



Startup Success: Niamh Sherwin Barry, The Irish Fairy Door Company

Local Enterprise Office 
Making It Happen

STARTUP STORIES: THE IRISH FAIRY DOOR COMPANY

ONCE UPON A LEO: EVEN A FAIRYTALE STARTUP CAN BENEFIT FROM A HELPING HAND FROM LEO SOUTH DUBLIN

ONE UPON A TIME, FOUR FRIENDS HAD A WONDERFUL IDEA TO START A BUSINESS WHICH MADE CHILDREN HAPPY AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES.

It might seem far-fetched but this is a true story about how The Irish Fairy Door Company went from being just an idea between friends to getting off the ground with a Business Priming Grant from their Local Enterprise Office in South Dublin.

Co-founder Niamh Sherwin-Barry picks up the story: "My husband Oisín and I had an awful time in the recession, we almost lost everything, and our friends Aoife and Gavin weren't too far behind us."

One evening the friends "were chatting at the kitchen table about these little shapes that looked like doors, and we had called them fairy doors. We were just discussing

what our fairies were doing and we were laughing about it and that got us and our husbands thinking we could definitely make money out of this."

They turned to their Local Enterprise Office for help. "Our Local Enterprise Office in South Dublin was just incredible." The Business Priming Grant it secured was "totally business changing" she says.

"We used it for developing the product, the website and for marketing on social media. We had been sitting around the table making the doors ourselves but now we were able to take on carpenters to make the doors."

LEO South Dublin also provided the friends with business mentoring and support, helping them get ready to export and preparing them to make the transition

to becoming a client of Enterprise Ireland. It helped the company grow and sell internationally.

Today The Irish Fairy Door Company has sold more than 750,000 products worldwide, including its innovative Worry Plaques which are designed to provide children with a way of handing over their worries to fairies, so that they can worry less.

The wonderful characters these four friends first created around their kitchen table are now also being brought to life as part of a "game-changing" global animation deal with Wild Brain, a digital network with 50 million subscribers and a portfolio that includes brands such as Fireman Sam, Curious George and Ben 10.

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“THERE IS ONE MESSAGE I ALWAYS SAY - GO TO YOUR LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE, SEE WHAT THEY’RE AT, SEE WHAT INFORMATION THEY CAN GIVE YOU.”

Niamh Sherwin Barry,
The Irish Fairy Door Company



Helping Make It Happen: Amanda Mills
of Local Enterprise Office South Dublin

The Irish Fairy Door Company is now one of Ireland’s most iconic and successful toy exporting franchises. It’s a happy ever after outcome, and one in which the Local Enterprise Office played a supporting role. That’s why Sherwin Barry is keen to direct others to their door.

“I do talks up and down the country for very early startups and there is one message I always say - go to your Local Enterprise Office, see what they’re at, see what information they can give you.”

They can give significant financial supports to startups too, including Feasibility Study Grants and Business Priming Grants.

A Feasibility Study Grant will help you develop with your business idea, exploring the demand for your product or service and making sure there is a market for it.

A Business Priming Grant can help a new business with costs such as premises, salaries or equipment.

LEO funding helped the The Irish Fairy Door Company enormously when it was starting off. Even though the friends had decided to make a go of their great idea, they soon realised that to build a magical world for children behind fairy doors would need more capital than they could provide.

The training and networking opportunities LEO offered help too, particularly as not everyone gets to start a business with their best friends!

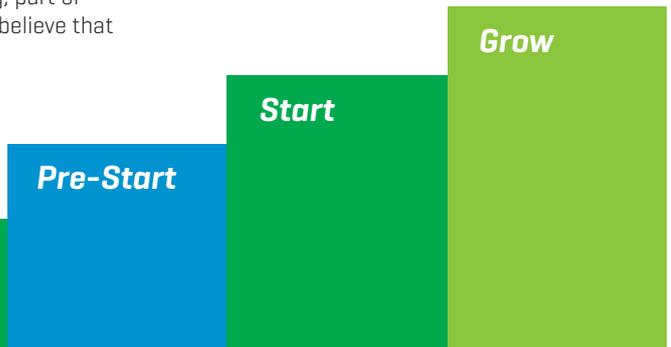
“It can be a very lonely road, particularly if you’re in business by yourself,” says Sherwin Barry. “When you go to the LEO it’s like feeling part of something, part of a business community and I believe that

has a hugely beneficial effect on people at the beginning of their entrepreneurial journey.”

Amanda Mills of Local Enterprise Office South Dublin says that businesses such as the The Irish Fairy Door Company epitomise the benefits of engaging with your Local Enterprise Office.

“This is what the LEOs are there for, to give people support that they might not get elsewhere. To be recognised as a place you can go for help to get started and push on and grow. The Irish Fairy Door Company is proof of this.”

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