

RETHINK IRELAND

THE RURAL RECOVERY FUND 2022

Evaluation Report



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Introduction

The Rural Recovery Fund was a one-year €600,000 Fund created by Rethink Ireland with support from Google.org and the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Dormant Accounts Fund.

The Rural Recovery Fund was created to address some of the most crucial challenges facing rural Ireland: economic disadvantage, lack of job and educational opportunities and social isolation. Awarded projects focused on recovery and resilience for rural communities, for whom many of these issues were exacerbated in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Rural Recovery Fund supported 6 amazing organisations that have made significant social impact to address these issues throughout the duration of the Fund. Awardees received cash-grants and non-financial supports, to support the development of programmes specifically aimed at increasing employment support, work-readiness training and essential wellbeing services to rural communities.

The Fund's Awardees engaged in Rethink Ireland's Accelerator Programme as well as a bespoke programme of non-financial supports. Each Awardee was paired with an expert, external consultant for one-to-one support. This support enabled the Awardees to produce a Theory of Change, build their capacity in impact management, and improve their Organisational Health Assessment¹ scores. Additionally, Awardees received tailored support in areas such as strategic planning, scaling, bespoke leadership support, and communications strategy, based on their individual needs.

Awardees attended a total of 6 Accelerator workshops, 4 online and 2 in-person, covering Stakeholder Engagement and Mapping, Resilient Leadership, Introduction to Impact Management, Communications, and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. These workshops offered a wealth of knowledge and practical skills, contributing to the success and sustainability of the six projects.

Finally, all Awardees were offered the opportunity to participate in Action Learning/Leadership groups, providing peer-leadership development opportunities and networking. This support system helped to build a strong community of like-minded individuals and created lasting relationships that will continue to drive positive change in rural communities across Ireland.

¹ The Organisational Health Assessment is detailed on p.7

The 6 Awardee projects were:

Organisation Name:	Project Name:
Ana Liffey Drug Project	Ana Liffey Drug Project - Mid-West
Camphill Initiatives for Social Ecology (CISE)	Employment Pathways Kilkenny
Grow Remote Ireland CLG	Remote Employment in Rural Ireland for All
Kantoher Development Group	Killeedy Regeneration Project
Ludgate Operations CLG	West Cork Reignite Programme
Peter McVerry Trust	Activation First

The purpose of this evaluation is to:

1. Assess the fund's performance against 5 of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability.
2. Assess and gather evidence of the Fund's impact at two levels:
 - a. Impact of the Fund supports on Awardees
 - b. Impact of the Awardees on their service users.

Methodology

This evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach to assess the Fund performance against the following OECD evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. Quantitative data was used to assess progress against Fund and Awardee goals. All qualitative data underwent thematic analysis in order to identify trends. Outputs from the quantitative and qualitative data were used to answer the following research questions:

- **Relevance of Fund:** was it designed to meet a clear and real need?
- **Efficiency of Fund:** were the resources used efficiently?
- **Effectiveness of Fund for Awardees:** what difference did the Fund supports (both financial and non-financial) make to Awardees?
- **Effectiveness of Awardees' support for their service users:** what difference did the Fund's support have on people using their services?
- **Unintended impacts:** were there any unintended impacts on Awardees or their service users?
- **Sustainability of the Fund:** are the impacts of the Fund likely to continue beyond the funding period?

The evaluation used the following data sources:

- Awardee Exit Reports
- Organisational Health Assessments
- Performance Assessment Reviews
- Awardee Outcome Metrics (hard and soft outcomes)
- Awardee Contract Level Goals
- Project Budgets and Finances
- Anonymous Awardee Exit Surveys.

Relevance of the Fund

Was it designed to meet a clear and real need?

In Ireland, over three in ten (31.4%) people live in a rural area, which is above the European average (27.3%)². Prior to Covid-19, rural Ireland was facing numerous challenges^{3,4} such as **ageing populations, population decline, decrease in full-time jobs, lower median incomes and higher poverty rates than the national average**. Rural isolation is also a major problem. People living in rural areas have an average distance to services like GPs, pharmacies and supermarkets that is seven times longer compared to people living in urban settings⁵. For marginalised groups living in rural areas, **these issues can intersect and have an even greater negative impact**. Non-profit projects working on one of the key challenges were eligible to apply to the Rural Recovery Fund through an open-call process.

The Fund focused on the economic impact of Covid-19 on Rural Areas:

The economic fallout from the Covid-19 crisis has been levelled on sectors of key importance to the rural economy in Ireland. Specifically, individuals working in tourism, hospitality and food have seen the greatest job losses⁶. The OECD estimated that the pandemic **could lead to a decline of between 45% and 70% in the international tourism economy**⁷ and in a report published by the Three Regional Assemblies, rural and coastal counties are more likely to be exposed to significant economic losses⁸.

The Fund aligned with National policy context:

A key policy that builds on opportunities available for rural Ireland is the 'Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025'⁹. The government outlines areas of strategic importance in rural development like attracting **remote workers and revitalising rural jobs**. Taking into account the multiple, intersecting challenges faced by rural communities prior to the pandemic, and with the added pressures of Covid-19 related issues, initiatives which ameliorate these difficulties are vital. In light of this, the work of the Awardees of this Fund have made progress towards this policy. They have done so by supporting marginalised communities, reinforcing rural economies and promoting remote working in rural Ireland.

2 [Introduction - CSO- Urban and Rural Life in Ireland](#)

3 [Energising Ireland's Rural Economy Report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas](#)

4 [Challenges and opportunities in Rural Ireland](#)

5 [Rural Ireland and the impact of COVID-19](#)

6 [The Initial Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Ireland's Labour Market](#)

7 [OECD - Tourism Policy Responses to the Coronavirus](#)

8 [COVID-19 REGIONAL ECONOMIC ANALYSIS](#)

9 [gov.ie - Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025](#)

Efficiency of the Fund

The Rural Recovery Fund aimed to give 200 individuals access to programmes that would build their skills, provide education and increase their job readiness.

BY THE END OF THE FUND, THESE GOALS WERE OVERACHIEVED WITH:



The work of the Fund Awardees also had a significant impact on soft outcomes, with service users reporting increased levels of confidence, job readiness skills, economic and educational aspirations, and digital application skills.

