

Ability to Work Fund

IMPACT REPORT 2020-2023



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INTRODUCTION

The Ability to Work Fund is a €1.5m fund created by Rethink Ireland in partnership with State Street and the Government of Ireland.

The Ability to Work Fund supported four innovative projects to empower more people with disabilities to gain employment. The Ability to Work Fund supported these projects to continue to positively impact the lives of people with disabilities throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, grow that impact over the course of 3 years, and build the capacity of the organisations themselves so that their impact can be sustained into the future.

FUND AWARDEES

- Dublin Simon Community ‘Employability Pathways’ Project
- WALK ‘Creating Employment PATHways Through Technology’ Project
- Cork University Foundation ‘Disability Support Service Mentoring’ Programme
- Not So Different ‘Creative Ability Hub’

THE FUND VISION

1. Empower 250 people with disabilities to progress along pathways to employment by investing in organisations that provide training, upskilling and education.
2. Double the impact of successful organisations by providing growth capital and support to organisations with a proven track record of social impact.



A TRANSFORMATIVE INVESTMENT

“State Street is extremely proud to support the Ability to Work Fund by Rethink Ireland in partnership with the Government of Ireland. The fund has supported four dynamic non-profits and social enterprises that are changing Irish society for the better.

Lower levels of education, skills and adult learning participation remain major barriers to accessing pathways to employment for people with disabilities in Ireland. Over the past three years, State Street has worked closely with Rethink Ireland to identify and back the most impactful organisations who are tackling the issue of disability unemployment, supporting them to maximise their reach and increase their social impact. A core objective of the Fund is to help

support more people with disabilities into the workforce by providing progressive pathways into education, training and employment based on their needs, abilities and potential.

The impact of the Ability to Work Fund has been remarkable; the data and statistics speak for themselves, but it is the personal stories and positive influence of the training, mentoring and work experience that create a lasting ripple effect for everyone. We must also acknowledge the challenging external environment over the past three years, and the conditions under which the organisations had to navigate. It is an exceptional achievement.

As an employer, State Street values the qualities – experiences, interests, and capabilities – that make our employees unique and we know that an inclusive culture and a diverse workforce make us stronger and more successful.

By empowering people with disabilities to gain employment, we are directly contributing to the overall health and well-being of our local communities by promoting equality of opportunities in education and sustainable employment for everyone in society. We are hugely excited to see the impact already achieved by these fantastic organisations, and we look forward to seeing what they achieve in future.”

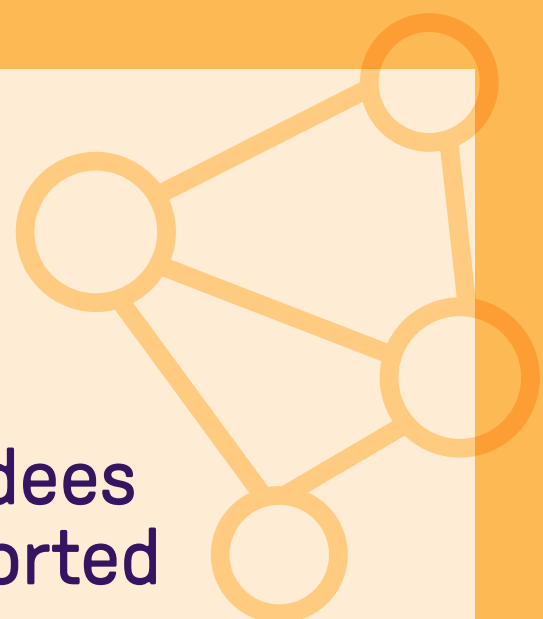


TADHG YOUNG
**Executive Vice President
& Country Head – Ireland,
State Street**

ABILITY TO WORK FUND IMPACT OVERVIEW

4

awardees
supported



1027

people with
disabilities supported to
progress along pathways
to employment.



66

employer partners
engaged to support
people with disabilities on
their employment journey.



Cash grants payment facilitated the recruitment of **5 new staff** and increased hours for 4 members of existing staff, enabling projects to operate more sustainably and **increase their reach**.



Non-financial support enabled awardees to **continue operating through Covid-19**, supporting awardees to **pivot their services online** which allowed them to continue reaching **vulnerable learners** during a period of heightened uncertainty.



THE RETHINK IRELAND PACKAGE

At Rethink Ireland, we are committed to supporting the best social innovations to scale and maximise their impact. We do this by using a venture philanthropy model – a funding method that uses the tools of venture capital investing alongside grants to support long-term social and environmental impact. Cash grant payments are tied to a number of targets and goals associated with programme delivery as well as strategic areas of growth. It is the process of treating a philanthropic donation in the same way as a venture capital investment, with the main performance metric being social impact.

