

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE LONGFORD (SEL)



SEL

FINAL REPORT

Social Enterprise &
Entrepreneurship Development
in Longford

DECEMBER 2013



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SOCIAL ENTERPRISE LONGFORD – SEL FINAL REPORT OF THE PROGRAMME

December 2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Social enterprise is becoming recognised as an important part of the European economy. Social enterprise is under developed in Ireland and is often unseen. Longford Community Resources Limited (LCRL) saw the potential for social enterprise in County Longford to address social issues. As part of its strategic plan LCRL made a call for tenders for the provision of a programme that would support the development of a social enterprise culture in County Longford and support emerging or new social enterprises. The Irish Social Finance Centre (ISFC) was appointed the contract following open competitive tender and Social Enterprise Longford (SEL) was born.

Purpose

The aim of SEL was to lay the groundwork and foundations for the development of a social enterprise culture in Co. Longford and to create a suitable environment for the development of social enterprise projects in Co. Longford.

Scope

The SEL programme operated from January 2012 to June 2013. It consisted of an awareness raising and outreach campaign around the county to raise awareness about what social enterprise is and to promote the SEL programme.

This was followed by three public seminars which aimed to support the generation of social enterprise ideas, to impart knowledge about the business planning process and to examine how to measure the social impact of social enterprises.

Participants were encouraged to sign up for the SEL training programme which consisted of a series of workshops and peer mentoring support sessions to help them to test the feasibility of their social enterprise ideas and to work through the business plan. It was delivered by experts in the fields of business planning, enterprise development, financial planning, marketing, human resources and governance. It had a strong practical component using group exercises and guest speakers from the field of social enterprise.

The programme also included assessments of the business plans at a number of junctures with one-to-one feedback and support provided to participants. Other supports such as feasibility study grants through LCRL and business mentoring through the Longford County Enterprise Board were identified for specific projects.

The programme culminated in a competition for a seed capital fund and awards that were made by the Minister for Social Enterprise, Seán Sherlock T.D.

Participation

Three information evenings held in different parts of the county attracted a total of 46 people. These were followed by three public seminars which attracted 69 attendees. Twenty-six people with 17 social enterprise ideas signed up for the SEL workshops. Of these, 21 people completed the programme and received certificates of completion. Eight social enterprise ideas completed the SEL programme and received awards.

Skills & Confidence

The training provided participants with a wide range of skills necessary to set up and operate a social enterprise. The process of testing the feasibility of ideas resulted in some participants realising that their idea was not viable as a social enterprise. For others the process highlighted the need for specific supports in order to progress their ideas.

Participants indicated that as a result of having taken part in SEL their confidence had increased regarding business planning, marketing, operations, human resources, governance and financial planning. Even where participants did not go on to set up a social enterprise it is hoped that the skills and knowledge acquired on SEL can be transferred to community projects they were involved in or any future ideas they may have to establish a social enterprise.

Geographical Reach

The SEL programme had an awareness raising and outreach component that was delivered in Granard, Longford and Lanesboro. In addition, local databases were used to make the community and voluntary sector aware of the programme. Participants who attended information evenings, public seminars and SEL workshops came from different parts of the county with major population centres of Longford Town, Granard, Ballymahon and Lanesboro all represented and ensuring a good spread of the social enterprise message. There was some concentration of participants who attended the workshops who were based in Longford and Granard.

Start-Ups

Eight social enterprise ideas went through the full programme and received SEL awards. Some were extensions of existing enterprises, e.g. REVAMP 3R, Camlin Catering and Creative Ardagh, others involved new activity to underpin existing services, e.g. Longford Centre for Independent Living and Lus na Gréine. Others were new ventures, e.g. Keeping House, Granard Motte Community Enterprise and Drumlish Community Pavilion.