The Rural Recovery Fund has been a catalyst for positive change in the lives of those it has supported, providing a foundation for continued growth and success.

Employment & Education outcomes:

Goal	Impact Achieved
Give 200 service users access to programmes that build skills, provide education & increase job readiness	297 service users accessed skills-building, education and/or job readiness programmes
Of these 200 service users, 100 will gain training qualification or education progression	161 service users received training, a qualification and/or educational progression
At least 50 of the total cohort of 200 will be supported to find employment/work placement by March 2023	139¹⁰ service users were supported to access employment

10 107 of the 139 jobs were supported by one project, Kantoher Development Group.

Soft Outcomes:

Soft outcomes refer to the changes a person experiences as a result of engaging with the project which cannot easily be quantitatively measured, e.g. increased confidence. This data was self-reported by Awardee projects where it was appropriate to do so

Goal	Impact Achieved
Increased levels of job readiness skills ¹¹ amongst service users (for example interview skills, presentation skills, ability to communicate professionally and English language skills where relevant)	98 service users were reported to increase their job-readiness skills
Increased skills using job/course searching platforms and completing digital applications	87 service users increased skills using job/course searching platforms and completing digital applications
Increased economic aspirations for the future amongst service users	30 service users were reported to have increased economic aspirations
Increased levels of confidence amongst service users	47 service users were reported to have increased levels of confidence
Increased educational aspirations for the future amongst service users	57 service users were reported to have increased educational aspirations

Individual Awardee Contracted Goals:

Contract goals were the goals set between Rethink Ireland and the Awardee projects at the beginning of the Fund. Contract goals included impact goals, capacity-building goals and deliverables as part of the one-to-one consultancy supports. All contracted goals of the Rural Recovery Fund were met, and in some cases exceeded. Each Awardee's contract goals and progress against these goals is outlined in Section 3 below - Awardee Profiles and Impact.

Total Contract Goals	Total Contract Goals Achieved
24	24

¹¹ Job readiness skills figures are inclusive of accredited and unaccredited training provided by Awardee projects. This is due to many projects (PMVT, ALDP, Ludgate, CISE) working with people with complex needs, where wraparound supports are key in helping people on their journey towards employment.

Effectiveness of the Fund

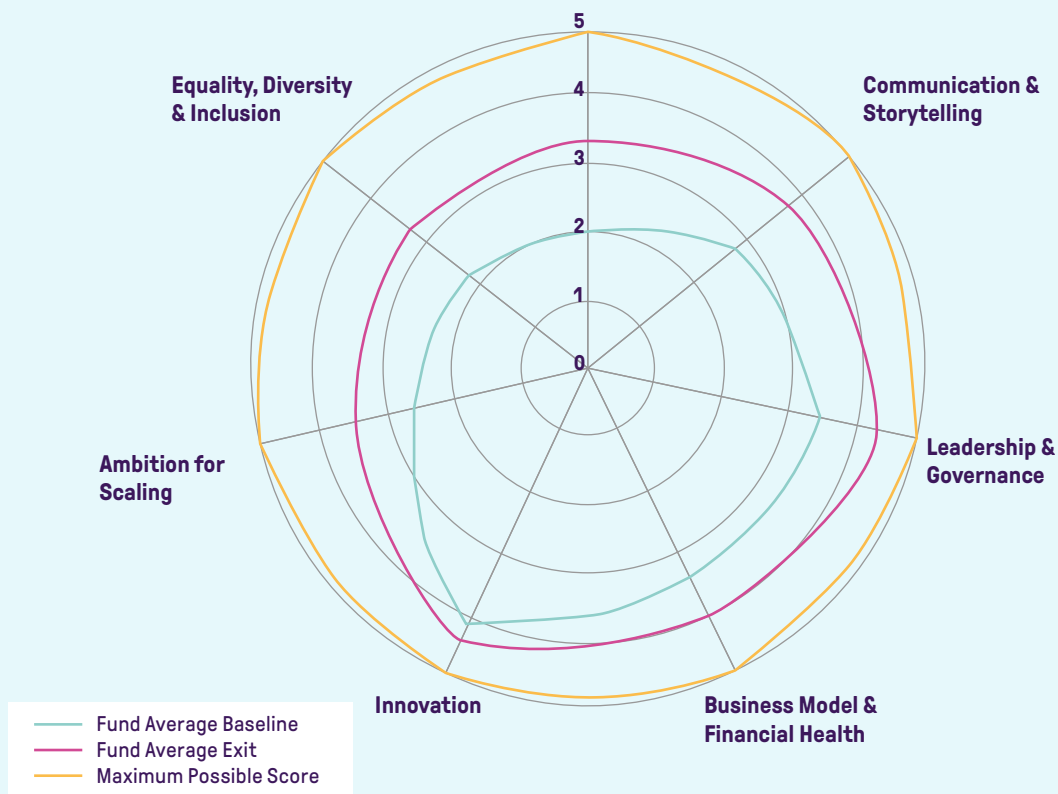
The Rural Recovery Fund has been effective in increasing the organisational capacity of the 6 projects. This was tracked and assessed using the Rethink Ireland Organisational Health Assessment tool.

The Rethink Ireland Organisational Health Assessment (OHA) was created to evaluate and monitor the organisational capacity of Awardees. The tool is also used to aid in identifying the correct non-financial and consulting supports necessary for enhancing the capacity and scaling of the projects.

The Rural Recovery Fund set a **target 25% increase across Impact Management, Communication and Strategic Planning (Leadership and Governance)**. The Fund overachieved in the areas of Impact Management and Communication, with a 72% increase and 37% increase respectively. Awardees increased their Strategic Planning capacity by 24%.

Awardees also reported significant increases in their OHA scores in the areas of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, with 48% increases respectively.

