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Discovering a message in a bottle on a nearby beach sparked the idea for print designer Niamh Gillespie's collection of accessories with hidden meaning.



Niamh Gillespie,  
**Tidings**

...Let's talk business



Comhairle Contae Lú  
Louth County Council



## The Tidings Story



Persistence and looking for opportunities is the key to breaking into new markets!

Internationally renowned print designer Niamh Gillespie had worked with some of the world's most iconic brands including Paul Smith and Alexander McQueen, designing acclaimed women's wear. She returned from living abroad, started her own brand and drew inspiration from the landscape and architecture around her.

Starting with a print collection and moving into an exclusive, luxury range of stylish accessories, Niamh explains how the business has grown:

Having worked in London for 15 years, I returned to Ireland in 2016. I had worked as a print designer for iconic brands, designing prints and patterns for some of the world's most stylish people. My first step was to design and market an art print collection. This kept my creativity flowing while I sought inspiration for my next move. I joined the community in Creative Spark in Dundalk to be among other creative entrepreneurs.

Walking along the beach one day, I discovered a small bottle with a message tucked inside. That message was designed to connect one soul to another faraway soul. That act of reaching out to connect with another person stayed with me. It made me think, what if we could wear beautiful garments with secret messages of support, encouragement and love? The idea developed in my mind and Tidings came to be in September 2020. The name refers to both the sea, and the greeting that the garment brings to the owner.

The Tidings brand is inspired by 3 main elements. Firstly, the wax seal on old letters, with the letter T for Tidings at its heart. The angular lines represent the inspiration I draw from buildings and architecture.

The leaves demonstrate my connection to nature, which fuels so much of my creativity. This motif is used throughout our designs but also across our beautiful, luxurious packaging, creating a sense of occasion every time you touch the box.

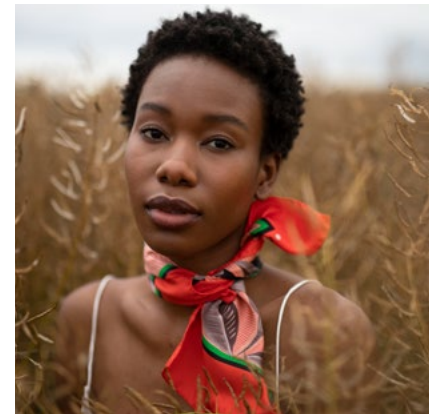
The design process is specialised, thoughtful, and time-consuming. I start by hand-painting the initial design, using a mix of soft shapes and architectural lines. I then transfer it to a digital medium and continue work on layering colours and finessing the scale so that the design works for the shape of the garment. Each design is also embellished with its discreet but powerful message of encouragement, such as "Chin up" or "Bloom with grace". Once the design is complete, it is sent to Italy to be printed on silk. The print samples come to me for feedback, adjustments are made and finally the pieces are printed and hand-rolled. They arrive with me for packaging in our gorgeous boxes and are ready to be sent to international retailers or purchased online.

Key steps for me were being selected for Brown Thomas' "Create", taking part in trade events such as Scoop and Pure in London, Showcase in Dublin and Premiere Classe, Paris, each creating opportunities to meet leading buyers. These meetings are critically important. Buyers need to see and feel your product for themselves, experience your passion and build that connection with you. Developing those relationships means that Tidings are now stocked in high end retailers such as Brown Thomas and Fortnum and Mason.

My creative brain is always working on new ideas and designs. Future plans include accessories for cooler climates, collaborations with luxury hotels, and a brand new collection in new product areas.

Watch The Tidings Story On YouTube:





## What supports did your Local Enterprise Office give you along the way?

Without two major supports from the Local Enterprise Office, I might never have been able to launch Tidings. The first was the **Feasibility Grant**. This funding helped me to launch my brand including the photoshoot, sampling and prototypes. The second was securing a place on the Get Set Programme which the Design Crafts Council Ireland run in conjunction with the Local Enterprise Offices. This programme provided me with specialist training and mentoring to get my product to market.

The **TAME Grant** has been instrumental in building connections with buyers. I used it to add an export section to my website, for engaging with international buyers. In 2021, I used the TAME grant to attend Scoop and Pure in London, while the 2022 grant allowed me to attend Premiere Classe in Paris and gain a host of international stockists. Being allocated a place at Showcase 2022, and winning the Local Enterprise Office Showcase Award, raised our profile with both Irish and international buyers.

**Mentoring**, especially ahead of trade fairs, has been really valuable. In particular practical aspects such as pricing, invoicing, line-sheets, marketing and negotiation strategy were very useful. Of course, the **Trading Online Vouchers** were essential for building a strong online presence.

## What difference would you say that Local Enterprise Office Louth has made to your business?

Knowing that I'm not on my own has made a huge difference. The Local Enterprise Office are with me and really understand the development needs of creative entrepreneurs. They seem to have the right support, no matter what stage I'm at, and that helps me keep moving forward.

## What advice would you give someone starting off in business?

Firstly, don't be afraid to do things that take you outside your comfort zone. Do the things that you don't like doing – they are essential for growth. And secondly, follow your passion. It is hard work, but when I walk into a store and see my designs featured, recognised and appreciated, I know that it's worth it. So tap into your passion and go for it!

Discover more about the supports Niamh mentions in her story



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### Feasibility Grant

Feasibility Grants are designed to assist with researching market demand for a product or service and examining its sustainability.



### TAME Grant

The Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters grant is available to help micro enterprises in Ireland unlock new overseas markets for their products and services, within Europe and beyond. This grant can cover up to 50% of qualifying expenditure, up to a maximum of €5,000 (exc. VAT).



### Mentoring

Mentoring matches up the knowledge, skills and insights of experienced business practitioners with small business owner who need practical and strategic one-to-one advice and guidance. Mentors contribute independent, informed observation and advice to aid decision making.



### Trading Online Voucher

This scheme helps local businesses to develop a presence online. It is open to businesses trading for more than 6 months, employing 10 people or less and with turnover of under €2million per annum. Vouchers are available to a maximum value of €2,500 or 50% of eligible expenditure and can be used for IT Consultation, development of an e-commerce website, software, online advertising, digital marketing strategy etc.

Visit [www.localenterprise.ie/louth](http://www.localenterprise.ie/louth) to find out more about these and other supports.

TIDINGS

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