As of December 2013 six of these enterprise ideas had commenced operations and had employed new staff: REVAMP 3R, Camlin Catering, Creative Ardagh, Longford Centre for Independent Living, Lus na Gréine and Keeping House. Granard Motte Community Enterprise had launched its feasibility study and is engaged in a fundraising campaign. Drumlish Community Pavilion continues to assess various options for premises for its day care centre.

Job Creation

It was hoped that participants on the SEL programme would support the retention or creation of 20 jobs. The projects that received awards are estimated to have the potential to create c.50 jobs and training places. As of December 2013, good progress had been made towards achieving this with six social enterprises supporting the retention of 9 full-time jobs and 30 part-time jobs and the creation of 11 new part-time jobs as well as the provision of training for 10 young people. In addition, a craft co-operative has been established as a spin-off from the Creative Ardagh project.

Key Components of Success

Key success determinants for the SEL programme included the following:

- Clarity over the programme’s purpose and intended outcomes.
- Detailed co-operation between LCRL, the County Enterprise Board, the Advisory Group and the SEL Project Team.
- Development of a programme of work for participants to engage in using a mix of theory, practice and experiential learning.
- Provision of workshops by people with practical experience of social enterprise and enterprise development.
- Provision of local contact points and outreach into the community.
- Provision of peer mentoring support to follow up on workshop learning and assignments.
- Facilitating access to specialist supports as required.
- Being as inclusive as possible for as long as possible.

Overall Conclusion

The delivery of the workshops and seminars was successfully achieved and there is now a greater awareness and understanding of social enterprise and its ethos in the county.

Overall, the combination of information seminars, formal workshops, peer mentoring support sessions, access to business mentors and other experts, feasibility testing, business planning with verbal and written feedback, helped participants to refine and progress their ideas.

Six months after completion of the SEL programme, six social enterprise ideas have become operational. They are supporting the retention of 9 full-time jobs and 30 part-time jobs and have created 11 new part-time jobs as well as provided training for 10 young people.

Recommendations

The SEL programme has shown that it is possible to animate social enterprise and to provide a range of relevant supports that result in social enterprise and job creation. A challenge that emerged was that starting the programme towards the end of the current Rural Development Programme limited access to possible sources of funding under the RDP.

It is recommended that the SEL programme be repeated in County Longford and that it commence at the start of the next RDP in order to facilitate access to suitable RDP funding for social enterprises that meet RDP criteria.

Having a programme of sufficient length to enable participants to fully explore their ideas and pilot them if necessary was critical to the success of most of the enterprises that are now established.

It is recommended that any future programme should run for not less than 18 months.

There are many organisations in County Longford that have the potential to be a social enterprise or that are in fact already a social enterprise but do not realise it. The SEL Programme engaged in a wide public awareness campaign about social enterprise. Going forward, more time should be devoted to identifying and working with these groups to explore the potential for social enterprise in their organisation or the creation of new social enterprises. The creation of the social enterprise network could support this process by spreading the word about the potential of social enterprise.

It is recommended that the programme be front-loaded to include more time for small group sessions exploring the potential for social enterprise in specific areas.

Close co-operation between LCRL and the County Enterprise Board were one of the key success factors in the operation of SEL.

It is recommended that for any future programme of this nature that this level of co-operation is replicated.

Access to one-to-one support and mentoring proved critical for some projects, e.g. Creative Ardagh. For others, access to feasibility study grants was necessary in order to progress their ideas, e.g. Granard Motte Community Enterprise. Seed capital was identified as a need to progress ideas and the final phase of SEL was changed to reflect this by providing a small seed capital fund that projects competed for.

It is recommended that for any future programmes of this nature that a fund be established to provide seed money for participants to hire business development mentors to support them through the first three years of start-up. A sliding scale of support could be employed, e.g. 100% funding towards such costs in Year 1, 70% in year 2 and 50% in year 3, with projects providing the balance of funds required for years 2 and 3.