FUND AVERAGE OHA PROGRESSION



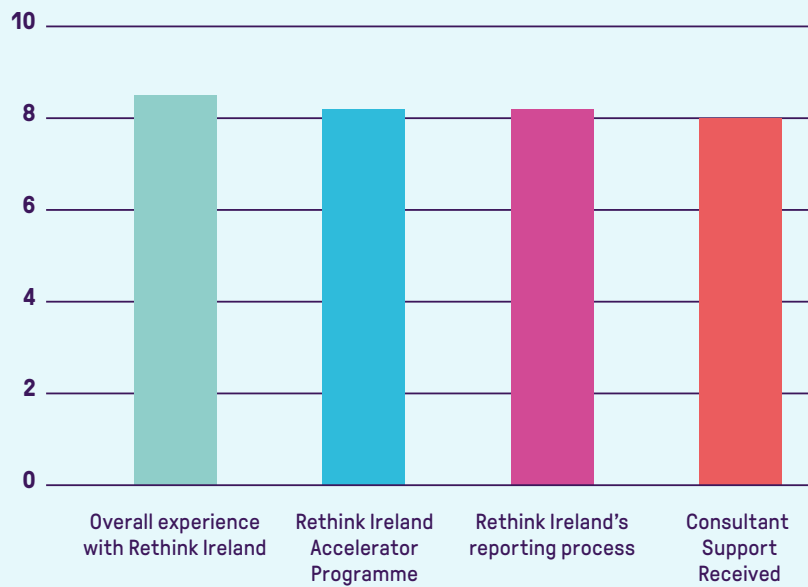
Organisational Health Assessment Metric	Fund Average Baseline	Fund Average Exit	% increase in Organisational Capacity
Impact Measurement and Management	1.98	3.41	72% [Target over-achieved]
Communication and Storytelling	2.83	3.89	37% [Target over-achieved]
Leadership and Governance	3.55	4.4	24% [Target slightly under-achieved]
Business Model and Financial Health	3.4	4.07	20% [No target]
Innovation ¹²	4.16	4.42	6% [No target]
Ambition for Scaling	2.63	3.54	35% [No target]
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	2.25	3.33	48% [No target]
Average	2.97	3.87	30%

¹² Increases in innovation are minimal as the projects have been innovative from the outset.

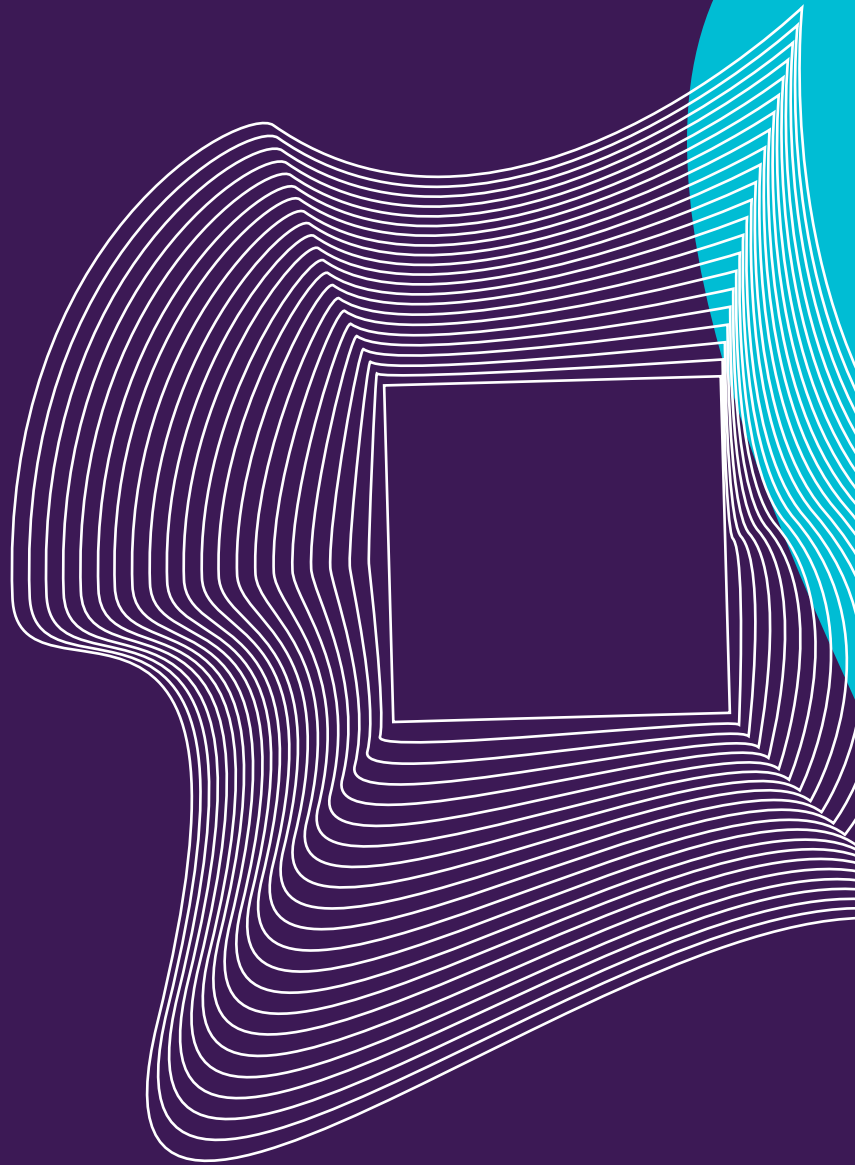
Rating of the supports provided:

At the end of the Fund, an anonymous Awardee exit survey was sent to the 6 projects. 3 projects responded to the survey, giving it a response rate of 50%. The following are the ratings of the supports provided:

AVERAGE RATING OF RETHINK IRELAND SUPPORTS



Awardee Profiles and Impact



AWARDEE

Ana Liffey Drug Project

Project Name: Ana Liffey Drug Project Mid-West

Funding Amount: €88,000 (cash grant and non-financial support)

Counties impacted: Clare, Limerick, Tipperary

SDG: 10 Reduced Inequalities



Project description

Ana Liffey Drug Project is a national addiction service with a 'Low Threshold – Harm Reduction' ethos, providing direct services to people who use drugs in Dublin and the Mid-West. Through this project, they expanded the reach of their services in County Clare, North Tipperary and rural Limerick supporting people affected by addiction, homelessness and other social issues. They conducted outreach in these areas bringing services to people who would otherwise not be able to access them. Their project workers are multi-skilled and deliver trauma-informed supports on a one-to-one basis. They support people to access residential treatment services, engage in local health services, and when they are ready, begin volunteer roles, work in their community or return to education, ultimately reintegrating into their community and wider society.

