

# 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.*



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



**CEDRA**



*“Early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, are invited to apply for a funded place on ACORNS.*

*Those who successfully completed the pilot are being offered the opportunity for further support”.*

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**E**arly 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 initiative.

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 2016 until April 2017. 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](mailto:info@acorns.ie) or phone the office at 01 8450770.

This innovative programme is funded under the **CEDRA Rural Innovation and Development Fund** through 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 must have recently set up a new business (no earlier than 29th June 2014) which she owns or part owns, or must be actively 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 as defined by CEDRA. 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 10th October/11th October 2016 in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.**

## HOW TO APPLY

Please register your interest on the website [www.acorns.ie](http://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 2016. No applications received after this date can be considered.**

## SELECTION PROCESS

As was the case in the pilot, 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 out those who are prepared to fully engage with the programme; demonstrate a determination to advance their fledgling businesses; and are prepared to work hard in pursuit of their entrepreneurial goals.

There are up to 56 places available for suitable candidates. The ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs will meet in late September 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 **10th October / 11th October 2016**. 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 in November, December, January, and February. 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 **4th April / 5th April 2017**. 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

**T**he 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 earlier this 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 a finalist in the 'Accountant of the Year (Industry)' in the prestigious Accountancy Awards 2016.

[www.polarice.ie](http://www.polarice.ie)



## ANNE CUSACK - Critical Healthcare, Westmeath

Anne Cusack set up Critical Healthcare in 1999. The company manufactures and distributes more than 2,000 emergency medical products to ambulance providers, fire services and the pre-hospital market in Ireland and the UK. Their brands include MediQuilt, a range of disposable linen products; Duramedic, a medical equipment and first aid product range; and Medlogistix, a bespoke procurement SaaS, designed around a client's requirements and specifications. Critical Healthcare has secured a number of major contracts with Medlogistix from the HSE, Dublin Fire Brigade and the Irish Coast Guard in Ireland and the UK. Anne and her team have won numerous Awards including the SFA Innovation Award 2013 and the IMSTA (Irish Medical and Surgical Trade Association) Best Services Company Award 2014. The business is continuing to grow at over 30% annually and plans are underway to expand into mainland Europe. Anne currently employs 20 people in Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath.

[www.criticalhealthcare.com](http://www.criticalhealthcare.com)



## ANNE REILLY - PaycheckPlus, Louth

Founded by Anne Reilly in 2005, PaycheckPlus provides Irish and UK Payroll processing services to clients across a range of sectors employing from 1 to several thousand employees. Headquartered in Drogheda, Co Louth, the PaycheckPlus Team help structure clients' payroll in the most efficient and cost efficient way, enabling progressive clients focus on their core business, confident that their payroll is meeting legislative and compliance requirements in a timely and accurate manner. PaycheckPlus also provides a range of additional services such as consultation, training, reporting, temporary and contingency payroll cover and foreign exchange services. PaycheckPlus is the recipient of a number of awards including Payroll Provider of the Year, Best Business Practice and Professional Services Excellence. Further information about their services and a useful Information Centre are available on the website.

[www.paycheckplus.ie](http://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 McEnery 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 7 years. The company now has over 500 clients throughout Ireland and employs 8 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.

[www.thehrsuiteonline.com](http://www.thehrsuiteonline.com)



## DEIRDRE MCGLONE - Harvey's Point, Donegal

Deirdre McGlone has run Harvey's Point Hotel located on Lough Eske, Co. Donegal for the last 20 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 and a 13 bedroom Lodge, which is located on the grounds of the hotel for special interest groups. In January 2016, Harvey's Point was voted Number One Hotel in Ireland in the TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice awards for the fourth successive year. The multi-award winning hotel was also ranked No. 13 in Europe. With 120 people employed in Harvey's Point, Deirdre and her team continue to push the boundaries as an industry leader, keeping hotel standards at the highest level.

[www.harveyspoint.com](http://www.harveyspoint.com)



## MARY B WALSH - Ire Wel Pallets, Wexford

Mary B. Walsh is the owner and Managing Director of Ire Wel Pallets Ltd. Established in May 1990, Ire Wel Pallets is a Pallet and Packaging Solutions Provider, supplying Pallets, Boxes and Crates to its exporting customers. The company's customer base includes organisations in the Medical Devices, Pharmaceutical, Food and Drinks industries. Based near Gorey, Co. Wexford, Ire Wel Pallets operates from the first purpose-built pallet manufacturing facility in Ireland. They have a 60,000 sq. ft. ventilated storage facility for Kiln Dried Timber Pallets in addition to onsite production facilities. A 2015 investment of €1.5m. introduced new technology and has given the company more control over its production, quality and stock. With customers throughout the island of Ireland, the company is now exploring export markets including the UK. Ire Wel Pallets currently employs 41 staff in Gorey and plans to expand further.

[www.irewel pallets.ie](http://www.irewel pallets.ie)



## TRIONA MACGIOLLA RÍ - Aró Digital, Galway

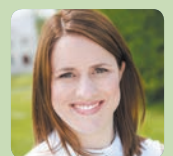
Triona MacGiolla Rí set up Aró Digital Strategy with her husband in 1996. The company provides a comprehensive range of internet software and services to the hospitality sector. Aró builds websites and booking engine software with a strong focus on conversion. This platform along with Digital Marketing 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](http://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*



# PILOT PARTICIPANTS

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

The programme will be run over a six month period, October 2016 to April 2017 and will build on the foundations established in the pilot.

This further development phase will include

- 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.



**FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:** Sandra Burns (Joe's Farm Crisps, Co.Cork), Valerie Murphy (Valerie's Breast Care, Co. Limerick), Maeve Sheridan (Western Herd Brewing Company, Co. Clare), Caroline McEnery (ACORNS Lead Entrepreneur and The HR, Co. Kerry), Denise Bourke (Divas and Dudes, Co. Kerry), Breda English Hayes (MOET Accountants, Co. Limerick), Norma Dineen (Bo Rua Farm, Co.Cork) and Grainne Bagnall (Sense about Maths, Co.Cork).

# SPONSORS

This innovative programme is funded under the **CEDRA Rural Innovation and Development Fund** (CEDRA - Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas) through 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 pleased to announce the second year of this very effective programme. Job creation is a priority for this Government and an important focus of Foodwise 2025. The success of last year's programme shows what a difference mentoring and peer learning can make to rural women in developing their new business ideas."***



"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](http://www.goingforgrowth.com))

Having just completed an 8th cycle, Going for Growth has supported over 450 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 managed the ACORNS pilot, Paula and her team in Fitzsimons Consulting are very enthusiastic about implementing this further development of the ACORNS initiative.



## CONTACT US

For more information or to contact us please email [info@acorns.ie](mailto:info@acorns.ie) or phone: (+353) 1 845 0770  
Address: Fitzsimons Consulting, 6 James Terrace, Malahide, Co. Dublin, K36 Y972 Ireland



### FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

Catherine Cocollos (Celtic Escargot, Co. Galway), Ann Shields (Anneco Beauty, Co. Laois), Angela Mahon (Truzees, Co. Offaly), Anne Cusack (Lead Entrepreneur, ACORNS and MD of Critical Healthcare, Co. Westmeath), Clare Colohan (The Galway Food Company, Co. Galway), Diane Nevin (Health Evident, Co. Westmeath), Lisa Larkin (Durrow Mills, Co. Offaly), Helen Conneely (Mementooh, Co. Westmeath), Ann O'Reilly (The Sewing Boutique, Co. Longford).

"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**

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