Longford Centre for Independent Living and Lus na Gréine are examples of organisations that are heavily reliant on State funding that saw the necessity for developing alternative sources of income to sustain their existing operations and to expand their services.

It is recommended that LCRL discuss with state agencies operating in Longford, e.g. HSE, the potential to put in place structures and supports that would allow community services to develop revenue generating social enterprises.

The SEL workshops generally took place over the course of a day. They used a mix of theory and practical exercises and included guest speakers, many of whom were involved in social enterprises. The workshop covering HR and governance however took place over a half day and this limited the use of practical work.

It is recommended that all workshops take place over a full day and incorporate practical exercises, examples and group work.

Having access to local peer mentoring support proved crucial to helping participants to explore and test their ideas and to keeping them motivated to continue. The group sessions took place at regular intervals in between workshops but did not extend beyond this. However, flexibility was built into the programme to facilitate one-to-one support when required.

It is recommended that peer mentoring support should continue to form an integral part of this type of programme and that it be extended to include the period when business plans are being finalised and the first six months of becoming operational.

In order to support the development of a vibrant social enterprise sector in County Longford, a network of social enterprises, social entrepreneurs and those who can support them needs to

be developed. There may also be opportunities to link into other social enterprise networks that are beginning to emerge at county and national levels.

It is recommended that efforts to establish a social enterprise network continue. In order to sustain the development of a network, some level of resourcing will be required from LCRL.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Longford Community Resources Limited (LCRL) was established in 1996. Its core purpose is to promote rural and economic development and to tackle social exclusion in County Longford. LCRL's Rural Development Programme (RDP) strategic plan 2007 to 2013 included objectives to improve the quality of life for the rural population, to enhance the local rural environment and to support business creation. As part of this strategic plan, LCRL funded Social Enterprise Longford – the SEL programme under the RDP. This project explored the potential for developing social enterprises in County Longford.

SEL was an eighteen month programme that commenced in January 2012. The aim of SEL was to lay the groundwork and foundations for the development of a social enterprise culture in Co. Longford and to create a suitable environment for the development of social enterprise projects in Co. Longford. It did this through a number of promotional outreach, training and support actions that are described in the following chapters.

After a competitive tendering process the Irish Social Finance Centre (ISFC) in conjunction with Clann Credo won the contract to deliver SEL. Clann Credo/ISFC partnered with the Longford EDI Centre to provide venues and local support to the programme.

1.2 SEL Programme Outline

There were seven phases to the programme as follows:

Phase 1

- Initiation of Project Team and Advisory Group
- Agreeing social impact measurement with contracted consultants
- Focus group with NGOs and enterprises
- Preliminary design

Phase 2

- Promotion
- Outreach
- Identifying champions/mentors
- Launch

Phase 3

- Finalising design of seminars and workshops

Phase 4

- Delivery of seminars

Phase 5

- Delivery of workshops

Phase 6

- Provision of one to one support

Phase 7

- Showcase event
- Development of post programme support plan

1.3 Evaluation

LCRL invited tenders to evaluate the SEL project. Social Value Lab won the tender competition. It used the Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology to assess the impact of the SEL project.

1.4 Project Oversight

An Advisory Group was established to oversee the SEL project. The membership was as follows:

Seamus Butler, chairperson of LCRL and chairperson of Longford Chamber of Commerce
Adrian Greene, CEO, LCRL
Angela Keaveney, Longford Women's Link
Michael Nevin, CEO, County Enterprise Board
Pat O'Rourke, LCRL
Paul O'Sullivan, CEO Clann Credo/ISFC
Alan Shanley, LCRL

The first meeting of the Advisory Group took place on March 8th 2012 to discuss the programme outline and promotional campaign. The results from a focus group with social enterprises in Co. Longford were also discussed (see next chapter).

The second meeting took place on April 13th 2012 and it discussed progress regarding outreach activities and the public seminars.

The third meeting took place on May 30th 2012 and discussed progress regarding the workshops. It also began to explore what support structure needed to be put in place after the SEL project was completed.