Through the Ability to Work Fund, Rethink Ireland supported four awardees with cash grants and tailored capacity building supports to suit the needs of each organisation.

Cash Grants

The overall cash grant investment amounted to **€937,000** between August 2020 and October 2023. Cash grants are a combination of private philanthropic funding and Government funding.

Capacity Building Supports

Capacity building supports are aimed at strengthening awardee organisations through tailored consultancy support on key strategic areas and participation in our Accelerator Programme. Rethink Ireland provided a total package of supports equal to €150,000.

The four organisations supported came to the Fund at various levels of organisational maturity and development, but each with a proven track record of enriching the lives of those they work with.



Cash Grant Investment

The cash grants provided to awardees had a meaningful impact for their organisations, for example:

- Not So Different was able to validate their service delivery model and acquire Continuing Professional Development accreditation for their Neurodiversity Awareness training courses, growing their industry network of partner organisations that support neurodiverse individuals into employment.
- WALK was able to support 74 people with disabilities into employment and implement a digital platform which has allowed them to sustainably scale their trainings to a larger number of learners.
- Dublin Simon was able to hire a project coordinator, who grew the volunteer network from 0 to 14, enabling them to reach 528 individuals through their Employability Pathways project.
- Cork University Foundation's Disability Service was able to grow their team from 1 part-time staff member to 2.6 staff members, maximising the impact of their employability mentoring programme for students with disabilities.

Capacity Building Supports: Rethink Ireland's Support to Scale and Impact

Our investment focuses on preparing our awardees to grow and develop their programmes so that they can maximise their social impact. Through a series of capacity-building supports provided by consultants and our Accelerator Programme, we strengthen the organisational capacity of our awardees in a number of strategic areas.

Working 1-to-1 with expert consultants, awardees are supported to develop their capacity in key strategic areas for their projects, including creating a Theory of Change, Strategic Plan, Communications Strategy and Impact Management framework designed for their individual contexts.

Through the Accelerator Programme, awardees take part in workshops designed to build their capacity in key areas that will support them to achieve their goals, including Impact Management, Pitching & Storytelling, Online Service Delivery, Strategic Planning, Scaling and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion.

The Ability to Work Fund awardees also received additional individualised strategy support and mentorship from expert strategic consultant in order to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic, as they moved their services online to continue to deliver impact for their participants during periods of lockdowns and uncertainty.



"It was good to think about how to explain what we do and how that can be used to get further buy-in from other organisations. Mostly we do what we do without thinking; here we were directly challenged to think about it and communicate it."

- ABILITY TO WORK FUND AWARDEE

THE ABILITY TO WORK FUND MEDIA & EVENTS

AUG 2020

The Ability to Work Fund Awards Announcement was featured on [RTÉ News](#), [RTÉ Radio One](#), [The Irish Times 'Images of the Day'](#) and the Irish Examiner, reaching **more than 2.1 million people**.



DEC 2021

To mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities, WALK participant Gavin Kinnear was featured in The Irish Examiner celebrating his recent employment success.