Impact

The Ana Liffey Drug Project engaged with 69 individuals in total (15 females and 54 males) who were struggling with homelessness, addiction, and complex needs. The organisation carried out 476 outreach sessions in rural areas and provided interventions such as an intake form, initial needs assessment, harm reduction and health promotion services, overdose prevention, naloxone provision, as well as key working and case management services. Through these efforts, 5 people engaged in the Ana Liffey Paid Peer Outreach programme, and several individuals pursued further education or employment opportunities, including addiction studies, the SHEP (Social and Health Education) programme, the Leaving Certificate, a boxing training course, forklift training and progression into employment. Additionally, 51 people engaged in naloxone training and overdose reduction education.

Impact in Numbers

TOTAL SERVICE USERS = 69

- 476 outreach sessions carried out in rural areas
- Number of Service Users supported into employment/work placement = 7
- Number of Service Users supported into training, qualifications or educational progression = 56
- Number of Service Users supported with increased job-readiness skills = 13
- Number of Service Users supported with job/course searching platforms and completing digital applications = 4
- Number of Service Users supported to increase educational aspirations = 25

ANA LIFFEY DRUG PROJECT HAS ALSO ENGAGED WITH 37 DIFFERENT AGENCIES ACROSS THE MUNSTER REGION.

- On the road towards recovery:
- 5 individuals are currently in a residential treatment programme.
- 4 people are waiting on a residential bed and engaging in pre-entry to residential programmes.
- 10 people have moved from precontemplation to contemplation stage of change.

Unintended impact - increased collaboration and increased reach of services, including plans for public drug-litter bins in Clare. Since receiving the Rural Recovery Fund support, additional funding has been secured from the JP McManus Fund for a mobile health unit for outreach services in rural areas. The project has also seen increased engagement and inquiries from GPs and An Garda Síochána leading to greater awareness of services in the community and cross-agency collaboration.

Contract Goals	Status
Ensure 2.5 days of each project workers time is allocated to North Tipperary, rural Limerick and Clare each week	Achieved - 2.5 days of each project workers time was allocated to North Tipperary, rural Limerick and Clare each week
Have 15 service users engaged with active care plans in each county; 45 in total	Over-achieved - Ana Liffey Drug Project supported 69 service users
On the Organisational Health Assessment, move Impact Management and Measurement from 1.8 to 2.5	Over-achieved - moved to a final score of 3.5 on Impact Management and Measurement
Complete a Theory of Change with an Impact Management Framework	Achieved - Ana Liffey Drug Project successfully created a Theory of Change with an Impact Management Framework



The Ana Liffey Drug Project Team at their 10-year anniversary celebration

Camphill Initiatives for Social Ecology (CISE)

Project Name: Employment Pathways Kilkenny

Funding Amount: €58,000 (cash grant and non-financial support)

Counties Impacted: Kilkenny

SDG: 4 Quality Education



Project description

Camphill Initiatives for Social Ecology (CISE) is establishing, supporting and scaling inclusive social enterprise projects in Kilkenny to create opportunities for persons with disabilities to build skills, increase their job readiness, and ultimately gain employment. CISE projects are set up to support adults with a disability or with autism, who have been unemployed for more than three years.

Impact

The 'Work Together Now' project supported participants transitioning from a weekly disability service programme into paid employment. 3 participants completed the course and secured employment in local restaurants and a shop while another 4 people engaged in the 'Start your Own Business' programme leading to the creation of a craft pottery business, wooden toy business, a Kombucha tea business and greetings cards business.

The 'Food Enterprise Project Kilkenny (FEPK)' pathway will train 12 participants in a structured training plan, with a goal of creating 3 part-time employment positions by December 2023. The 'Gifted' project also showed positive results, with participants improving in self-esteem, social connectivity, independent life skills, and mental health. CISE is taking a partnership approach to address the challenges faced by the disability service sector and measuring the positive outcomes of the programmes, including the improvement of family services and circles of support.

Impact in Numbers

TOTAL SERVICE USERS = 20

- Number of Service Users supported into employment/work placement = 7
- Number of Service Users supported into training, qualification or educational progression = 14
- Number of Service Users supported with increased job-readiness skills = 7
- Number of Service Users supported with job/course searching platforms and completing digital applications = 18
- Number of Service Users supported with increased self-confidence = 20
- Number of Service Users supported with increased economic aspirations = 7
- Number of Service Users supported with increased educational aspirations = 20