The next three meetings held on July 12th 2012, September 5th 2012 and November 22nd 2012 discussed updates on the workshops, progress being made by participants and supports required by them.

The last meeting of the Advisory Group took place on March 13th 2012 to discuss the last phases of the project and to agree changes to these phases proposed by Clann Credo/ISFC.

1.5 Project Management

Clann Credo/ISFC established Project Team to manage the SEL project. The members of this team were:

Paul O'Sullivan, CEO, Clann Credo/ISFC
Jennifer Hennessy, SEL Project Manager, Clann Credo/ISFC
Ann Clarke, SEL Training Co-ordinator, Clann Credo/ISFC

Pat Kelleher, Longford EDI Centre

This group met on a regular basis to discuss progress, to address any barriers or challenges that were arising, to identify potential guest speakers and to plan and schedule the work.

1.6 Structure of the Report

This introduction is followed by Chapter 2 examines the results of the focus group with local people. Chapter 3 explores the promotion and outreach phases of the project. Chapter 4 outlines the public seminars. Chapter 5 summarises the workshop phase of the project. Chapter 6 examines the range of supports that were offered and provided to participants on the SEL programme. Chapter 7 outlines how projects were assessed and the supports that were planned for after the SEL programme. Chapter 8 describes the Awards Ceremony. Chapter 9 draws out the main learning and conclusions from the SEL programme and makes recommendations for the future.

CHAPTER 2 FOCUS GROUPS

2.1 Introduction

In order to finalise the design of the SEL programme and tailor it to the needs of Co. Longford, it was considered important to hear the views of local people about the issues they considered to be important in developing social enterprise.

Two focus groups were held on January 25th 2012. Twenty-four individuals from the community and voluntary sector attended the first focus group. These included representatives of Tidy Towns committees, community groups or individuals from different parts of the county such as Legga Moyne, Kenagh, Ardagh, Clondra, Dromard, Drumlish, Cullyfad and Ballinamuck, the Longford Women’s Link, Lus na Gréine Family Resource Centre, St. Vincent de Paul and Longford Social Services. Six individuals from private business attended the second focus group, including one social enterprise. Both focus groups were facilitated by the SEL Training Co-ordinator. The main findings from these focus groups are presented below.

2.2 Perception of Social Enterprise

Both groups exhibited a confused understanding about what social enterprise is, although it was more evident in the community and voluntary sector focus group than in the private sector focus group.

There was a strong emphasis in the descriptions given on social outcomes, but less so on the business aspect of social enterprise.

Around one-third of the community and voluntary sector organisations present indicated that they had some sort of income derived from trading activities, e.g. sale of goods or services, room rental, etc.

Both groups identified specific ideas as well as county-wide initiatives and developments as potential sources of opportunities for the creation of social enterprises, for example, the county tourism strategy.

2.3 Challenges for Social Enterprises

The groups were asked to identify the main challenges for social enterprises in Co. Longford. These were:

- Identifying viable opportunities and testing their feasibility.
- Having relevant local bodies and agencies on board to support social enterprises.
- Getting appropriate staff and concerns over the implications of being an employer.
- Accessing funding.
- Ensuring that social enterprise does not compete with or displace existing private sector enterprises in the county.
- Having someone in an organisation to be the ‘entrepreneur’.
- Impact of committee structures on decision-making and ability to react to opportunities quickly.
- The small scale of Co. Longford.

2.4 Issues for SEL

The issues raised by the focus group that had implications for the final design of the SEL programme included the following:

- The need for a stronger focus on feasibility testing and business planning.
- Having a clear definition of what social enterprise is and raising awareness about social enterprise.
- Having a central point of access for case examples and ideas, e.g. a web presence for the SEL programme.
- The need to develop a brochure and PR material for the programme to get the message out to communities about the programme and what it had to offer to them.
- The importance of linking into support agencies and existing forums.
- The importance of having access to mentors for social enterprises on the SEL programme.

