

ACORNS

Accelerating the Creation Of
Rural Nascent Start-ups



Providing early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their current aspirations.



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Those who successfully completed the pilot and ACORNS 2 are being offered the opportunity for further support”.

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 Department of
**Agriculture,
Food and the Marine**
An Roinn
**Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**

ACORNS

Early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, are invited to apply for a funded place on the ACORNS programme following the successful completion of the pilot and ACORNS 2.

The intention is to provide up to 56 entrepreneurs with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their current aspirations.

The programme will run from October 2017 until April 2018. Selected participants will be those who, on a competitive basis, best demonstrate their potential to advance their businesses and their commitment to fully engage in the initiative.

If you would like to find out more about the initiative or have any questions about ACORNS, please feel free to contact us at info@acorns.ie or phone the office at 01 8450770.

This innovative programme is funded through the **Rural Innovation and Development Fund** by the **Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)**. Thanks to this funding, there will be no charge for those selected to participate in ACORNS and their accommodation costs associated with the residential elements of the initiative will be covered.

WHO QUALIFIES FOR THE PROGRAMME?

ACORNS is designed for nascent female rural entrepreneurs. To qualify for consideration, a woman (i) must have recently set up a new business which she owns or part owns, and which has generated sales no earlier than 29th June 2015 or (ii) must be at an advanced stage of planning a new venture and have a clear idea of what she wants to achieve. If she is not already trading, activities such as organising the start-up team, looking for equipment/facilities, saving money for the start-up, or writing a business plan would all be considered as active commitments to starting a business.

She must also be living in a rural area. These are all areas of the country outside the administrative city boundaries of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

There is no restriction on the sector in which the new business is focused. Favourable consideration will be given to those who expect to grow their business and to employ others over the next three years.

If selected, applicants must be available to attend the first residential session on 23th October/24th October 2017 in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.

HOW TO APPLY

Please register your interest on the website www.acorns.ie in the first instance and you will be sent an application form by email. Complete the application on your system and return it to us by email attachment.

Application forms can also be sent and received by post. Please contact us on 01 845 0770, if you would like a form posted to you or if you have any difficulties in registering online. **Closing date for receipt of completed applications is the 22nd September 2017. No applications received after this date can be considered.**

SELECTION PROCESS

As was the case previously, it is expected that there will be many more applicants than there are places available. Accordingly, it will be a competitive selection process. The ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs will be central to the selection of successful candidates. They will be seeking those who are prepared to fully engage with the programme; demonstrate a determination to advance their fledging businesses; are prepared to work hard in pursuit of their entrepreneurial goals; and expect to become employers.

There are up to 56 places available for suitable candidates. The ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs will meet in early October to assess the applications received. Successful candidates will be notified in the following days.

WHAT TIME COMMITMENT IS INVOLVED?

The cycle will start with a residential Developmental Forum, which will get underway in Mullingar on the **23rd October / 24th October 2017**. The theme of this Forum is *Establishing Good Foundations*. At this event, the participants will meet each other, their ACORNS Lead Entrepreneur and their round table group for the first time. An overnight stay is incorporated into the event.

Participants will subsequently meet with their ACORNS Lead Entrepreneur and their group of eight peers in separate round tables on four occasions between November and March. These sessions will last for about three hours and will explore the themes of Strategy, Marketing/Sales, Finance, and Implementation. The location of these sessions will be close to the assigned ACORNS Lead. Some travel may be involved on the part of the participants.

A second residential Development Forum will be held on **16h April / 17th April 2018**. The theme of this Forum will be *SMART Planning - The Roadmap Ahead*.

Selected candidates are expected to attend all events.

WHAT'S THE APPROACH?

Based on a belief that entrepreneurs learn best from each other, the ACORNS initiative is focused on interactive round table sessions that are facilitated, not by consultants, academics or professional trainers, but by female entrepreneurs who have started and successfully grown businesses in rural Ireland.

Those who will facilitate the interactive round table meetings and the residential developmental sessions, have the practical knowledge that comes from first-hand experience of owning and managing a successful business in rural Ireland. They believe in the philosophy of *entrepreneurs supporting entrepreneurs* and are giving their time to assist others on a voluntary basis. They are known as ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs.

Working with a group of up to eight participants each, the Lead Entrepreneurs will facilitate round table meetings, addressing enterprise challenges and supporting participants to consider how best to start, develop and position their businesses for sustainability and growth.