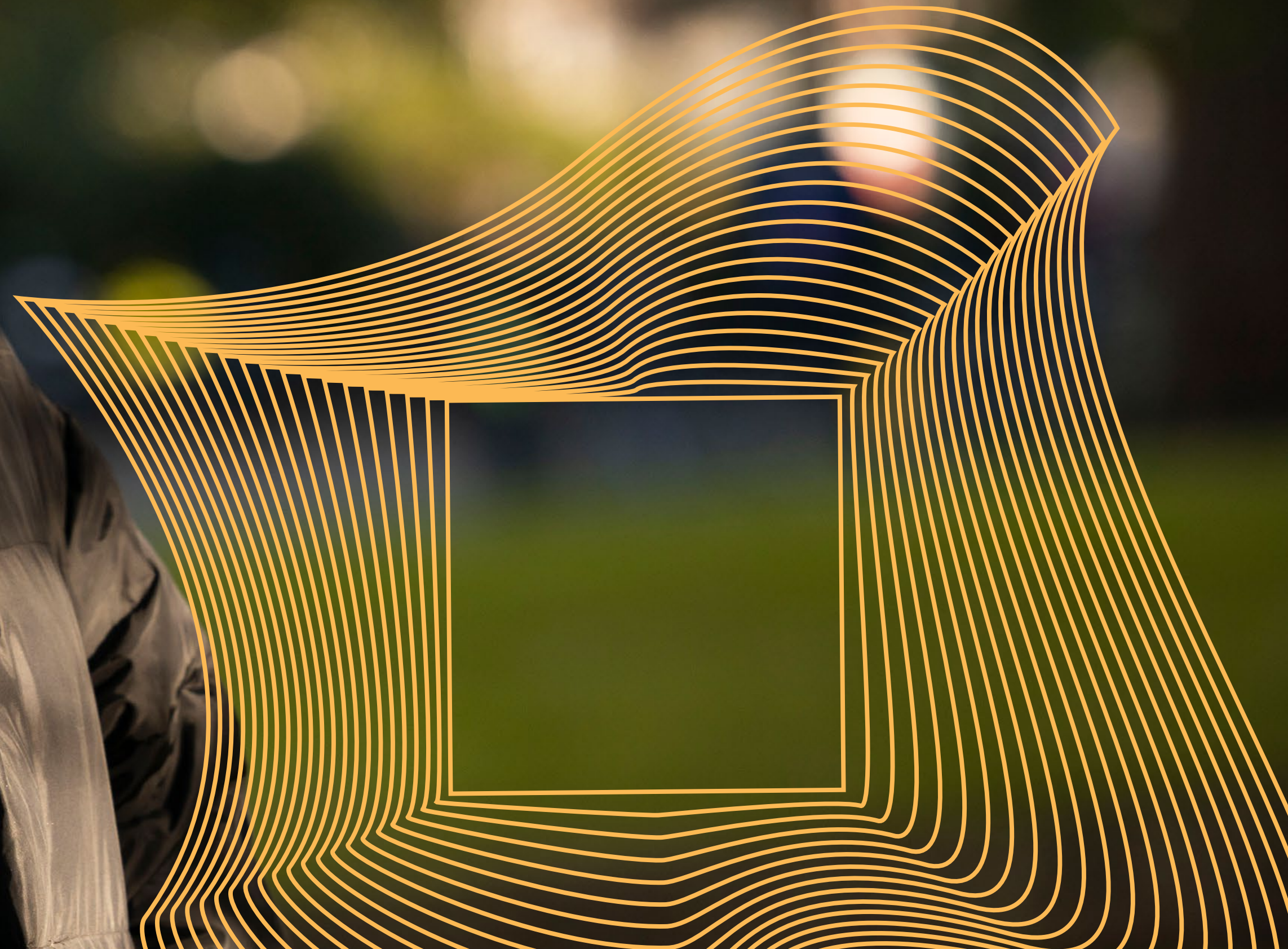


NOV 2022

The impact of the Fund and its awardees were recognised at an intimate lunch event in Dáil Éireann, hosted by Senator Erin McGreehan.



FUND IMPACT



Meet the Dublin Simon Community 'Employability Pathways' Project

FUNDING AMOUNT: €215,500

Project overview

Dublin Simon Community Employability Pathways Project is an innovative employability model which caters for the most vulnerable individuals in society, namely people experiencing homelessness who are also living with a disability.

Aim of investment

The main purpose of this funding was to give personalised employment support to individuals with a disability who are also experiencing homelessness. The programme improves job-readiness and develops skills through literacy, numeracy and IT classes; volunteering placements within Dublin Simon Community; a Community Employment Engagement scheme for people experiencing homelessness; training opportunities; and other meaningful activities.

Scaling impact

A dedicated staff member was recruited to coordinate the design, piloting and ongoing delivery of the Employability Pathways Project.

The Employability Pathways team received specialist consultant support to develop a Theory of Change, Strategic Plan and Implementation Plan, as well as ongoing mentorship to implement these strategies. They also received individualised leadership training and support to effectively measure impact for the project.

The Fund supported the team to temporarily transition the programme online when they were forced to halt in-person training and experienced loss of staff capacity during the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning they could continue to make a positive impact on the lives of their learners through this challenging period.

Through the support of the Fund, the programme has been able to continuously adapt to meet the changing needs of the individual learners presenting themselves to Dublin Simon Community's services. The team actively 'meets learners where they are', offering a full spectrum of supports, from foundational literacy to formally accredited courses. In 2022, the team developed a new wellbeing programme, reaching 153 people with a person-centred approach, allowing each individual to complete the programme at their own pace.