Unintended Impact - positive partnerships and networking opportunities developed

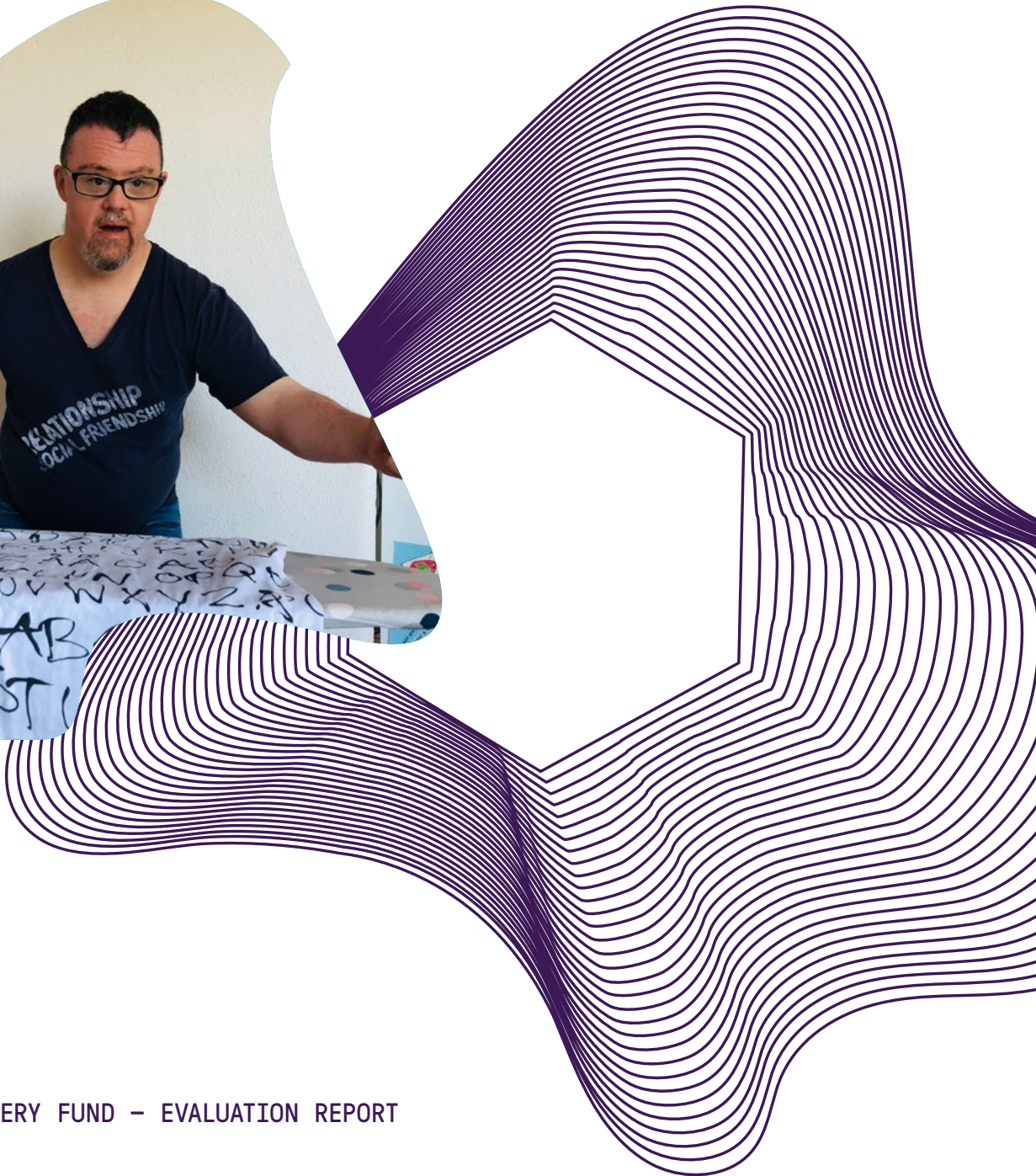
“This experience demonstrates that there is plenty of positive activity within our local communities. Community connectors are needed to join these positive actors and synergies. The overall experience is one of generating a momentum which can now be further developed. We did hope for some degree of networking, the unintended [outcome] was the range and degree of goodwill and support.”

- John O'Connor, Project Lead

Contract Goals	Status
Recruit and hire a development manager for CISE	Achieved - A Development Manager was successfully hired
Launch CISE's website	Achieved - The CISE website is now active
Create 3 employment opportunities for CISE Service Users	Over-Achieved - CISE exceeded their target and supported 7 Service Users with employment opportunities
On the Organisational Health Assessment, move Leadership and Governance from 1.6 to 2.6	Achieved - CISE moved to a final score of 4.2 for Leadership and Governance
Create a Theory of Change and Strategic Plan for CISE	Achieved - CISE created a Theory of Change and Strategic Plan

CISE case study:

- John O'Connor, Project Lead



AWARDEE

Grow Remote

Project Name: Remote Employment in Rural Ireland for All

Funding Amount: €87,000 (cash grant and non-financial support)

Counties impacted: National

SDG: 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth



Project description

Grow Remote are on a mission to enable everyone to work, live and participate locally. They do this by making remote work both visible and accessible, with a particular focus on rural communities. Through the “Remote Employment in Rural Ireland for All” project, Grow Remote provided supports to social enterprises in rural Ireland, who are supporting and employing people from disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

Impact

Grow Remote supported 42 individual participants from 16 social enterprises. These organisations serve a diverse range of communities, including, but not limited to, marginalised individuals, inner-city children, people with disabilities, remote communities, those with Asperger’s, and migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Participants received comprehensive training through two core programmes - Leading Remote Teams for managers and Thriving Remotely for individuals - aimed at supporting social enterprises to take advantage of remote work opportunities for themselves and their clients. Participants learned how to transition their organisations to remote or hybrid work and support their clients in finding remote jobs. Upon completion of the training programmes, all participants received a digital badge equivalent to a QQI Level 5/6. While it is too early to see the direct impact on employment or work placements, due to the nature of the programmes delivered over an extended period, the participant organisations are now well-positioned to support their clients in finding remote work.

Impact in Numbers

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS = 42

- Number of Participants supported into with increased job-readiness skills = 42
- Number of Participants supported with job/course searching platforms and completing digital applications = 42

Unintended Impact - sparked essential dialogue about the social impact of remote work, reiterating its importance to social enterprises amidst post-pandemic office returns.

“We saw how the promotion of this project led to some very important conversations. It came at a time where a lot of companies (including Social Enterprises) were considering bringing their staff back to the office after the pandemic. Many of the conversations that we had with the participating social enterprises reminded them of how important it was to facilitate people to work remotely. The social impact of remote work tends to take a back seat compared to what’s best for the bottom line of the business and this project has helped to keep the social impact of remote work as part of the conversation in the social enterprise sector.”

- Joanne Mangan, Project Lead

Contract Goals	Status
Have 40 participants from various social enterprises signed up to Grow Remote courses	Achieved - Grow Remote supported 42 participants with Grow Remote courses
On the Organisational Health Assessment, move ambition for scaling from 2.75 to 3.75	Achieved - Grow Remote moved to a final score of 3.75 for Ambition for Scaling
Create an updated Theory of Change and Strategic Plan for Grow Remote	Achieved - Grow Remote created an updated Theory of Change and Strategic Plan



Grow Remote participants connecting in person

Kantoher Development Group

Project Name: Killeedy Regeneration Project

Award Amount: €58,000 (cash grant and non-financial support)

Counties Impacted: Limerick

SDG: 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth



Project description

Kantoher Development Group (KDG) is a community development organisation set up to rejuvenate the village of Killeedy and create employment for people in the surrounding area. KDG is working to create diverse employment opportunities, in sustainable enterprises, for people in West Limerick.