2.4 Tailoring SEL

The issues identified were taken on board in tailoring the SEL programme to the needs of Co. Longford. A web site was established www.SocialEnterprise.ie/Longford. A brochure to promote the SEL programme was designed and published. It was made available in hard and soft copy. A PowerPoint presentation about the programme was developed.

As the programme progressed, additional workshops were inserted into the programme to address identified needs as follows:

- Human resources training workshop.
- Governance training workshop.
- Business planning peer support session.
- Pitching the idea training workshop.

The issue of access to local mentors was brought up regularly at Advisory Group meetings. Possible sources of funding for projects were also discussed.

CHAPTER 3 PROMOTION & OUTREACH

3.1 Introduction

One of the aims of the SEL programme was to raise awareness about social enterprise and foster a culture of social enterprise in Co. Longford. A promotional and outreach campaign was devised to achieve this and is described below.

3.2 Promotion

A logo and a brochure outlining SEL were designed and published for circulation to community groups and at information evenings. Pull-up stands were also developed for use in promotional events.

A broadcast e-mail was prepared for all relevant databases in the county. The broadcast email was sent to over 10 different community networks around Longford for onward distribution to their databases. These included LCRL, the Community and Voluntary Fora, the Chamber of Commerce, the GAA, the Longford Youth Service, Longford Women's Link, Travellers movement, Acorn and Longford library service. The information was included in the Parish newsletter. The information sheet and a copy of the brochure were also sent out to the charity shops and secondary schools.

Opportunities for joint advertising and editorials with LCRL were also identified. Press editorial, photo and advertisements were prepared. An advertisement along with an editorial with two pictures covering the SEL programme appeared in the Longford Leader on March 28th 2012. It gave details of the three information evenings about SEL.

Radio shows that might be suitable for promoting SEL were identified including the Mary Claire Greally Afternoon Show, the Community Diary and the Claire Mulchay Business Programme. Pat Kelleher and Jennifer Hennessy, members of the SEL Project Team, were interviewed on the Mary Claire Greally show on Radio Shannonside about the SEL programme. The station also mentioned the information evenings that were planned for around the county.

Local social media outlets such as the Club County Board Facebook pages were also identified as possible means of getting the message about SEL out.

A specific web site for SEL was created, www.SocialEnterprise.ie/Longford with a link to it from the LCRL and Clann Credo web sites.

A press launch was organised to coincide with the launch of the TSA report on energy in Co. Longford.

3.3 Information Evenings

Three information evenings were held around Co. Longford to increase awareness about social enterprise and to promote the SEL programme. All of the sessions took place in the evenings in order to ensure that as many people could attend as possible.

The first meeting took place in Longford town on the 2nd of April 2012 in the EDI Centre. The second took place on April 3rd 2012 in St. Mary's Hall in Lanesboro. The last

information evening took place on April 4th 2012 in Lus na Gréine Family Resource Centre in Granard.

Inputs to the information evenings were made by LCRL, the EDI Centre and Clann Credo/ISFC. These covered what social enterprise is, an outline of the SEL programme and how it would benefit participants. The EDI Centre gave their experience of setting up a social enterprise and Clann Credo also provided examples of social enterprises. LCRL spoke about the grants and supports available under the RDP.

Twenty-four people attended the event in Longford. These included representatives from a broad range of community organisations including Rathmhuire Resource Centre, REVAMP 3R Store, Shannonside Wood turners, Lanesboro Tourism Coop, Lus na Gréine FRC, Longford Historical Society, Longford Warmer Homes, EDI Centre, Wetlands Heritage Ireland, Longford Community Voluntary Forum, Longford Women's Link, Longford Tidy Towns, Killoe/Newtownforbes Group, Haggard Art & Culture, St. Helen's GAA, Ballynamuck Community Enterprise Centre, as well as a number of individuals in a personal capacity.