Impact overview

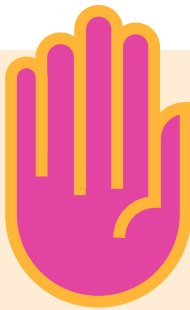
528

learners engaged
on the Employability
Pathways Project

614

sessions delivered
as part of the
Employability
Pathways Project

14



new volunteers
trained and delivering
the Employability
Pathways model

9

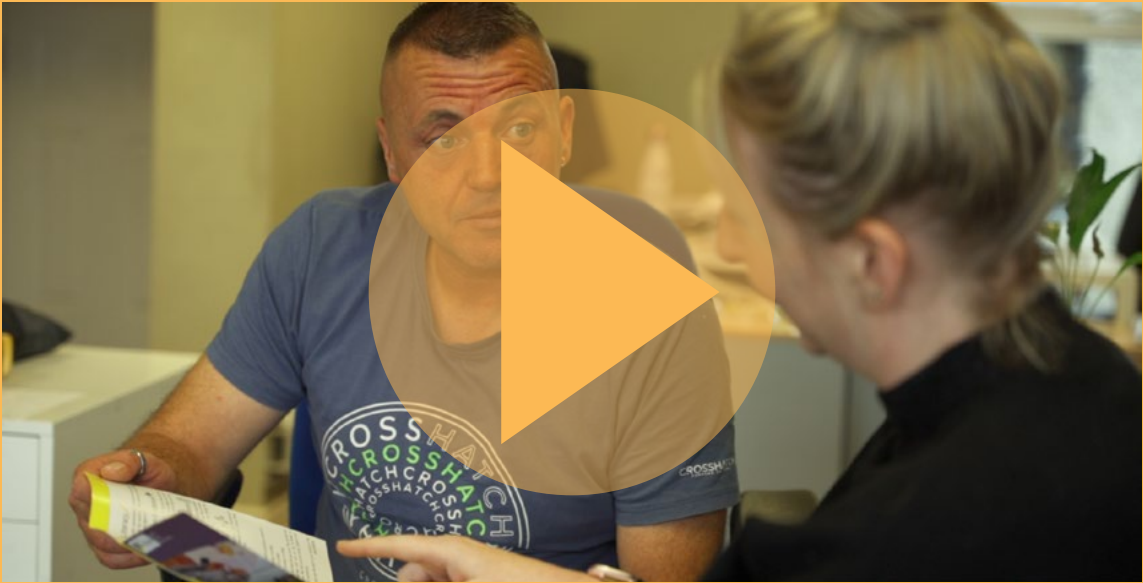


learners achieved
accreditation through
the Employability
Pathways Project



“The programme has helped me to do something productive in my day – learning is being productive. I was feeling a little lost with my days so it has helped. I have also signed up to more courses to build on my employability goals. Overall, being involved in the course has allowed me to be productive, gave me more direction and allowed me to start planning better.”

EMPLOYABILITY PATHWAYS PROJECT PARTICIPANT



Click to watch a video about
Employability Pathways

The team were supported to develop a Theory of Change, Strategic Plan and Evaluation model, supporting the sustainability of the Employability Pathways programme beyond the Ability to Work Fund and enabling it to replicate in other communities.

N.B. Impact overview numbers are based on self-reported data shared by the awardees.

“The impact of the resources provided through Rethink Ireland, not only from a financial standpoint but also the non-financial supports which we were able to utilise, were tremendous. These allowed for the professional development of staff and opportunities to link in with other organisations, sharing best practice and creating opportunities for collaboration and sharing.”

KATIE SHEEHAN, EMPLOYABILITY PATHWAYS PROJECT LEAD



Meet Joseph from the Employability Pathways Project

“For 20 years I had been using drugs and in recent times I’d been living on the street and in hostels, but a few years ago I found myself at a crossroads, and decided I had to do something about my problem.

I went into a treatment centre, and after that I found myself in a recovery house. While there I was introduced to the Simon Community, and the development programme they run. At that point, my confidence was so low, it was basically on the ground, so this was exactly what I needed. I met other people and learned where they had been and where they had gotten to through these support services. So I said I’d give it a go.

They provided me with all these opportunities to help my mind and my body. Learning about new social settings and new opportunities, it was like a snowball effect in the opposite way to where my life had been before.

I built my self-worth and I built my self-belief, and I got to the point where I applied for college. I’ve done a year in the Liberties College, which was tough since I left school at 15, but I wanted more for myself so I gave it all I had – 100% attendance. And now I’m starting at Trinity College, which is surreal, but I’ve learned to know that I belong and that I have the worth to be where I am. I know I deserve as much of a chance as anyone else. I have a five year plan now, it’s unreal that I’m thinking that way, I have an ambition to want more for myself.”