LEAD ENTREPRENEURS

The voluntary Lead Entrepreneurs are the backbone of the ACORNS programme. They are not, and cannot be, experts in every area of business but they have faced the challenges of starting and growing a business. All are past participants of the Going for Growth programme and have first-hand experience of the round table peer learning approach and of its benefits. All seven are entrepreneurs with businesses based in rural Ireland.



ALISON RITCHIE - Polar Ice, Laois

Alison Ritchie is the Managing Director of Polar Ice Ltd., Ireland's leading manufacturer of dry ice products since 1996. Polar Ice is located in Portarlington, Co Laois. As a serial entrepreneur, Alison established her second business Polar IceTech Ireland Ltd. in 2005, growing the business to become the market leader in Cryogenic Cleaning. She successfully sold the business last year.

Alison has a Business Degree from DCU. She subsequently trained and qualified as a Financial Accountant (CPA) and a certified Tax Advisor. Alison was awarded the Ulster Bank Business Achievers Award for Women Led Business in Leinster 2015. In the same year, Alison was presented with a special award from Offaly LEO in recognition of her contribution to Female Entrepreneurship. Most recently Alison was awarded the Women Mean Business Entrepreneur of the Year 2016 and named 'Accountant of the Year' 2017

www.polarice.ie



ANNE CUSACK - Critical Healthcare, Westmeath

Anne Cusack is co-founder of Critical Healthcare which was set up over 16 years ago. Having established themselves as the leading supplier to the emergency services (Ambulance, Fire and Irish Coast Guard) in Ireland, the company has over the last 2 years targeted export markets. Critical Healthcare is now well established in the UK as well as the German healthcare market with customers including NHS Ambulance Trusts. Market disruption/innovation is at the core of Critical Healthcare and to date their value proposition has been centred around 2 channels: Medlogistix and Medilinen. Medlogistix is a SaaS offering which has enabled customers to track, and forecast procurement spend without compromising on product choice. The software has been researched and developed in-house and phase 2 is currently being rolled out amongst current customers. Medilinen is a range of disposable linen, which includes MediQuilt, a patented solution for ambulance use protecting patients from infection and cross contamination. The company employs 20 people in Westmeath. Critical Healthcare has distribution agencies in Ireland, France, the Netherlands and Romania.

www.criticalhealthcare.com



ANNE REILLY - PaycheckPlus, Louth

Anne founded Paycheck Plus, Ireland's leading payroll outsource company in 2005 and has successfully grown the business into a globally recognised payroll provider, winning two global awards in 2017. Anne's wealth and knowledge in payroll services and corporate governance stems back to her days lecturing with the Irish Payroll Association (IPASS) and receiving a Diploma in Company Direction from the Institute of Directors (IoD) in 2013. Anne speaks at prestigious events both locally and internationally, where she relishes the opportunity to share her passion for payroll, corporate governance and specialist insight to payroll professionals. Anne sits on a number of Boards and previously worked in the educational sector and with Blue Chip companies such as Unilever and Heinz. Anne's numerous qualifications and depth of experience gives her invaluable insight into business development, leadership and compliance.

www.paycheckplus.ie



"ACORNS has given me the confidence and positivity to achieve things I didn't know were possible. The support from the network of women, along with our Lead Entrepreneur, was a massive contributing factor".

CIARA SHINE, SHINES SEAFOOD



CAROLINE MCENERY - The HR Suite, Kerry

Caroline McEnergy set up The HR Suite in response to the demand for an outsourced expert HR department being necessary and accessible for all companies who employ people. The HR Suite offers specialist tailored and effective human resources and business solutions to clients throughout Ireland. Based in Tralee, Co. Kerry, with a nationwide client base, The HR Suite also has an office in Dublin. Demand for the services of The HR Suite has been growing steadily over the last seven years. The company now has over 500 clients throughout Ireland and employs eight full time staff including a specialised recruitment consultant. Caroline is a member of the Low Pay Commission and is also an adjudicator in the new Work Place Commission. She has completed a Masters in Human Resources in the University of Limerick and is a trained mediator. Caroline is also the author of "The Art of Asking the Right Questions" a tool kit for people managers to ensure they maximise the talent of their people.