Ten people attended the event in Lanesboro. These included representatives from Shannonside Woodturners, Longford Warmer Homes and Lanesboro Tourism Co-operative as well as a number of individuals from the area.

Twelve people attended the event in Granard. These included individuals from Granard, Coolarty, Toneywarden, Ballynulty, Granard Town and representatives from Rathmhuire Resource Centre, Lus na Gréine FRC and Granard Motte Community Enterprise.

3.4 Outreach

In addition to the information evenings, Pat Kelleher, EDI Centre, contacted many community and voluntary groups to make them aware of SEL and to encourage them to take part. The EDI Centre also fielded enquiries from people who had heard about SEL through word of mouth.

3.5 Expressions of Interest

The Project Team believe that 14 expressions of interest would be needed to ensure the viability of the training workshops.

The promotional material produced for SEL included an Expression of Interest form for people interested in taking part in the programme to complete. The information evenings resulted in 12 expressions of interest. Subsequent outreach by Pat Kelleher generated other expressions of interest and by the start of the workshop programme, 17 expressions of interest had been received.

3.6 Champions

The members of the Advisory Group and Project Team acted as champions for the SEL Programme. In addition, local people from around the county were identified as possible advocates for the programme. These were invited to events and asked to promote SEL by bringing another one or two people along with them. They included people working with local community groups, community for a, parish newsletters, immigrant communities, volunteer centres and tourism projects

CHAPTER 4 PUBLIC SEMINARS

4.1 Introduction

In order to raise awareness about the possibilities for social enterprise and to foster a culture of social enterprise in the county, it was felt that a series of public seminars should be made available to all-comers. Three topics were chosen for these seminars. This chapter discusses the outcomes.

4.2 Promotion

A personal email was sent with the agendas for public seminars to those who attended the information evenings and focus groups. A notice about the seminars was also sent to ten community databases and to the Parish News.

The Community & Voluntary Forum highlighted the SEL programme at its AGM and they issued a reminder to members by email.

An A4 poster/notice was distributed to libraries.

Text messages and targeted individual phone calls and meetings of key people were held to encourage participation at SEL events.

An editorial appeared in the Longford Leader on Friday 18th May entitled “Smurfit Expert to address EDI Centre Event” in the lead up to the second seminar on Business planning. There was a further radio interview with Pat Kelleher on Radio Shannonside.

PR around these seminars included a radio interview with Senan Cooke of Dunhill Eco Park, one of the guest speakers, and a further radio interview with Pat Kelleher of the EDI Centre.

Three further pieces were published in the Longford Leader leading up to the first seminar and in between seminars.

4.3 Public Seminars

The public seminars were open to anyone interested in social enterprise. The first seminar was held on Saturday April 28th 2012 from 10am to 1pm in the EDI Centre Longford. The topic was *Recognising Opportunities for Social Enterprise*.

Twenty-eight people took part in the seminar, with a further 10 sending apologies. Participants were from Granard Motte Community Enterprise, Newtownforbes CE scheme, Longford Environmental Alliance, Lus na Gréine FRC, Dromard Development, East Meets West, Longford Centre for Independent Living, EDI Centre, Ardagh Heritage Centre, Wetlands Heritage Ireland, Longford Indoor Market, Beekeepers Association Longford, Longford Tourism, the Lions Club, Soccer Exchange, Longford Tidy Towns, Sherpack (private company), as well as five individuals interested in social enterprise.

It was facilitated by Sue Targett of Clann Credo/ISFC. She gave the background to the SEL programme. She gave examples of social enterprise projects in other counties and referred to reports in Longford that might lead to projects, i.e. LCRL Energy Report and the Co.

Longford Tourism Strategy. Her presentation highlighted potential projects mentioned in the reports.