Meet WALK ‘Creating Employment PATHways Through Technology’ Project

FUNDING AMOUNT: €290,500

Project overview

WALK and its subsidiary, Walkinstown Green Social Enterprises (WGSE), provides education, training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, autism and other barriers to employment through the operation of the Green Kitchen Café and the Green Garden. Through these programmes, WGSE provides a bridge to mainstream employment and has supported people into work with 51 different employers including the Houses of the Oireachtas, Compass at Google, Facebook, Accenture, Tallaght University Hospital and Costa Coffee.

Aim of investment

The Creating Employment PATHways Through Technology project (CEPTT) has upgraded WALK’s technology platform. They have also used the funding to recruit additional members to their team. This has allowed them to support more people and provide a more cost-effective and tailored service. The technology platform provides job coaches the tools and resources needed to create vocational profiles for their clients.

Scaling impact

- Through the Fund, WALK were able to assign a dedicated resource to coordinate the CEPTT project and to drive the adoption of new technology for employability training for their participants, as well as regularly engage professional job coaches to work with participants.
- WALK faced challenges in offering work placements during Covid-19 so they pivoted and started online training opportunities for their participants, supported by Rethink Ireland’s capacity building supports.
- The team was supported by expert business consultants to create a Theory of Change, a Strategic Plan and to develop a model of good practice for the delivery of all WALK’s supported employment services, enabling the services to scale.
- WALK also received specialist support to design and implement an impact measurement framework for their project.
- The team was supported by a specialist communications agency to improve external communications through print and website content support, allowing WALK to reach more potential participants and partner employers through the organisation’s digital channels.



Impact overview

148

participants engaged in
WALK’s CEPTT project.

74

people with disabilities
were supported into
paid employment

45

people with disabilities
were supported into
work experience with
a view to gaining paid
employment

42

employer partners were
engaged to support
WALK participants to
progress along pathways
to employment

132

people were supported
by technology
to participate in
employment
skills training

92

participants completed
employment-focused
training programmes



Click to [watch a video](#) about WALK

“Our partnership with Rethink Ireland allows us to deliver on both the pre-training and on-site job support, enabling us to provide the training and job coaching expertise to collaborate directly with more participants and employers. Without the partnership with Rethink Ireland, we would not be able to offer such a bespoke, quality-driven and personalised programme.”

SHERYL MCCANN, WALK PROJECT LEAD



Meet Andy from the WALK CEPTT Project

“I’m really happy where I am, I’ve been in WALK since 2020. When I came in first I was nervous, but once I saw everything they do, and heard all the stories from people, I felt like ‘I’m staying with WALK’. When you’re here, you get extra help, you get extra support. They really guide you through life. The training they give you, you think about your life goals.

Everyone has been really nice. They’ve introduced me to work places, like the Tallaght Hospital placement, which I loved. I’ve gotten work experience in lots of places through WALK, getting the employment skills that I need. It’s hard to find a job you can just go into, you have to have experience, and that’s what I’ve gotten, you get that training and support. And now I’m in Gifts.ie, it’s warehouse work and I’m really enjoying that too.

I need to live my life independently, and I believe WALK will help me do that. My biggest dream is to become a successful actor. For me I want to see positivity for my future.”

Meet the Cork University Foundation ‘Disability Support Service Mentoring’ Programme

FUNDING AMOUNT: €290,500

Project overview

This project matches students with disabilities with professional mentors for an academic year and provides students with the opportunity to develop their employability skills through regular meetings with their mentor in the workplace. The programme supports students to increase their ability to secure employment through 1-to-1 mentoring and access to employability experiences in employer organisations, and engages employers to provide opportunities for students with a disability. Through this engagement, it encourages employers to make meaningful changes to their recruitment and selection practices to become more inclusive employers.

Aim of investment

The Ability to Work Fund investment allowed the team to grow from one part-time team member to 2.6 full-time employees over the course of the 3 years. This allowed the programme to increase mentorship and employer partnerships, enabling more students with disabilities to be successful in progressing to summer internship and graduate roles.

Scaling impact

- Team grew from one part-time employee to 2.6 employees over the course of the fund.
- 19 corporate partners participated in the programme, including Apple, Pfizer and PepsiCo.
- The Disability Service Mentoring Programme team received specialist consultant support to develop a Theory of Change, Strategic Plan, Communications Strategy, Impact Management Framework, as well as transition the programme online during Covid-19 lockdowns.
- The project developed from a mentoring programme to a more powerful programme for students and employers, ultimately including an employers forum, mentoring and a summer placement programme.
- Through the Fund, the Disability Service Mentoring Programme team was supported to develop a Growth Plan for their service, which included a redesign of the offering to sustainably deliver more impact for students.

