

# OUT *on your* OWN

## Talking POINT

Innovative firms get a helping hand



Elaine O'Regan

A new scheme launched this month by InterTradeIreland aims to assist innovative companies in reaching their full potential. Companies from across Ireland and Northern Ireland will learn how to transform their approach to innovation, with 12 firms that meet the challenge benefiting from up to €23,000-worth of expert coaching and mentoring.

The Innovation Challenge Programme, which was piloted last year, helps businesses to transform their company's prospects in just nine months by learning and applying the most effective methods of generating, marketing and launching new products and services.

From the companies attending briefing events around the country, 30 will be selected to take part in workshops. Of those, 12 will go on to receive specialist in-company mentoring to guide them through the delivery of their business growth plan.

"The SME sector represents 98 per cent of all enterprises in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and increasing their contribution to innovation-led growth and job creation is essential in creating an innovation-driven economy that maintains a competitive advantage," said Aidan Gough, director of strategy at InterTradeIreland.

According to Gough, research undertaken by InterTradeIreland's business monitor survey found that more than 60 per cent of companies surveyed did not have a business plan in place. "This, coupled with the identified deficit in management practice in manufacturing companies, points to a lack of strategic planning around how innovation can contribute to business growth," said Gough.

"The Challenge Programme has been developed with these key issues in mind, to help SMEs identify new innovation opportunities and bring them to fruition efficiently and effectively.

"It is designed to target those companies that have ambitions for innovation and growth, but lack the necessary capabilities to make a long-term commitment to innovation. It is a unique opportunity, and we hope that firms from across Ireland will come forward to take up the challenge."

For more information, log on to [intertradeireland.com/challenge](http://intertradeireland.com/challenge), or follow on Twitter at #ITChallenge

# Social enterprises on an irresistible rise

Social enterprise is growing in Ireland as workers look for community, as well as financial, support, writes Elaine O'Regan

Community spirit is taking centre stage as social enterprises benefit from the changing attitudes to entrepreneurship brought on by the recession. This is according to John Murphy, chief executive of Speedpak, a community-based enterprise in north Dublin.

"As someone involved with people within the sector, I am noticing that younger people coming out of college may have a different view of where they want to go because of what has happened in recent years," said Murphy.

"In terms of the standards many companies have been operating to, they may not want to go down a particular route where they think they see damaged reputations. Social enterprise offers a way to get involved in business that has a double bottom line, not only commercially, but also in terms of social impact."

Murphy said that, while Ireland's social enterprise sector accounted for just 3 per cent of GDP, the average in other European countries was double that, at 6 per cent. "In some countries like Italy, where social enterprises have been established for many decades, they are up to 11 per cent as a contributor to overall GDP," he said.

"Particularly in light of the economic climate, social enterprises tend to have more people working in them compared to regular SMEs because they are about providing services to meet a social need or, as in our case, running a commercial operation where the purpose is to give people job opportunities."

Speedpak has just been announced as one of the first round of successful graduates of the Arthur Guinness Fund programme for social enterprises. On Thursday, the company will launch a new workplace training model developed on the back of its involvement in the programme,



John Murphy, chief executive of Speedpak: 'The WAM project has been a great success'

CLAIRE MULVANY

through which it received funding of €100,000 and mentoring support over two years.

Speedpak's Workplace Accreditation Model (WAM) has been designed to address the problem of long-term unemployment by addressing a key barrier to workplace progression for those affected – a lack of formal education.

Murphy is passionate about the programme, which he believes can help to support communities with high unemployment rates by easing the transition into paid employment with a structured, on-the-job approach.

"WAM is about converting workplace learning into an educational qualification. We use what is around the workplace in order to convert what people are doing on a day-to-day basis into a qualification. It is the workplace that offers the learning opportunities from teamwork and health and safety to quality assurance

and conflict management," he said.

Speedpak has trialled WAM at its own premises in Coolock where, to date, Murphy said it had provided employment for more than 70 people, achieving €600,000 in commercial sales.

"The WAM project has been a great success, with ten Fetac modules developed," he said. "Fifty people have taken part in the training, 3,000 tutoring hours have been delivered, 2,500 independent study hours have been undertaken by participants and 17 people have achieved the full Fetac award – equivalent to the Leaving Cert."