Impact

Since its inception, KDG Enterprise Park has grown to over 200 employees, with 107 new jobs created as a direct result of Rural Recovery Fund support. The Enterprise Park provided space to a struggling printing company, which now employs 3 people and is growing, with local organisations and companies using its services. KDG also secured €250,000 in investment for a wood briquetting business, allowing it to resume operations and employ 4 people with growth potential. In addition, 100 jobs were created by a catering facility which opened its new factory at Kantoher. The overall impact of KDG has been significant, as the park now employs more people than it did before its 2005 closure, and is poised for continued growth.

Impact in Numbers

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS = 107

- Number of Participants supported into employment/work placement = 107
- Number of Participants supported with increased job-readiness skills = 2
- Number of Participants supported with job/course searching platforms and completing digital applications = 1
- Number of Participants supported to increase self-confidence = 6
- Number of Participants supported to increase economic aspirations = 3
- Number of Participants supported to increase educational aspirations = 2

Contract Goals	Status
Hire a manager to drive the development of the Killeedy Development Project	Achieved - A manager was successfully hired
Create 10 new employment opportunities in Killeedy	Over-achieved - KDG exceeded their target, creating 107 employment opportunities in Killeedy
On the Organisation Health Assessment, move Impact Measurement and Management from 1.3 to 2.3	Over-achieved - KDG moved to a final score of 3 for Impact Measurement and Management
Create a Theory of Change with an Impact Management framework and plans to scale	Achieved - KDG created a Theory of Change with and Impact Management framework

KDG Case Study:

David is a 30 year old, qualified graphic designer that sought to set up his own printing business. The business required a lot of space for equipment such as a laminator, printers, photocopier, large screens with a big footprint and with commercial activity in this region vibrant, that space was not available on the small budget David had. He approached KDG to see if they could help.

KDG offered a space allowing David to start small and to grow, and supported him by establishing connections with the other enterprises in the Business Park as well as the wider community.

David now has a formidable business and there's a possibility of moving to a larger facility within the Enterprise Park.

"Were it not for KDG and the ongoing, friendly support offered by this voluntary organisation, The Printed Source would not be in operation. We are now in year two of our operation with three people employed in Kantoher and look forward to further growth in the year ahead . A huge thanks to all the local businesses and voluntary organisations that use our services which has been the foundation on which this business has grown from. Were it not for the large space offered freely by KDG at the outset we wouldn't have been in a position to purchase the large pieces of equipment that are a key component of this business."

- David Garrihy, The Printed Source.



AWARDEE

Ludgate Operations CLG

Project Name: West Cork Reignite Programme

Award Amount: €63,000 (cash grant and non-financial support)

Counties Impacted: Cork

SDG: 5 Gender Equality



Project description

Ludgate is Ireland's first rural digital hub, located in Skibbereen. Through their Reignite Programme, they supported women in West Cork who wished to return to work to rebuild their confidence, develop appropriate professional skills and ultimately enabled them to re-enter the workforce. The programme consists of an 11-week tailored training, coaching and mentoring programme followed by a 3-month paid work placement. The content is tailored to the specific challenges faced by women returners in rural Ireland.

Impact

The Reignite Programme supported 14 participants from across West Cork, with a mix of urban and rural backgrounds and ages ranging from mid-30s to mid-50s. The programme consisted of weekly 3-hour workshops covering topics such as motivation, digital skills, and job search strategies, and participants also received personal consultation with business and career coaches as well as mentorship from professionals in their field. Since completing the programme, over a third of the participants have moved into employment or started their own business, while others are exploring further studies or taking time to reflect on their next steps. Feedback from the programme showed that it significantly increased the participants' confidence and readiness to re-enter the workforce, with 90% reporting increased confidence and 70% reporting a positive impact on their work-readiness. The workshops on digital skills and social media were especially beneficial in overcoming participants' fear of not having necessary skills.

Impact in Numbers

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS = 14

- Number of Participants supported into employment/work placement = 8
- Number of Participants supported into training, qualification or educational progression = 14
- Number of Participants supported with increased job-readiness skills = 14
- Number of Participants supported with job/course searching platforms and completing digital applications = 14
- Number of Participants supported to increase self-confidence = 13
- Number of Participants supported to increase economic aspirations = 10
- Number of Participants supported to increase educational aspirations = 10

Unintended impact - positive partnerships and networking opportunities developed

“One of the most successful elements, and its impact not fully anticipated in advance of the programme, was the development of a very strong support network among the women. They became each others’ advocates and key supporters, and were instrumental in contributing to the increase in confidence in each participant. Many of the candidates alluded to this in their end of programme survey. In fact, many of the candidates have kept in contact post-programme completion, staying in touch via WhatsApp, and meet as a group every so often.

Another unforeseen positive impact is the growth in awareness in the wider business community of this cohort of skilled individuals, ready to step into a variety of roles. Organisations now approach Ludgate regarding vacancies they are looking to fill and when seeking out candidates.” - Rose Minihane, Project Lead

Contract Goals	Status
Register and train at least 10 female returnees through the first offering of the West Cork Reignite Programme	Achieved - Ludgate exceeded their target, registering and training 14 female returnees
On the Organisational Health Assessment, move Impact Management and Measurement from 2 to a 3	Achieved - Ludgate moved to a final score of 3 for Impact Measurement and Management
Create a Theory of Change and a Communications Strategy	Achieved - Ludgate created a Theory of Change and Communications Strategy

Ludgate Case Study:

“Taking time away from work shouldn’t equate to leaving your career behind but for many women, it does. Numerous women intend to return to work after a career break, but re-entering the workforce often proves difficult due to various obstacles. Consequently, three in five women return to lower-paying roles than they held previously. This underutilisation of their skills discourages women from returning and results in a talent loss.

As a woman who experienced a five-year career break, I faced similar challenges. In 2022, I learned about Ludgate’s Reignite Programme for women returnees. Though initially sceptical, I discovered the programme offered more than just reskilling; it included workshops, mentorship, and networking opportunities. The women returnees came from diverse backgrounds and industries, and we bonded over our shared experiences.

Over three months, the workshops and camaraderie with fellow participants proved invaluable. The programme produced results: over half of the women found work or pursued their dream careers through further education. I secured a role as a direct result of the programme, and others started businesses or continued their education. We’re all grateful for our Reignite experience and remain a strong support network for each other.”

