectives of the Galway Traveller Movement in education, health, culture and identity.

### Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO BUDDING SOCIAL INNOVATORS?

A. Always stay focused on the social objective you set out to achieve. Never let anyone sidetrack your vision. There is no better feeling than bringing about positive change.

### Q. WHAT IS YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE WITH BOUNCE BACK?

A. We rebranded our social enterprise after one of our team fell on a bundle of mattresses and bounced straight back up. We changed our name from First Class Recycling to Bounce Back Recycling. Community members have constantly bounced back from barriers and challenges in their daily lives – so Bounce Back is the perfect name!

**“I got a job in the mainstream labour market in 2018. I was so excited. But this excitement did not last as I had to hide my identity in the workplace and listen to my community being run down on a daily basis in the media. I stuck it out for two years but in the end I decided I had to leave for the good of my health and wellbeing. I began working with Bounce Back in 2020 and this safe space allows me to thrive.”**

– Quote from participant

# Equality: It's Urgent !

It cannot be said often enough that not everyone in Ireland is treated equally. Yet while 94% of us believe we should be, 88% of us don't believe there is sufficient funding for community organisations working on equality issues, according to an Amárach opinion poll commissioned by Rethink Ireland in 2020.

The 88% are correct: civil or human rights and community development projects attract only 0.39% of philanthropic investment in Ireland<sup>11</sup>.

And so people living here continue to endure ongoing and unacceptable injustices that lead to lower life expectancy, violence, poor health and limited access to education – among other difficulties.

For anyone experiencing this, the need to achieve equality is urgent. But only a collective and focused effort can make real inroads. Inclusive action means elevating the voices of those directly affected – we need this to happen and we need it to happen now.

**Inclusive action means elevating the voices of those directly discriminated against.**

# 94%

**94% of all Irish people believe everyone in Ireland should be treated equally.**

## OUR APPROACH

We repeat, nothing less than a team effort will bring about the profound systemic change required to eradicate inequality. We encourage networks and coalitions of organisations to work together on some of today's most alarming trends including the rise of hate, racism and discrimination.

Our funding should create the conditions to achieve these aims:

- Marginalised communities become better equipped to organise for themselves and contribute to policy change.
- Civil society works together to halt the rise of racism and discrimination in Ireland.
- Ireland begins to construct a culture of equality.

## WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

In 2018 we created a pilot Equality Fund, in partnership with the Peter Kinney and Lisa Sandquist Foundation and the Government of Ireland. What started out as a €400,000 fund over one year, became a commitment of €10 million over five years.

This will be the largest philanthropic investment in equality work in Ireland since Atlantic Philanthropies and the One Foundation.

For the inaugural Equality Fund (2018–2019), the five Equality awardees delivered a total of 284 interventions, engaging 18 regular volunteers and recruiting two co-ordinators and one therapist to help deliver life-changing results for marginalised and/or hard-to-reach communities.

Projects selected were inventive in strengthening equality for LGBTI+ people, migrants, prisoners and former offenders, and those affected by gender-based violence. And we paid particular attention to people living with more than one type of discrimination.

One major lesson during the first Equality Fund was the importance of minority communities speaking for themselves and leading initiatives.

The work of this fund was critical to forming the Equality Fund's future direction and incarnations.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

We believe the Equality Fund can transform the equality sector, by catalysing the existing creative energy, vision and innovation, and ensuring funding.

We will find and deliver funding to ventures intent on combating poverty and discrimination, and to foster a national team effort.

# 284

**Interventions delivered by the five Equality Fund awardees.**

<sup>11</sup>. Philanthropy Ireland (2016). *Institutional Philanthropy and Social Investment in Ireland Study 'A Description of the Field'*.

## AMAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

**Amal Women's Association is a Muslim-led service, responding to the needs of women with a connection to the Muslim faith and culture in Ireland.**

**Amal means Hope.**

### Q. WHY WAS AMAL SET UP?

A. Amal is a feminist organisation and we believe in the power of women to fundamentally shape and change the future of Ireland and in the power of Muslim women as agents of change.