- The funding allowed for increased contact with employer partners which in turn led to increased opportunities for students. As a result, the Summer Internship programme grew from 15 internships in 2021 to 40 internships in 2023. The team have also set up a new Disability Service Graduate Hire Programme, which supports students to secure full-time graduate roles.
- The team were supported to develop a ‘HR Toolkit’ and associated training for partner employers to support them to learn more about disability and how they can become more inclusive employers.



Impact overview

337

mentoring partnerships
were facilitated
between students and
corporate mentors.

200+

sessions were delivered to students and
over 250 sessions were delivered
to mentors by the Disability Service
Mentoring Programme team over the
course of the fund.



2000+

hours of mentoring
were delivered to
students.

86

participating
students were
supported into
paid internships.



19

corporate partners
participated in
the programme,
including Apple,
Pfizer and PepsiCo.



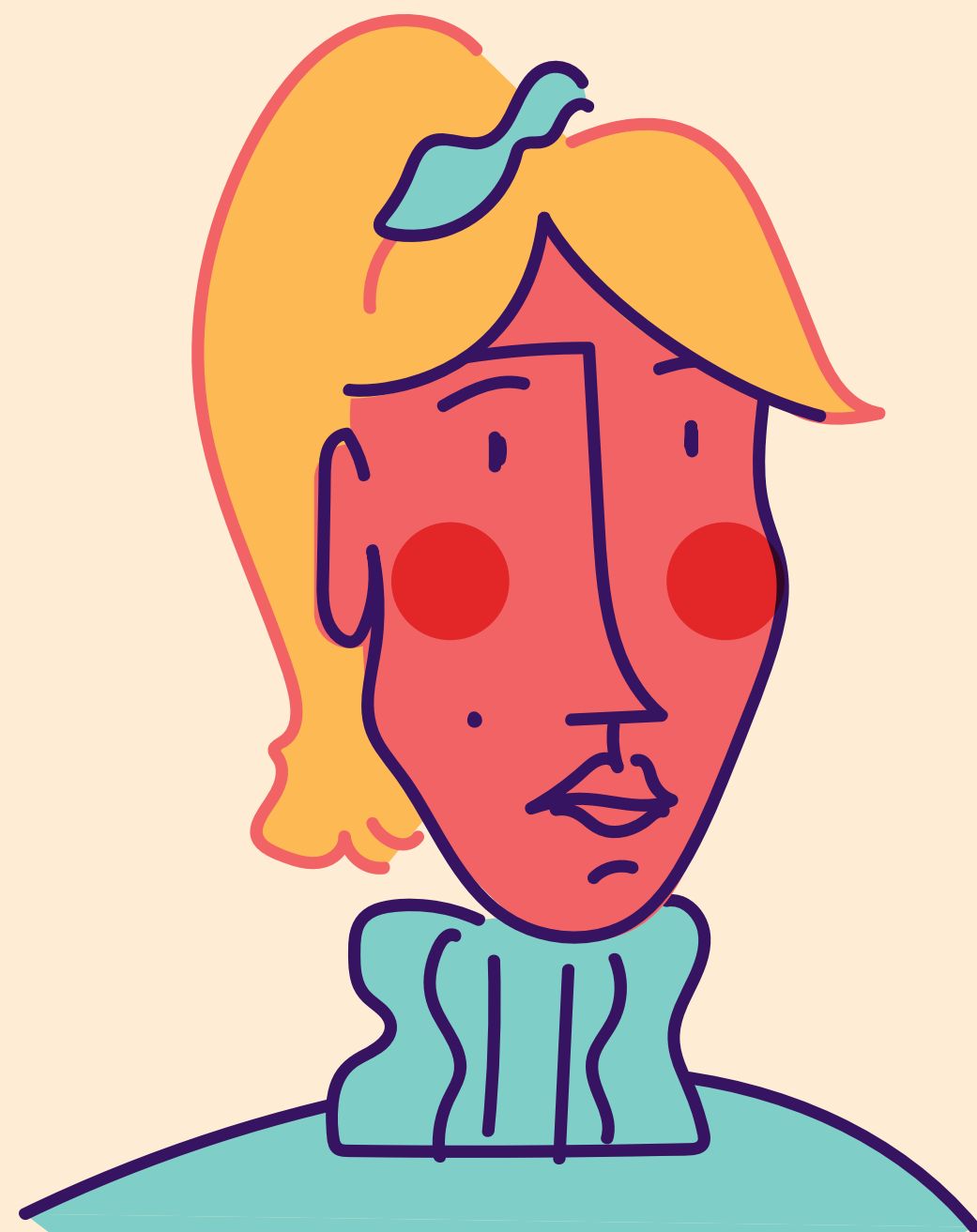
Participating students reported **increased confidence** in their ability to
transition from 3rd level education to employment, in disclosing their
disability to their employer, and their ability to integrate in the workplace.