Originally a teacher, Murphy joined Speedpak in 2007 from Dublin's Northside Partnership, the organisation that initially established the venture in 1995.

"It was set up with the local community, and with state support at the time, to meet a social need and, specifically, to

give people who were long-term unemployed coming from disadvantaged communities the opportunity to get work experience in a real commercial environment," he said.

As well as its primary business, offering packaging services to manufacturers, promotional and marketing firms, Speedpak also has a sister operation called Shamrock Rosettes operating on the same site in Clonsilla Business & Technology Park.

"We manufacture rosettes, sashes and badges," said Murphy. "We do all the rosettes for the RDS Horseshow, the Tullamore Show, the big agricultural shows, horse shows and events around the country, and communities and confirmations."

The companies have a core staff of 13, with contract numbers averaging 50 on an ongoing basis.

"These people would be on different labour market programmes, such as the Commu-

nity Employment Scheme, which is now under the Department of Social Protection," said Murphy.

"We still work closely with the Northside Partnership. They have a role in helping people get back to work and 70 per cent of our referrals would come directly from their local employment service. They have what they call mediators out in the local commercial field, like guidance counsellors who meet with unemployed people and would know about what we do here in Speedpak.

"If a job opportunity comes up, they would suggest a person to apply for it. We recruit, in some respects, like any other employer. We interview people and we go through a process of selection.

"What makes us different is that we don't necessarily employ the person who is best for commercial activity. We employ on the basis of giving a person an opportunity."

## Other graduates

Speedpak was among the first group of ten Arthur Guinness Fund awardees to graduate from the programme this month. The ventures were the first to receive financial and business support from the fund in 2010 following its establishment as part of Guinness's 250th anniversary celebrations.

Since then, two further groups of ten companies have participated in the annual programme. The first will graduate next year and the second in 2014. Diageo Ireland's country director, David Smith, said the aim of the fund was to support social entrepreneurs in Ireland who were "in the business of changing communities for the better".

"The fund was designed as a springboard to help these social entrepreneurs to take their initiatives to the next level and to deliver transformational social change," said Smith.

"The awardees that have graduated from the programme have surpassed the objectives that they set themselves and their initiatives. These are inspirational, passionate and committed people with a business head, a social heart and great business brands.

"A study undertaken earlier this year has shown that 40,000 people have been positively impacted by the fund since its inception. This year, for every check-in by people to the Arthur's Day Facebook event, a €5 donation will be made to the Arthur Guinness Fund."

In addition to Speedpak, the other social enterprises and entrepreneurs to graduate from the Arthur Guinness Foundation programme this month included the following firms.

### Anam Cara

Founder: Sharon Vard

Anam Cara provides online and face-to-face support services to bereaved parents and families. Since joining the Arthur Guinness Fund, it has:

- built a national executive panel to oversee services;
- established an adult sibling support service with 74 members; and
- introduced professional facilitators for group meetings to facilitate peer support.

### Camara

Founders: Cormac Lynch and John Fitzsimons

Camara uses technology to provide education services to communities in Ireland, Africa and Jamaica. Since 2010, it has taken delivery of more than 2,000 computers at support hubs in Belfast, Cork and Galway.

### Fáilte Isteach

Founder: Mary Nally

Fáilte Isteach is a community project through which older volunteers welcome new migrants through conversational English classes. In the past two years, it has grown from 22 to 54 centres in 20 counties, with 550 volunteers teaching 1,600 students each week.

### GIY Ireland

Founder: Michael Kelly

GIY Ireland is a not-for-profit organisation that brings communities together to grow their

own food successfully. It has grown from 40 to 106 groups since 2009, involving 30,000 in projects and programmes in 2012. There are more than 6,700 registered members of the GIY website in Ireland. The organisation has raised more than €600,000 in the last three years, and employs four full-time staff.

### Kanchi

Founders: Caroline Casey and Nikki Hegarty

Kanchi is a business network that supports organisations which employ people with disabilities. It applied to the Arthur Guinness Fund to support the development of the Ability Network, which has 14 founder members with a combined 50,000 employees. Sixteen events have been held to date with more than 1,500 attendees. Kanchi will launch a new Ability Benchmark in 2013.