www.thehrsuiteonline.com



DEIRDRE MCGLONE - Harvey's Point, Donegal

Known as the "Happy Hotelier", Deirdre McGlone is the proud owner / manager of the multi-award winning Harvey's Point in Donegal. Her career spans almost thirty years. Opening with 20 bedrooms, a restaurant and a small team, the hotel has seen phenomenal growth over the years. Today, the hotel boasts 64 suites, a 13 bedroom Lodge, which is located on the grounds of the hotel for special interest groups, and newly opened conference facilities. In January 2017, Harvey's Point was voted Number One Hotel in Ireland in the TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice awards for the fifth successive year. Harvey's Point was named Georgina Campbell's Hotel of the Year for 2017. There are 150 people employed in Harvey's Point, all dedicated to delivering the highest standards of excellence. Deirdre is passionate about promoting Donegal as a tourist destination and delivering world-class hotel-keeping blended with genuine Irish hospitality. Personal accolades include being awarded Hotel Manager of the Year by Irish Hospitality Institute and Donegal Person of the Year 2016.

www.harveyspoint.com



MARY B WALSH - Ire Wel Pallets, Wexford

Mary B. Walsh is the founding owner and Managing Director of Ire Wel Pallets Ltd. Established in May 1990, Mary has driven the growth of her business to make it the leading supplier of pallets, boxes and crates in Ireland. Innovation and service are the key focuses for Mary in ensuring the success of Ire Wel Pallets. Theirs is the first purpose built manufacturing site in Ireland in their sector. They have also developed specialist storage facilities and technologies, transforming industry capabilities. Mary has acquired and retained a wide range of blue chip clients for Ire Wel Pallets in the Medical Devices, Pharmaceutical, Food, Drinks and Electronic sectors through delivering solutions particular to each customer and their needs. Mary comes from a financial background to Ire Wel. She puts the skills gained during this part of her career to good use in her current role. Heading up a team of 42 staff, Mary B. Walsh is dedicated to growing her company in a way that benefits her customers, her staff and the wider community.

www.iwppallets.com



TRIONA MAC GIOLLA RÍ - Aró Digital, Galway

Triona Mac Giolla Rí set up Aró Digital Strategy with her husband in 1996. The company provides a comprehensive range of internet software and services to the hospitality sector. Aró builds beautiful websites along with booking software with a strong focus on conversion. This platform along with Digital Marketing Services gives Aró clients a solid platform to maximise their direct online revenue. Triona took part in the 6th Cycle of Going for Growth in 2014 and is a member of the Going for Growth community. The company focuses on luxury hotels with a client portfolio containing some of the top 4 and 5 star hotels around the world and is committed to research and innovation and the latest technology within the digital space. Aró Digital Strategy currently employs 30 people in Na Forbacha, in the Connemara Gaeltacht.

www.aro.ie



"I feel so lucky to have been part of such an inspiring and motivating group of women. I have learnt invaluable lessons and built a strong network of female entrepreneurs that I will remain in touch with for years to come".

NICKI HOYNE, MY SHINING ARMOUR



PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

ACORNS is now in its third year. There was a clear desire on the part of those who completed ACORNS previously to stay connected with the initiative and to participate in a further development phase. Thanks to the funding being provided through the Rural Innovation and Development Fund by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, a further development phase has been put in place for those who successfully completed ACORNS 2 and are continuing to develop their new businesses. There is no charge for these participants.

This further development phase includes:

- Two round table sessions with their ACORNS Lead Entrepreneur,
- An opportunity to attend topic based workshops relevant to their development,
- Further networking opportunities,
- Development of individual participant profiles,
- Tracking of progress against agreed goals and milestones.



ACORNS pilot participants left to right: Catherine Cocollos, Celtic Escargot; Ann Shields, Anneco Beauty; Angela Mahon, Truzees; Anne Cusack (Lead Entrepreneur) MD of Critical Healthcare; Clare Colohan, The Galway Food Company; Diane Nevin, Health Evident; Lisa Larkin, Durrow Mills; Helen Conneely, Mementooh; Ann O'Reilly, The Sewing Boutique.



ACORNS 2 participants left to right: Michelle Beresford, Y Knot; Patricia O'Neill, Trish's Honey Products; Laura Moloney, Glow Beauty; Eilín O'Carroll, Firmount; Mary B. Walsh, Ire Wel Pallets Ltd (Lead Entrepreneur); Aine Breen, Liwu Jewellery; Karen Keane, Bean and Goose Ltd; Kabira Allain, KYMAIA

PROGRESS MADE BY PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

100 early stage female entrepreneurs were supported by ACORNS in the period October 2016 to April 2017. 43 were those who had been involved in the pilot and availed themselves of the opportunity offered for further development and 57 who participated in ACORNS 2.