Click to watch a video about *Disability
Support Service Programme*

*“It was great to help somebody in their career
and to bring some of the experience that I have
managing people down through the years and
helping them with career development. Also
the benefit to yourself and what you learn
yourself is tremendous.”*

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICE PROGRAMME MENTOR



Meet Rebecca from the UCC Disability Support Service Mentoring Programme

“For a long time I didn’t realise I was dyslexic. I didn’t have the confidence or courage to go out into the world and get a job in a corporate company.

If someone looked at me they’d say, ‘She’s fine, she can communicate with people.’ But the reality is that on the inside, I’m second guessing what I’m saying. People don’t realise there are hidden disabilities.

I was going into the final year of my degree studying Languages & Global Software, and I realised I didn’t actually know how to write a CV properly, or how to do an interview. When I got an email from the Disability Support Service, I said to myself I’m going to fill out the form and see how it goes.

I’ve had two mentors from the programme, one for the final year of my undergrad and one for my year doing my higher level diploma. The mentoring programme opened doors for me – it gave me the confidence to apply for an internship this year, and thankfully I got it! Now I know I can go and apply for other jobs and develop the next steps of my career.”

Meet the Not So Different 'Creative Ability Hub'

FUNDING AMOUNT: €290,500

Project overview

Not So Different (NSD) brings together employers, educators, families, community organisations and service providers in a holistic, person-centred programme to support neurodiverse individuals into employment. NSD's Creative Ability Hub is a collaboration between Not So Different, Third Level Institutions, Local Authorities and the Community. Students are supported to develop and showcase their individual talents through community-based projects whilst availing of neurodiversity employment supports in their innovative digital hub in Blanchardstown, Dublin. There, NSD provides employability skills training and supports talented creative individuals to become work-ready and build connections with employers.

Aim of investment

The Ability to Work Fund supported Not So Different in their work with neurodiverse students to develop their creative skills in a supported environment. A key aspect of the Creative Ability Hub is the showcasing of student work, allowing students' families, their educators and their prospective employers to learn more about neurodiversity and giving students an opportunity to present their work to prospective employers.

Through the Fund, Not So Different were also able to increase their employer network and support their capacity to work with neurodiverse employees, through the development of a CPD accredited training offering. They were also supported to create a strategic business plan for the organisation, ensuring its sustainability beyond the lifetime of the Ability to Work Fund.



Scaling impact

- Through the Ability to Work Fund, Not So Different received specialist consultant support to create a Business Plan, a Strategic Plan, and an Impact Management Framework. They also received ongoing support from expert consultants to effectively implement these into their operations.
- Not So Different were supported to develop an online learning portal for their learners, which allowed them to continue the Creative Ability Hub throughout Covid-19.
- The Not So Different team received expert support to develop and gain CPD accreditation for their e-learning module for employer partners, helping them to develop their service offering and educate more people about neurodiversity in the workplace.
- The team were supported to develop a Theory of Change, Strategic Plan, and Evaluation model as part of the Fund Accelerator Programme, supporting the sustainability of the Creative Ability Hub beyond the Ability to Work Fund and enabling it to remain a sustainable service into the future for people who are neurodiverse.
- Not So Different were supported through the fund to work with media specialists to develop their communications strategy and create new communications assets that allow them to effectively communicate their impact to different stakeholders.

Impact overview

34

students were supported through the Not So Different Creative Ability Hub.