- Ludgate Participant



Tracy Keogh, Co-Founder, Grow Remote and Fiona Ryan, Project Lead for the West Cork Reignite Programme, Ludgate Operations pictured at The Ludgate Hub, Skibbereen, Co. Cork.

AWARDEE

Peter McVerry Trust

Project Name: Activation First

Award Amount: €87,000 (cash grant and non-financial support)

Counties impacted: Galway & Mayo

SDG: 1 No Poverty



Project description

Activation First is a project established by Peter McVerry Trust (PMVT) that supports tenants of Housing Services in Galway and Mayo to access local education, training and employment opportunities with a view to assisting their integration into local communities. The project engages directly with potential employers, educators and trainers to match them with Peter McVerry Trust tenants and offers ongoing support to both parties to sustain participation in the project.

Impact

PMVT's Activation First project provided support to individuals experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health issues, and disabilities. The support included assistance with CV preparation, job searches, interview preparation, confidence building, community engagement, and English classes. The project's impact has been seen in the positive changes it has made in tenants' lives, providing ongoing and collaborative support that takes into account their unique circumstances and the potential need for extra support to sustain progress.

Impact in Numbers

TOTAL SERVICE USERS = 45

- Number of Service Users supported into employment/work placement = 10
- Number of Service Users supported into Training, qualification or educational progression = 35
- Number of Service Users supported with Increased job-readiness skills = 20
- Number of Service Users supported with job/course searching platforms and completing digital applications = 8
- Number of Service Users supported to increase self-confidence = 8
- Number of Service Users supported to increase economic aspirations = 10

Unintended impact - fostered educational support for refugee children alongside adult activation, enhancing family and community inclusivity.

Contract Goals	Status
Hire 2 housing support officers to implement the Activation First project in Galway and Mayo	Achieved - 2 housing support officers were hired
Support service users to access 15 activation placements (employment, education and/or work placement)	Over-achieved - 10 service users achieved employment and 35 service users achieved educational progression
On the Organisational Health Assessment, move Impact Measurement and Management from 2.5 to 3.3	Over-achieved - PMVT exited the Fund with a score of 4 in Impact Measurement and Management
The senior leadership team at Peter McVerry Trust will engage with leadership supports to develop key competencies	Achieved - the PMVT leadership engaged with supports to develop key competencies
Create a theory of change for the Activation First project	Achieved - PMVT created a Theory of Change




PMVT Case Study:

Janet, her husband, and their two young children, entered the PMVT housing with supports service in 2021 after they had received a termination notice from their landlord and found themselves homeless. Janet suffered from depression and required a lot of community support to rebuild her life and wellbeing. In October of 2022, Janet was referred into the Activation Programme. She was studying part-time but really wanted to find some part-time work so she could earn some extra money, and because she was experiencing some personal challenges at home, Janet really wanted the dignity of having her own money and having an outlet outside of the home.

Together with her key worker, she met with a member of the Activation team to explore her needs and hopes around Education, Training and Employment. Over a period of three months, the key worker and the activation officer worked on exploring a number of avenues with Janet. Together they crafted her CV, mentored her on exploring where her skill set lay, and explored skills she had not recognised in herself before. The team felt it was important that Janet was not overwhelmed as she experienced periods of real vulnerability when dark days would overwhelm her, so attention was paid to setting realistic expectations and working at a pace that would not put Janet under pressure.

With the support of the Activation team, Janet found a part-time position in a coffee shop close to her home that was willing to accommodate her hours of availability while her children were in a local crèche. She really blossomed in her role and being able to engage with customers gave her a real sense of purpose.



“The Activation Programme has made me feel human again as I was able to work and get my own money. I am very happy with the service. At times it doesn’t even feel like a service, but like a friend that is holding your hand through a difficult time.”

- Janet

Sustainability of the Fund

Organisation Name	Project Name	Sustainability
Ana Liffey Drug Project	Ana Liffey Drug Project - Mid-West	The project will continue beyond the lifetime of the Fund. Ana Liffey have received confirmation from the HSE that they can amend their Service Level Agreement to continue with one full-time and one part-time project worker role in rural areas.
Grow Remote Ireland CLG	Remote Employment in Rural Ireland for All	The project will continue beyond the lifetime of the Fund. The Remote Playbook for Social Enterprises is being built to provide guidance for social enterprises on making the transition to remote work and supporting clients to find remote jobs. The project involves ongoing engagement with participating organisations to identify their needs and provide further training for their clients through the Remote Work Ready training programme. The next phase of the project involves close collaboration with these organisations to support their client base in training for and securing remote jobs.
Peter McVerry Trust	Activation First	The Activation First project will continue in the Mid-West region with their horizons already expanding into Roscommon and Clare. The posts will be funded through the PMVT fundraising department as well as from income from their tenants.

Organisation Name	Project Name	Sustainability
Kantoher Development Group	Killeedy Regeneration Project	The project will continue beyond the lifetime of the Fund. KDG are in discussions with businesses to take over a factory that has been idle for some time at Kantoher. Should they be successful, they would use the rent from this facility to fund further growth.
Ludgate Operations CLG	West Cork Reignite Programme	The project will continue after exiting from the Rural Recovery Fund. They have now partnered with Cork ETB to run the Reignite Programme.
Camphill Initiatives for Social Ecology (CISE)	Employment Pathways Kilkenny	The project will continue after exiting from the Rural Recovery Fund. They have secured funding from Kilkenny LEADER Partnership (KLP) to continue the Food Enterprise Project (FEPK).

Summary

1. Relevance of Fund: was it designed to meet a clear and real need?

Yes, the Rural Recovery Fund was designed to meet a clear and real need in rural Ireland. The Fund was created to address the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on rural communities, which were facing economic disadvantage, lack of job and educational opportunities, and social isolation. The Fund supported six projects that aimed to make significant social impact in addressing these challenges. The Rural Recovery Fund was a response to the high levels of poverty, population decline, and isolation in rural Ireland, as well as the economic fallout from the pandemic in sectors like tourism, hospitality, and food, which have seen significant job losses. The work of the Awardees of the Fund aligns with the government's policy of revitalising rural jobs and promoting remote working in rural areas.