We recognise that our voices and our needs are under-represented in Ireland and that is why we originally set up Amal to platform and assist the needs of Muslim women across the island.

Amal means hope or aspiration. We are a Muslim women-led organisation working to meet the needs of all women with a connection to our respective faiths and cultures. You don't need to be religious, you don't need to be born into the faith but we are deeply focused on this community because it's one we know, understand and live in.

### Q. WHAT IMPACT HAS RETHINK IRELAND HAD ON AMAL?

A. Rethink Ireland has had an immeasurable impact on our organisation.

Through Rethink Ireland funding and consultations, we have been able to structure our organisation, plan long-term and continue to serve Muslim women. We were able to employ our first staff to assist in setting up an operation plan and a new strategic plan within our organisation. We now stand our own two feet and serve with confidence.

**"You make me feel that I am not alone."**

**"Amal has brought hope and positivity to my life. I came here two months ago and everything was new to me. Amal made me believe that Allah brings great, wonderful people to brighten your way and the world."**

- Quotes from participants

Interview with Nor Nasib  
(Secretary and Treasurer) and  
Hannan Amer (Chair and Founder)

### Q. WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

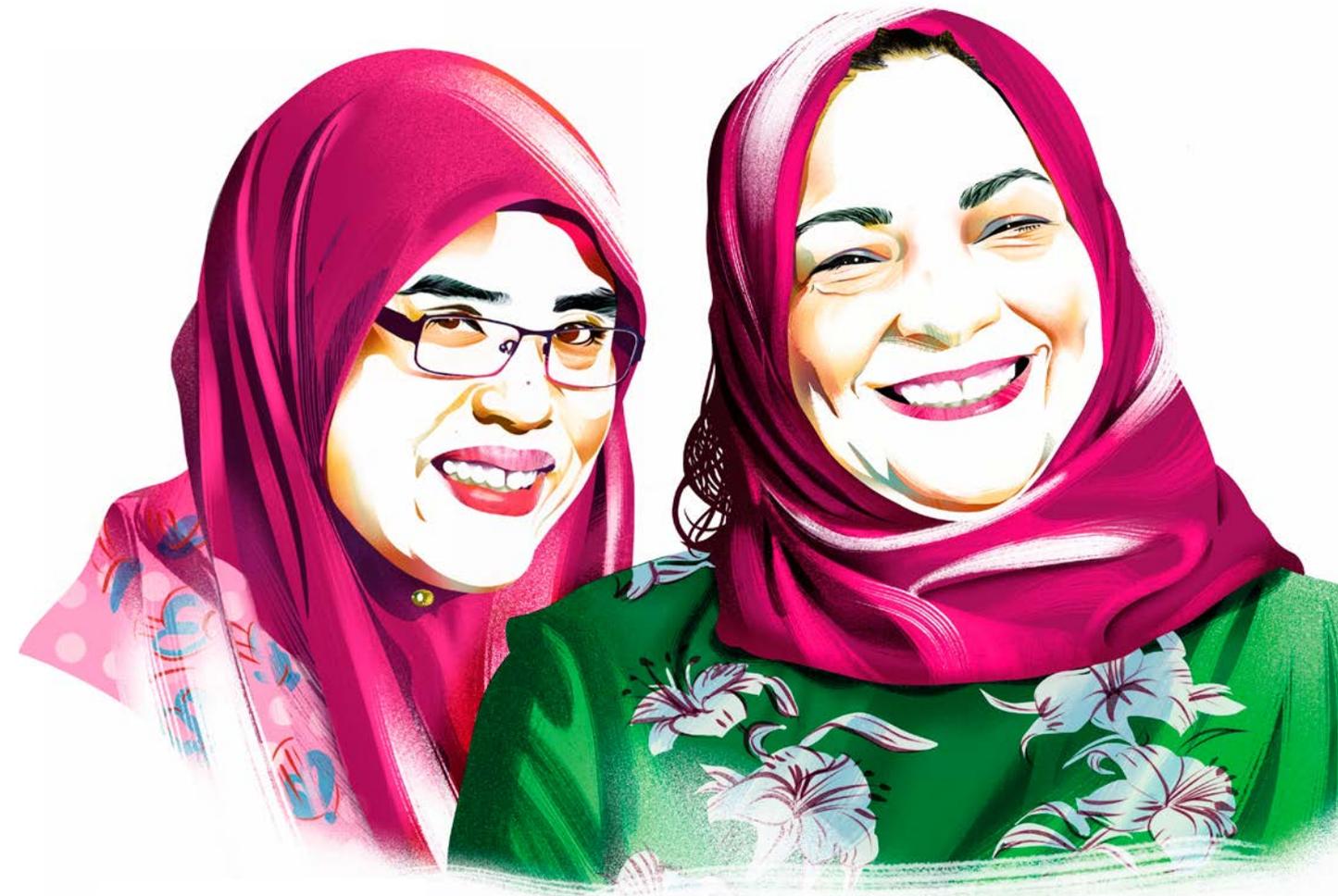
A. We hope to expand our community outreach programme, by employing and training more staff in order to assist in looking after each case. Our cases are increasing every day and we aim to assist those people effectively.

### Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO BUDDING SOCIAL INNOVATORS?

A. You need to get the trust of the community first. We do this by way of our weekly social events such as our coffee mornings, activity classes and youth projects. This has allowed us to gain trust in the community and has provided a space for women to comfortably speak to us.

### Q. WHAT IS YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE WITH AMAL?

A. We always look forward to visiting Direct Provision centres. We distribute essential food, clothing and toy packs to Muslim families during the holy Islamic month of Ramadan or during our Islamic festival, Eid. Nothing compares to the smiles on faces of the children and families that receive our packs. Our funniest moment is when one of our volunteers dressed up in a costume for the children. Let's just say...it wasn't the finest moment for that volunteer, but the children loved it and that's all that matters!



*Nor Nasib*

*Hannan Amer*

# The Green Transition: No Time To Waste

The Earth is facing a climate crisis. In Ireland, water and air pollution are among the highest in Europe, our transportation systems need updating, vast potential for renewable energy is untapped and biodiversity is declining at an alarming rate.

Changing any of this is an enormous task – not least persuading people that the dangers are real, worsening and will affect them personally.

Barriers facing those willing to take up the challenge include the limited capacity of environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs) and limited funding.

To stop climate change, we have to work together at every level to generate the public engagement, excitement and enthusiasm necessary for a green transition.

The potential is there and Rethink Ireland believes social innovation can help to unlock it.

Groups within communities and communities themselves have a role to play in creating and promoting local solutions to climate change.

This can be the seed ground for taking responsibility in a small way that ultimately burgeons to include entire populations. Look how Greta Thunberg's actions gave rise to a global movement that drew in the younger people who will bear the consequences of persistent global inaction.

We have a unique opportunity to become a model for Europe in how to excel in the green transition. Government has paved the way for rapid transformation with its Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2021. Its commitments include backing Ireland's move to net zero and achieving a climate-neutral economy with a 51% cut in emissions in a decade.

It's time to get going.

## OUR APPROACH

Rethink Ireland encourages philanthropists and Government to support ventures that help communities embrace the green transition.

Rethink Ireland's vision is that:

- More people become informed on the impact of climate change and how to halt it.
- More areas of land and water are protected and enhanced.
- More people buy sustainable local food.
- Ireland develops a thriving circular economy to avoid over consumption of precious resources and producing waste.

# €3.8m

Since 2016, we've invested €3.8 million in green transition projects and supported 26 innovations.

## WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

Since 2016, we've invested €3.8 million in green transition projects and supported 26 innovations. Our most significant contribution is through our Growth Fund.

We invested €2.49 million over three years into FoodCloud which combats food waste by linking food businesses with charities via technology. We have been instrumental in making this technology platform possible. With us at their back, FoodCloud has quadrupled its impact. In 2020 alone, it redistributed 3,022 tonnes of food, saved 9,670 tonnes of carbon dioxide, and hit a milestone when it redistributed 100 million meals internationally.