ACORNS PILOT FURTHER DEVELOPMENT PHASE

Those who completed the ACORNS pilot in 2016 were offered the opportunity to participate in a further development phase. 98% availed themselves of the opportunity presented for further support through ACORNS. The progress of these 43 entrepreneurs since their first involvement in ACORNS is very impressive.

- Their combined sales increased by just over €2million over the 15 months to the end of 2016 to €4million (103%).
- The number of exporters increased to 11. One in four of the ACORNS pilot participants are now exporting.
- Their combined employment increased over the 15 months by just over a third to 107.
- The participants are confidently projecting further growth in sales, exports and employment by the end of 2017.

ACORNS 2

Fifty five participants (96%) completed ACORNS 2, which ran from October 2016 to April 2017. They all reported that participating in ACORNS was of value to their business.

- At the end of the cycle, 47 of the businesses were trading, including nine that had started to generate sales for the first time during the cycle.
- Among those trading, there was a reported 21% increase in turnover over the six month cycle.
- Eight participants were already exporting before the start of the cycle, three more have since started to export.

"An invaluable programme which has opened my eyes to several new paths my business can now take. I couldn't recommend ACORNS enough".

GERALDINE BYRNE, MEDISKIN



WHO WE ARE

FITZSIMONS CONSULTING

Fitzsimons Consulting specialises in areas related to entrepreneurship and growth. Paula Fitzsimons, founder and managing director of Fitzsimons Consulting, is a recognised expert on entrepreneurship. Paula has been the national coordinator for GEM for Ireland since 2000. The annual GEM report is recognised as giving a unique insight into early stage entrepreneurial activity in Ireland. Paula is a former President of the consortium of GEM national teams, and a former Director of GERA, the governing body for the Global Entrepreneurship Research Association.

Recognising that fewer women start new businesses and, of those that start, fewer have significant growth ambitions than do men, Paula Fitzsimons designed and developed the Going for Growth programme, which is focused on peer support as a means of assisting established women entrepreneurs who wish to grow their businesses. The Going for Growth initiative is funded by Enterprise Ireland and KPMG. (www.goingforgrowth.com)

Having just completed an 9th cycle, Going for Growth has supported over 500 women entrepreneurs to achieve their growth ambitions and measures its success in terms of the

participants' increased turnover, additional employment created and the number of new exporters.

Going was Growth was awarded the European Enterprise Promotion Award 2015, Investing in Entrepreneurial Skills, and featured extensively in a book *Inclusive Business Creation - Good Practice Compendium*, published in May 2016 by the OECD and European Commission. In recognition of her work in the area of female entrepreneurship, Paula received the WMB Boots Empowering Women Award 2014.

Having successfully designed and implemented the ACORNS pilot and ACORNS 2 programmes, Paula and her team in Fitzsimons Consulting are very enthusiastic about implementing this latest phase of the ACORNS initiative.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO CONTACT US
Email info@acorns.ie
Tel: (+353) 1 845 0770
Fitzsimons Consulting, 6 James's Terrace,
Malahide, Co. Dublin, K36 Y972 Ireland



SPONSORS

This innovative programme is funded through the **Rural Innovation and Development Fund** by the **Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine**. Its objective is to encourage a stronger level of enterprise development in rural areas by seeking out and assisting start-up female entrepreneurs living in rural areas to grow and develop their businesses.



Following a competitive tendering process, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed TD has selected the ACORNS initiative developed by Fitzsimons Consulting as most suitable to achieve the stated objectives. It is designed to unleash the potential of female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland, who have recently started a business or who have taken concrete steps towards starting a business. The objective is to equip these early stage entrepreneurs with the appropriate knowledge, confidence and networks to successfully start and develop sustainable businesses.

MICHAEL CREED TD

Minister Creed said ***'I am delighted that ACORNS is being offered to rural female entrepreneurs for a third year. Once again, they will have the opportunity to avail of the tremendous supports it can give them to develop and grow their businesses, increase employment, and to make a real contribution to their local communities. I am greatly encouraged by what ACORNS has achieved to date, and I urge early stage female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland to apply.'***



"Being part of ACORNS has gifted AgriKids with a network of professional business contracts operating within rural Ireland. It has also gifted friendship, which will go beyond the six month programme".

ALMA JORDAN, AGRIKIDS



ACORNS

Fitzsimons Consulting,
6 James Terrace,
Malahide,
Co. Dublin,
K36 Y972
Ireland

Phone: (+353) 1 845 0770

Email: info@acorns.ie

www.acorns.ie

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