2. Efficiency of Fund: were the resources used efficiently?

The efficiency of the Fund can be seen from the fact that it was completed on budget and all contract goals were met - and in many cases exceeded - by the Awardees. Out of the 297 participants that were provided access to programmes that build skills, provide education, and increase job readiness, 161 received training qualifications or education progression. The goal of supporting at least 50 participants to find employment or work placement by March 2023 was overachieved, with 139 of the 297 participants supported in finding employment or work placement. Soft outcomes such as increased confidence, job readiness skills, economic and educational aspirations, and digital skills were also positively impacted for a significant number of participants.

3. Effectiveness of Fund for Awardees: what difference did the Fund supports (both financial and non-financial) make to Awardees?

The Fund made a significant difference to the Awardees, providing both financial and non-financial support to help them achieve their goals.

Ana Liffey Drug Project was able to allocate 2.5 days of each project worker's time to rural areas, have 69 service users engaged with active care plans and improve their organisational health assessment in Impact Management & Measurement from 1.8 to 3.5.

Campill Initiatives for Social Ecology recruited a development manager, launched their website, created 7 employment opportunities and improved their organisational health assessment score for leadership and governance from 1.6 to 4.2.

Grow Remote trained 42 staff and volunteers from social enterprises, increased their ambition for scaling from 2.75 to 3.75, and created an updated Theory of Change and Strategic Plan.

Kantoher Development Group hired a manager to drive the development of the project, created 107 new employment opportunities, improved their organisational health assessment from 1.3 to 3, and created a Theory of Change with an Impact Management framework.

Ludgate trained 14 female returnees through the first offering of the West Cork Reignite Programme, improved their organisational health assessment from 2 to 3, and created a Theory of Change and Communications Strategy.

Peter McVerry Trust was able to hire two housing support officers to implement the Activation First project in Galway and Mayo, support 45 service users to access activation placements and improve their Impact Management and Measurement organisational health assessment from 2.5 to 4.

4. Effectiveness of Awardees' support for their service users: what difference did the Fund's support have on people using their services?

The support provided by the Awardees to their service users has made a significant difference in their lives. PMVT's Activation First project helped people experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health issues, and disabilities to gain job readiness and employment, while the Ana Liffey Drug Project provided support to 69 individuals struggling with homelessness, addiction, and complex needs. The programme resulted in 5 people engaging in the Ana Liffey Paid peer Outreach programme, education and employment opportunities, and 51 people receiving naloxone training and overdose reduction education. Grow Remote supported 42 individuals from 16 social enterprises, providing comprehensive training on remote work and supporting their clients in finding remote jobs. CISE's Work Together Now and FEPK pathways created businesses and job placements, and the Gifted project showed positive results in self-esteem, social connectivity, independent life skills, and mental health. KDG Enterprise Park grew to over 200 employees and directly created 107 new jobs, while Ludgate's Reignite 2022 supported 14 candidates with 5 re-entering the workforce with increased confidence and readiness.

5. Unintended impacts: were there any unintended impacts on Awardees or their service users?

The implementation of the various projects had some unintended impacts:

The Ana Liffey Drug Project saw positive unintended impacts such as increased inquiries from An Garda Síochána and referrals from GP's in rural areas for information on their service, drug trends, and referral routes. They also received funding for their mobile health unit and planned for public drug litter bins in Co. Clare following their education on the drug litter working group.

Campill Initiatives for Social Ecology saw the development of positive partnerships and networking opportunities through promoting their innovative pathways towards employment for people with a disability. They generated momentum within the local community, with a range of goodwill and support that they did not fully anticipate that can now be further developed to allow them to further scale their work.

Grow Remote saw the promotion of their project leading to important conversations about remote work and its social impact. It helped promote the importance of the social impact of remote work for the staff of the participating social enterprises, particularly at a time when they were considering bringing staff back to their offices.

Kantoher Development Group Enterprise Park had an unintended consequence of greatly over-achieving their employment target. This is a sizeable over-achievement of their original target of 10 jobs, and would not have happened without the support from the Rural Recovery Fund.

Ludgate's Relgnite 2022 programme had a very positive unintended impact, as the women participants developed a strong support network and became each other's advocates and key supporters, contributing to increased confidence among the participants. This informal network will continue to act as a key support for service users long after the lifetime Rural Recovery Fund.

For **Peter McVerry Trust**, working with under 18-year-olds as part of their Activation First project had an unintended impact of supporting families as a unit, including linking the families with schools and educational providers in their pledged accommodation area. Furthermore, PMVT worked extensively with Ukrainian refugees through the International Protection Accommodation Services.

6. Sustainability of the Fund: are the impacts of the Fund likely to continue beyond the funding period?

The projects funded by the Rural Recovery Fund are committed to sustaining their initiatives beyond the Fund's duration. The Ana Liffey Drug Project has received approval from the HSE to retain two project worker roles in rural areas. Grow Remote Ireland CLG is developing the Remote Playbook for Social Enterprises, providing guidance on remote work and supporting clients in finding remote jobs. The Activation First project by Peter McVerry Trust will expand into additional regions and be funded through the organisation's fundraising efforts and tenant income. Kantoher Development Group aims to secure a factory for rent to fund further growth. Ludgate Operations CLG's West Cork Reignite Programme will continue with a partnership with Cork ETB. Camphill Initiatives for Social Ecology (CISE) has obtained funding from Kilkenny LEADER Partnership (KLP) to sustain the Employment Pathways Kilkenny project, specifically the Food Enterprise Project (FEPK).

Thank you to our donors

“Rethink Ireland’s Manifesto 2030 calls out a vision where our rural communities are thriving. It paints a picture where, “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. We can work at homes or regional hubs and offices 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.”

We all know that investment in our rural communities helps to make Ireland a more equitable and sustainable place for everyone that lives here.

I am blown away by the direct impact that the Rural Recovery Fund has had on the lives of people engaging with our Awardees’ work, but am also struck by the wider impact that will have been felt by those people’s families and networks, who have also benefited - and continue to benefit - from these innovative projects.

We would like to thank our donors, Google.org and the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Dormant Accounts Fund, for your generous support which has made this Fund possible - another step towards realising the vision of our Manifesto 2030”.



Deirdre Mortell
CEO, RETHINK IRELAND

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