We have also funded smaller social innovations with big dreams. With funding of €35,000, Refill Ireland made strides to address the environmental impact of single-use plastic water bottles. One of Refill Ireland's pivotal innovations, the Tap Map, helps environmentally conscious users locate water stations nationwide for their reusable plastic bottles. Since becoming an awardee of Rethink Ireland in October 2020, Refill's Tap Map now boasts 618 more users, 10 new Tap Map business locations and 70 people have attended their online climate education presentations.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Our journey to support the green transition is just beginning. We call on philanthropists and the Government to join us. Rethink Ireland aims to create a large multi-year dedicated green social impact fund. Already we're keeping an eye out for fresh, disruptive ideas that will restore and revive our portion of the world – with people living here leading them.

**We have to work together at every level to generate the public engagement, excitement and enthusiasm necessary for a green transition.**

Interview with Iseult Ward,  
CEO and Co-Founder

## FOODCLOUD

**FoodCloud is one of Ireland's largest social enterprises, redistributing surplus food from retailers and food businesses to charities who need it.**

### Q. WHY WAS FOODCLOUD SET UP?

A. I had always been very passionate about food, and I never understood why it was going to waste, particularly when there were so many people who couldn't access enough food.

While studying Business and Economics in college, I felt I could apply what I was learning to an enterprise that could prioritise having a positive social and environmental impact. I came together with Aoibheann O'Brien, Co-Founder of FoodCloud, to do something about it.

### Q. WHAT IMPACT HAS RETHINK IRELAND HAD ON FOODCLOUD?

A. We were honoured to be the first recipients of Rethink Ireland's Growth Fund. The support allowed us to focus and develop a robust three-year strategic plan to optimally position the organisation for sustainable future growth. During Covid-19 we doubled the amount of food redistributed in Ireland from an average of 25 tonnes per week in February before the pandemic to over 60 tonnes per week. We couldn't have done it without Rethink Ireland and the support of AIB.

### Q. WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

A. Our vision for Ireland is for an environmentally friendly food system that supports food secure and resilient communities by 2030.

We also aim to connect a global community of food redistribution organisations through our technology platform to support the reduction of food waste internationally.

### Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO BUDDING SOCIAL INNOVATORS?

A. You must understand the problem you are trying to solve from the user perspective. In the early days, we spent a lot of time in store talking to staff who would be donating and a lot of time speaking to charities who would be collecting the food to get an understanding of their needs.

### Q. WHAT IS YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE WITH FOODCLOUD?

A. One of the most exciting projects was our recent climate campaign. With support from Rethink Ireland we launched our first-ever awareness campaign around the enormous environmental issue of food waste.

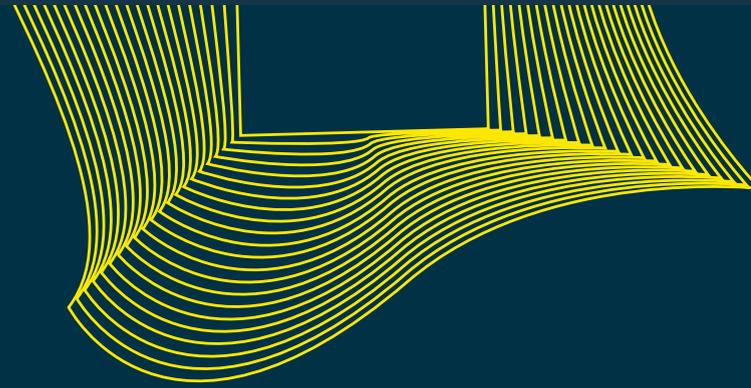
**“Through FoodCloud, we have been able to offer much more variety in terms of the meals for our service users. Providing daily food like we do, encourages attendance from our young people and helps us bond with them, as well as enabling us to connect with them in ways that are impossible without using food.**

**Food is a great unifier and we couldn't envision not using it. Our project wouldn't be the same without it!”**

- Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services

*Iseult Ward*

# Responding to Covid-19



## €40m

**In 2020, the Department of Rural and Community Development launched a €40 million Covid-19 support package for the charity sector.**

## €5m

**€5 million (12.5%) of the Covid-19 support package was committed to our Innovate Together Fund.**

### **The Innovate Together Fund, a unique initiative in Europe, has been essential to the strong, innovative response of the non-profit sector during the pandemic's first stages.**

Apart from its health implications, the Covid-19 crisis has from the outset exposed the equality cracks and fissures in our society. This awareness now presents us with opportunities for creative solutions to the social, economic and environmental problems that beset today's Ireland. Rethink Ireland believes social innovation can go a long way to providing solutions to these challenges.