5

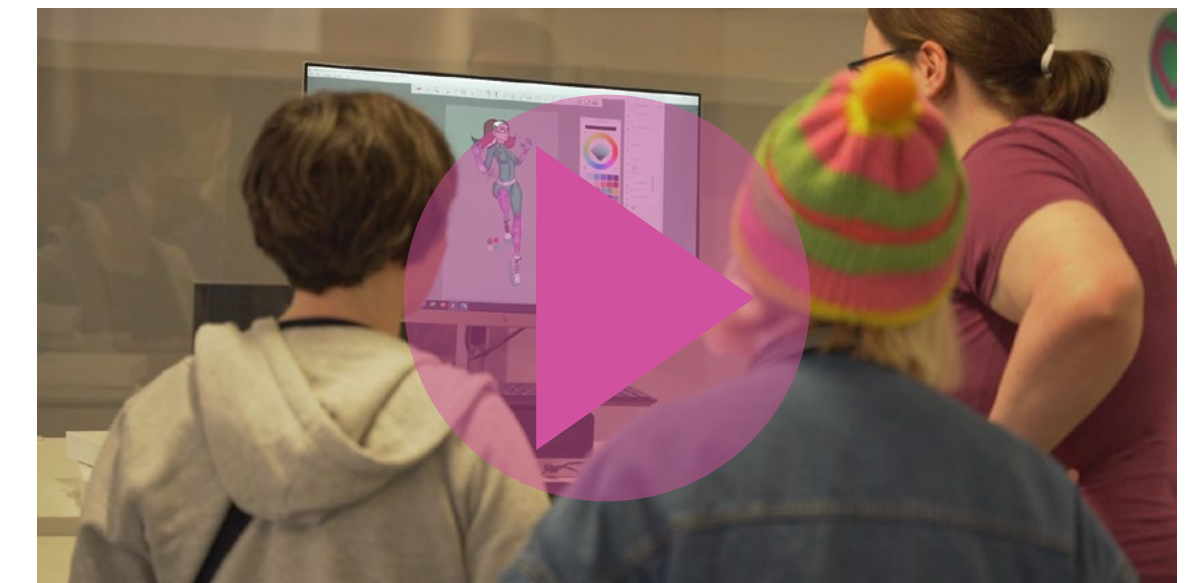
employers were engaged with the Creative Ability Hub.

2

new employees were hired to coordinate the Creative Ability Hub.

Not So Different achieved CPD accreditation for their training on inclusivity and neurodiversity in the workplace, which will allow them to scale their corporate training programme.

Through the implementation of their strategic plan, Not So Different have developed a self-referral pathway to cater for the needs of individuals who are not yet engaged with their services, and developing an industry mentor panel to increase the capacity of employers to attract and retain a more diverse workforce.



Click to [watch a video](#) about *Not So Different*

“Not So Different opens the door to people who might not normally have a voice or want to have their voice expressed in a different way. And it allows all of that innovation and creativity to come forward into the community, into businesses and into our lives”

MEADBH COLEMAN,
INNOVATION CONSULTANT &
NOT SO DIFFERENT MENTOR



Meet Ross from the Not So Different Creative Ability Hub

“I realised I had a creative interest when I was 16; I was writing plays and stories and poetry. Creative writing gives me a sort of power to create my own world when the real world is too hard sometimes.

I realised I have several different talents, and Not So Different has helped me to explore them. They’ve given me a lot of help here and a lot of support so that I can learn to write better and get my work out there.

The career I’m building is around making greeting cards, and I have an idea of making framed poems and quotes. It feels good when I’ve written something that someone else really likes, and that I’m the one who wrote it. It’s good I’m so busy at the moment, working on other creative side projects as well, but the greeting card business and the poems are my main career goal.

With Not So Different, I feel like I’m part of such a talented group. I don’t think I’d really have the talents without autism. It makes me unique and it’s part of my charm. People can enjoy and be inspired by the work that I make, and I know that I can be proud of what I’ve done.”

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, four non-profits have supported over 1,000 people with disabilities to progress towards employment under Rethink Ireland's Ability to Work Fund over the past three years. The Fund allowed for an increase in service levels, expanding reach to open up employment opportunities for people with disabilities, nurturing their talent and matching them with progressive companies and organisations. This is in direct response to the employment and equality needs of people with disabilities where participants are enabled to access the workplace via the programmes supported through this Fund.

All four projects achieved significant growth over the course of the Ability to Work Fund. In the case of UCC's Disability Service, funding allowed them to grow their team from one part-time employee to an active team of three. For WALK, support meant they could introduce new technology to scale their employment training programmes. The Ability to Work Fund has made a significant impact on all four of its awardee organisations, and by extension, the people that they support across Ireland.

"The investment by State Street is a testament to their approach to support people in Ireland, and globally, on the pathways to education and employment. By supporting people with disabilities through this Fund, we have collectively impacted over 1000 people. This is real leadership around social investments. We look forward to extending our partnership with State Street and continuing to make a difference to communities across Ireland."

DEIRDRE MORTELL,
CEO, Rethink Ireland



