

Name of Programme: Dormant Accounts Fund - Training and Mentoring for Social Enterprises (Pilot)

Name of funding Department: Department of Rural and Community Development

Organisation: Offaly Integrated Local Development Company Limited by Guarantee t/a Offaly Local Development Company (OLDC).

The Project:

OLDC was granted this funding to deliver training and mentoring supports to social enterprises (SEs) across the county. SEs were divided by two stages of enterprise development;

- 1) Training was provided to existing SEs with many, varied structures and a combination of paid staff, labour scheme participants and volunteers.
- 2) Intensive mentoring was provided to three new SEs at ideation stage to bring them to a more solid operational footing.

A part-time mentor dedicated to the project would also facilitate the establishment of a Social Enterprise Network to increase collaborative training and greater dissemination of relevant information.

Support was originally planned for in-person delivery. Training was to take place in two locations in Offaly, involving co-ordinating expertise that would support workers and/or voluntary board directors on operational issues.

Ways in which the project responded to COVID-19 related restrictions and continued to operate in an evolving environment in 2020:

In-person mentoring, training and networking took place between January and March 2020. This built project momentum and allowed for good working relationships to be forged for what lay ahead.

Restrictions on movements and gatherings brought about a reassessment of the project format. Meanwhile, the pandemic had an immediate and negative impact on participating SEs that suddenly faced business closure, staffing issues, loss of income streams and a lack of suitable business continuity plans. OLDC immediately provided SEs with mentor support over the phone and quickly adapted the project to an online format. ICT platforms that could be easily navigated by users were researched and one was selected (Zoom).

Work was undertaken with trainers to transform planned sessions for online delivery. An introductory training session was held to inform participants on remote training (e.g. use of relevant online platform and etiquette). This was followed by a series of 20 online training sessions between April and November.

Ideation-stage SEs continued to receive intensive mentoring, also via online meetings. (A limited number of small in-person meetings while restrictions were briefly lifted.)

Challenges to online learning were identified. Broadband connectivity was sometimes insufficiently reliable for quality participation. Some participants lacked ICT skills and confidence, however their participation was facilitated and supported by the project team where possible.

For participants, the time commitment required of them to attend training or participate in mentoring sessions was reduced now that they did not have to travel. The project attributes higher-than anticipated engagement in some sessions to this factor.

Some additional costs incurred and additional training resources required at the outset to plan and prepare the online training series. These were however outweighed by savings in costs associated with delivering the same training in-person in two different locations. Economies made in training costs were re-assigned to the mentoring budget, enabling a fourth ideation-stage SE to benefit from the project.

Impact of funding: spotlight on Offaly Healthy Homes

The aging population of west and south Offaly is 3.5% higher than the national average. 13 community leaders from across this area were facilitated by a Social Enterprise mentor to identify needs and generate ideas for community-based supports that would enable older people to remain living independently in their homes. A key gap in existing services identified was the delivery of hot, nutritious meals to older people in their own homes at a sufficient scale to meet demand.

Intensive mentor support and additional external expertise facilitated a process of market and service model research, identification of partner agencies, costing and capacity-building e.g. in compliance, HR and financial management. This resulted in the generation of a business plan for a *meals to the door* service.

As the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented demand for food delivery services, the new initiative, bolstered by mentor support, brought a social enterprise approach to a collaboration with an existing, small-scale meals on wheels service. This resulted in a capacity increase from the delivery of 78 to 550 dinners weekly, along with other essential services for cocooning older people.

Dormant Accounts Funding facilitated the establishment of Offaly Healthy Homes and the securing of funding for salaried staff which will ensure greater service continuity and business sustainability than a solely volunteer-operated service. This in turn provides a lifeline to a larger number of older people who wish to continue living independently in their own homes and communities.

Figures/Statistics (if applicable) demonstrating project success and/or impact on participants/clients:

Key achievements	
26 training sessions delivered 6 in person 20 online	Total attendance across the training series was 200 participants ¹ .
6 networking sessions facilitated 18 social enterprises participated in the network Network meetings continue every 6 weeks	The network is working towards achieving common goals collaboratively, e.g. group buying of overheads such as electricity, insurance and accountancy fees.

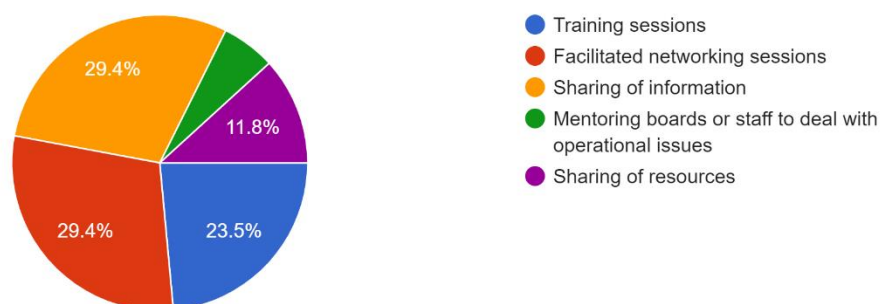
¹ Not unique individuals, some participants engaged in more than one training session.

The mentor continually disseminated information relevant to Social Enterprise staff and boards	Examples of updates include funding sources, programme supports and training opportunities.
Ongoing mentor support to all participating SEs via phone, online or in-person meetings (where feasible)	Finding solutions to operational issues e.g. COVID-19 regulation implementation; HR issues; Corporate Governance; funding applications; policy and procedure development.

Short-term outputs for ideation-stage social enterprises	
Offaly Healthy Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business plan developed for meals on wheels service. • Successfully secured salary funding
Paddle Together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business plan developed for an outdoor kayaking adventure business
Ballycumber Planning Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed a full community consultation • Published a 5-year 'Village Plan'. All key actions are currently being implemented and monitored
Moneygall Development Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Plan generated which identified three enterprise strands; community gym, 'Digital Hub' and community shop. • Community gym ready to begin operations in 2021

Which of the following has been most beneficial?

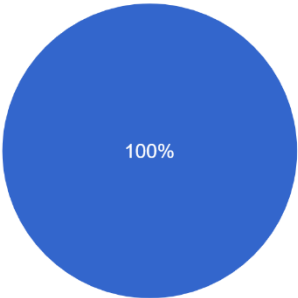
17 responses



Quote(s) from service user/s and/or project worker, if available:

Would you like to see these supports continuing?

17 responses



- Yes
- No