In 2020, the Department of Rural and Community Development launched a €40 million Covid-19 support package for the charity sector.

Of this, €5 million (12.5%) was committed to our Innovate Together Fund, demonstrating the importance the Government places on social innovation.

The Fund differs from other emergency responses because it has helped organisations to adjust their services so they meet the altering needs of awardees during a pandemic.

The response was overwhelming: we received 693 applications after two calls for applications, Rethink Ireland's highest ever for any fund in five years of action. Two stringent selection processes followed out of which 71 awardees were selected.

They work with 33 different communities all adversely affected by Covid-19. Among them are some of Ireland's most excluded populations: offenders and former offenders, migrants, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness and people with addiction issues. Others include the elderly, their carers, and, of course, students. Many projects work with more than one of these groups.

The statewide fund supports projects in 16 of Ireland's 26 counties but collectively they impact every county, as many have a wide reach.

The outcome so far, has been positive. Early findings demonstrate that the fund has helped awardees survive and maintain their overall aims and objectives. It also enabled some to switch existing services online thus avoiding any disruption for users. Elsewhere, grants sparked new thinking and innovative projects and services were born.

The Innovate Together Fund has brought together philanthropists, Government and the non-profit sector to respond to and rebuild after the Covid-19 crisis.

We were delighted to receive a further €0.6 million in funding from the Zurich Foundation, Medtronic, Twitter and Oakfield Trust making this a €5.6 million fund in total.

A prime lesson for us is that we now know the more resilient and flexible the project, the more possible it has been to keep services running.

Those using technology have largely avoided the challenges faced by those relying on in-person services or on-site staff. Others have found that the nature of their services are not completely suited to online delivery. This suggests a blend of digital and face-to-face delivery methods is likely to have the most robust success in delivering services in the future.

## 33

**Our awardees have worked with 33 different communities all adversely affected by Covid-19, including some of Ireland's most excluded populations.**

# TECH2 STUDENTS

Tech2Students is a collaboration between Trinity Access Project and Camara Education to bridge the digital divide for students during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Q. WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO SET UP TECH2STUDENTS?**

A. The impact of Covid-19 highlighted the digital divide between students and schools nationwide. Tech2Students addresses this divide by raising funds and accepts device donations to get re-purposed devices out to students who need them.

**Q. WHAT IMPACT HAS RETHINK IRELAND HAD ON TECH2STUDENTS?**

A. Without the aid of Rethink Ireland Tech2Students would not have been able to reach students in the 26 counties of Ireland. Funding from Rethink Ireland allowed us to put a full-time project team in place to manage the nationwide expansion of the project.

**Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO BUDDING SOCIAL INNOVATORS?**

A. There is a solution to every problem – all you need is the right team, motivation and discipline, vision, networks and timing.

“The laptop is amazing – it’s so much easier than working on my phone. My hands don’t hurt anymore. Thank you to everyone at Tech2Students!”

– Quote from student

Interview with Dr Cliona Hannon and Marianne Checkley, Co-Founders

**Q. WHAT IS YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE WITH TECH2STUDENTS?**

A. A few months ago a teacher contacted us about a student she was concerned about. The student had a learning disability and had not been attending online classes or submitting any course work. When the teacher received devices from us, the student had tears in their eyes when they received it.

They were the first in class the following morning and every other morning after that. They completed their coursework, caught up, and even asked for extra coursework. They went on to use the device to apply to college via the CAO and are currently studying in third level education.

Without that device, without Tech2Students and without that funding from Rethink Ireland, this never would have happened for this student. It completely altered the course of their life.

“One act of donating a device can change a person’s world. This simple act of giving away an old or unused laptop can open up a world of opportunity – allowing them to continue on with school and create the future they want for themselves.”