### Growing Locally

Founder: Alma Gallagher

Since joining the Arthur Guinness Fund programme, Growing Locally has developed a site just outside Claremorris for horticulture programmes with water, electricity and essential services, including two growing tunnels. The organisation has delivered a year-long horticulture programme to 13 participants from south-west Mayo who sold products to consumers through box schemes and onsite.

### Pietà House

Founder: Joan Freeman

Pietà House provides specialised treatment for people who have suicidal ideation or who participate in self-harm behaviours. During its two-year involvement in the Arthur Guinness Fund, it has:

- opened up two new houses, in Limerick and Ballyfermot;
- developed a marketing and fundraising plan, including the very successful Darkness into Light annual fundraising walk that has grown from one location to 14 in 2012; and
- helped more than 6,000 people since being founded.

### Rediscover Fashion

Founders: Carrie Ann Moran and Sarah Millar

Rediscover Fashion produces re-designed, re-purposed and recycled fashion, accessories and homewares. In the past two years, it has:

- opened a Rediscover Fashion EcoStore in Ballymun in Dublin;
- run five fashion shows reaching 1,400 people; and
- delivered 30 courses and recycled 2.5 tonnes of textile waste.

### SUAS

Founder: Colman Farrell

SUAS supports high quality education in under-resourced communities in Ireland, India and Kenya. The organisation applied to the Arthur Guinness Fund to support the development of a world-class service learning programme and, in 2011, delivered 40,000 hours of voluntary service.

## The LOWdown Tips for start ups

### This week: Jump Start 2012

Last Tuesday at the LINC, the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown's Learning and Innovation Centre, we launched our annual entrepreneurial competition, Jump Start 2012.

Now in its third year, Jump Start 2012 is open to entrepreneurs who would like to base their business in an innovative and supportive environment. The value of the overall award will be €25,000. This will include €5,000 in cash along with the cost of incubation space for 12 months and business start-up packages in areas such as design, media, technology equipment, print and call answering.

The successful company will also have access to:

- a structured approach to the

development of their business through LINC's Create Learn programme;

- mentoring on key aspects of business development;
- industry-specific seminars to support innovation and development;
- access to the academic expertise of the institute;
- a cohort of students for placements and possible recruitment; and
- access to the facilities in the LINC building, including meeting rooms, training rooms and computer labs.

Shortlisted entrants will get the unique opportunity to present their ideas to a very experienced panel, including Bobby Kerr, panellist on RTE television series *Dragons' Den*; AIB regional manager Judith Troy; Oisín Geoghegan, chief executive of Fingal County Enterprise Board;

and George Kiely, regional director of Enterprise Ireland.

We are looking for Ireland's next big tech start-up. Our 2011 winner, Safefood 360, has expanded its business into the US where 75 per cent of its customer base is now located.

The previous year's winners, Innovation Zed, recently won the Biomnis Health Innovation Award and secured €350,000 in funding to invest in its international growth strategy.

Jump Start 2012 is supported by AIB, Fingal County Enterprise Board, Grafton Media, Snap Blanchardstown, Kendlebell, HP, Enterprise Ireland and the LINC.

Spanning more than 2,000 square metres and newly refurbished, the LINC has a board and meeting rooms, computer, entrepreneurship and 'ideas' labs, a research room, onsite catering and free parking.



Assumpta Harvey, manager of LINC, the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown Learning and Innovation Centre

Tenants also get access to support and mentoring through the Create Learn Grow business incubation programme.

Jump Start 2012 applicants must meet set criteria. The business must be technology or knowledge-based. It must either already be exporting or plan to do so. Its business plan must provide for a substantial growth strategy that can strengthen the economic impact of the business within its region.

The applicant must be in business for less than two years.

Application forms can be downloaded from [thelinc.ie/jumpstart](http://thelinc.ie/jumpstart). The closing date is 4pm on Friday, October 19. The shortlist will be released on November 2. The winner will be announced on the evening of the final judging, on November 15.

Assumpta Harvey