– Quote from teacher



Marianne Checkley

Dr. Cliona Hannon

# The Power Of Collaboration

**Our goal is to bring together coalitions of social innovations and empower them to tackle the systemic issues that cause our greatest social and environmental problems.**

## SHARING LEARNINGS

Since our inception we've placed great value on shared learnings.

We based our model on international best practices including New Profit Inc, NESTA, President Obama's Social Innovation Fund, and Inspiring Scotland.

Since then, our CEO has travelled internationally to present our progress on social innovation including to a Stanford University group in Berlin, to a social enterprise summit in Hanoi, Vietnam and at the Brussels Economic Forum.

Our former Chair, Terence O'Rourke, represented us in Tokyo at an International Symposium on Utilisation of Dormant Deposits.

To this day, we are members of European Venture Philanthropy Association, Philanthropy Ireland, Social Value International, and the Irish Network Against Racism. We continue to collaborate with partners in Ireland, Europe and Internationally.



## CREATING PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD OUR ECOSYSTEM

We believe we've achieved a lot in five short but momentous years. We could not have done so had we not teamed up with Government Departments, private donors, academics, social enterprises, social innovations and many others.

Yes, the work has a long way to go but despite that, we believe social enterprise in Ireland is more robust, able to take bolder steps and better able to reach its goals than before we arrived.

As members of the National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group, we have undertaken research into the understanding of legal forms for social enterprises with the Department of Rural and Community Development.

In 2020, we allied ourselves with Dublin City University and Community Finance Ireland with help from the Irish Social Enterprise Network. We received our first European grant as part of this consortium. The project we are tasked with is to find the most suitable financial aids for social enterprises at varying points in their development.

Progress is afoot, too, in the social innovation sector. Government has endorsed us, together with Genio, to set up a National Competence Centre for Social Innovation in Ireland.

Over the next two years and using the knowledge and experience we now have, we will jointly create the centre, develop a mutually agreed strategy and action plan, along with the basis for a future national policy in the area.

As an EU project we will team up with similar centres in Portugal, Bulgaria and Cyprus. As ever, it is the team effort that counts, deepening knowledge and ensuring quality outcomes for everyone.

We will also contribute to building a social impact investing sector in Ireland. We aim to develop Ireland's first Social Outcome Fund, based on European models and learning, by 2023 and we have already taken initial steps in that regard in partnership with the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Over the next number of years, we plan to continue to lead and contribute to policies and practices that stimulate philanthropy, social enterprise and social innovation in Ireland.

## SYSTEMS CHANGE

Systems change is the "idea that we can design interventions that fundamentally reshape social or environmental systems that lead to injustice or negative results".<sup>12</sup>

Systems thinking means understanding the web of interrelations that create complex problems and rethinking assumptions about how change happens.

It is emerging as a necessity rather than an "add on" for organisations in the social innovation sector who have an appetite for changing the game rather than achieving and celebrating independent micro-successes. And it is becoming even more important in the light of the green and just recovery which we all aspire to.

In 2018, we decided to put a new emphasis on systems change at Rethink Ireland. The areas we've identified for a systems change are education, social enterprise, and equality followed a little later by the green transition.

It is important to note that system change is a long term agenda and has no quick measurable outcomes - it is a 7-10 year horizon.

Our goal is to bring together coalitions of social innovations and empower them to tackle the systemic issues that cause our greatest social and environmental problems.

**Together we can re-design how we live and work together.**

12. Cubista, J. and Papi-Thornton, D. (2019). *Systems Change in Social Innovation Education*. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

# Lessons For Us

# 1.

## Impact is about backing people

How many times have you seen the word 'trust' written down in a research paper or impact report? Our guess is not many. Now, how many times have you relied on it in your career? Trust is essential to everything and as a funder we are no exception.

We rely on rigorous selection processes, conduct thorough interviews, undertake a huge amount of due diligence, yet we rarely talk about trust.

2,606 applications, 246 social innovations later, we recognise the patterns.

An innovation is not just about the idea or the organisation, it's about the people driving them. It's the people who take the strategic plan and bring it to life, who take the cash grant and make it work hard, it's the people who are relentless in their pursuit for growth and solutions.

At the end of the day, impact relies heavily on people and the trust you place in their ability to achieve great things.

# 2.

## Growing pains can hurt

We've always known that the tools needed to start an innovation are different to those needed to grow it and it's a skill we help our awardees to develop. But now we know first-hand the challenges of rapid growth.

We've grown from an idea to 50 people in just five years. We outgrew our start-up culture quicker than we thought. We've already been through two organisational restructures!

We've pivoted, made mistakes, exceeded our own expectations and worked at an extremely fast pace.

In 2019, 'organisational resilience' became a common phrase in our day-to-day discussions. We began introducing frameworks, communications tools and investing in our systems.

**Our biggest learning? Keeping the development of staff, systems, tools and skills in lockstep with the development of your mission is critical to sustainable growth.**

# 3.

## Innovation is messy and unpredictable

We've learnt that innovation is messy. It rarely comes from agreement or alignment; it thrives with constructive conflict.

And it happens in grey areas, not black and white spaces. The best ideas are not always generated in 'brainstorm' meetings; they happen over coffee with a colleague, on your commute into work, or right before you go to sleep!

There are twists and turns, not straight lines. Innovation means constantly changing your plans and adapting to new information.

The biggest and perhaps most frustrating thing to understand about innovation is this: it's never fully realised. **We've never fully arrived, whenever we get where we think we want to get, there's a new place to reach.**

# 4.

## Finding the balance between impact and risk-taking is harder than it looks

We want and need to stand over our (and our awardees) impact - this demands planning and measuring.

But focusing too hard on impact measurement and management can discourage us from backing the most risky, disruptive ideas, with the most marginalised communities.

We address this through taking a portfolio approach, where a portfolio of awardees can include lower risk and higher risk awardees or innovations. But is this enough? How do we know when we are taking enough risk? After all, that's our mission.

## Rethinking Our Future

**We believe that Irish people want to choose human prosperity on a healthy and flourishing planet. This is our vision for Ireland in 2030:**

## A VISION FOR IRELAND 2030 !

### THE IRISH ECONOMY IS A HUMAN ECONOMY

Our love affair with GDP has come to an end because growth that leaves our people and our planet behind is failure. We measure our economy's success based on the equality we achieve, the physical and mental health of our people and the environment in addition to GDP. We value inclusive and sustainable job creation. The social and solidarity economy, and especially social enterprises, plays an important role in this agenda, restoring heart and hope to new economic thinking.

### IRELAND LEADS THE GREEN TRANSITION IN EUROPE

We are achieving our ambitious targets for a just and green transition. The private, public and civil society sectors work together to achieve these targets, as we all adapt how we live, work, travel and consume. The transition is just and fair, and leaves no one behind. Ideas that help us embrace the transition are pioneered in Ireland and exported across Europe.

### A RADICAL EQUALITY AGENDA HAS EMERGED

Everybody in Ireland believes equality benefits us all. The Government and society actively protects the rights of Ireland's most marginalised communities. Minority communities are equipped to speak for themselves and enter powerful decision making positions. Led by next generation leaders, philanthropy, alongside taxation, plays a key role in redistributing wealth to support a more equal society.

### OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE THRIVING

Regional towns and rural communities are re-energised and sustainable. The rise of remote work has given many the freedom to choose where and how we want to live. There are options to work at home or in regional hubs and people in rural communities no longer have to say, 'there are no jobs here'. Fewer commuters mean fewer emissions and housing pressures are alleviated for our cities.

### A BOLD GENERATION TAKES CHARGE

Collaboration is the new competition. Creative, energetic, and solution-focused, this new generation takes care of our people and planet. They ask questions of themselves, their families, their employers, and they start or invest in organisations that provide solutions to these questions. Wait for change to happen? No way. They make it happen. They work together to build an equal, sustainable and just future.

**This is our 2030 manifesto for Ireland.**

RETHINK IRELAND

**RETHINK  
IRELAND** Our  
Social  
Innovation  
Fund