The guest speakers were both from social enterprises and they were Senan Cooke of Dunhill Eco Park and Pat Kelleher from the EDI Centre. Senan Cooke was an inspirational speaker who gave the background to the Dunhill projects and put social enterprise in a national and European context. There was an animated group discussion about opportunities and unmet needs in the county. Hand outs were provided to support the discussion on ideas generation.

The second public seminar was held on the evening of May 17th 2012 from 7.30 pm to 10.30 pm in the EDI Centre. It was titled *Business Planning for Social Enterprises* and was facilitated by Professor Frank Roche from the Smurfit Business School.

Twenty-four people attended, with a further seven apologies received. Participants were from Coolarty, Ballinulty, Lisduff, Granard Town, Ardagh, Lanesboro, Longford Environmental Alliance, Granard Motte Community Enterprise, Longford Centre for Independent Living, EDI Centre, LCRL, EDI Catering, Longford Women's Link, Dromard Development Association, Lus na Gréine, Longford Tourism and Creative Ardagh. A number of people attended from some of these organisations.

The seminar took people through the business planning process in detail, why it was important and what the contents of a business plan should be. The guest speaker was Seamus McCormack of WestBic and Clar IRD, who has extensive experience of supporting start-up enterprises, including social enterprises. He spoke of his experience with Clar IRD and also his role in WestBic in assisting business planning. He outlined the range of projects in Mayo and the continuing development of new projects impressed all present and sparked a few ideas for projects in Longford. Hand outs were provided to the participants to take back to their organisations.

The third public seminar took place on May 30th 2012 from 7.30pm to 10.30 pm in the EDI Centre. Its title was *Measuring Social Impact*. Seventeen people took part. It was facilitated by Paul O'Sullivan, CEO of Clann Credo/ISFC.

Seventeen attended the seminar with a further 12 apologies. Participants were from Ballymahon, Drumlish, EDI Centre, UCL Harps, Ballymahon AFC, Creative Ardagh, Granard Motte Community Enterprise, Longford Environmental Alliance, LCRL, Wetlands Heritage Ireland, EDI Catering and Lus na Gréine. Some of these organisations had more than one participant.

Paul O'Sullivan covered the role of evaluation, why it is necessary to measure impact and the importance of defining impact. He outlined clearly the key requirements and the tools and methods involved in evaluation. The feedback and questions posed by the audience indicated that for many they were new to the concepts and practice required in social evaluation and that they had a new understanding of the subject.

The guest speaker was Rick Rijdsdijk of Social Value Lab from Scotland. He gave a presentation entitled 'Introduction to Social Return On Investment (SROI)'. He gave a comprehensive outline of methods used in social impact measurement. He introduced Social Value Lab, their work and experience to date. He then looked at the background to SROI, its

usefulness and limitations and finished with prime examples of SROI. He outlined the movement from grants to contracts with community groups since the nineties and a shift from measuring outputs to measuring outcomes. The use of SROI for strategic planning, allocation of resources and funding application was clearly defined.

Following on from questions and answers Paul O’Sullivan provided topics for group discussion around intentions in setting up social enterprises, the difference social enterprises are hoping to make and the signs and/ or signals that will demonstrate success. The topics were discussed by the groups over a cup of tea followed by a plenary discussion.

CHAPTER 5 WORKSHOPS

5.1 Introduction

An active campaign of recruitment to encourage local people to participate on the SEL Programme took place right up to the first workshop which was held in June 2012. The purpose of the workshops was to support people with social enterprise ideas through the feasibility testing and business planning stages of their start-ups. This chapter describes each of the workshops. In between workshop sessions, facilitated peer support group sessions were held and these are described in the next chapter.

5.2 Recruitment

Twenty-six individuals with 17 ideas signed up to take part in the SEL workshop programme and peer support sessions. The table below summarises the projects.

SEL Participants

Participant	Idea
Wetlands Heritage Ireland (3 participants)	Extension and development of tourism heritage project at Corlae Trackway Centre.
Ardagh Creativity (2 participants)	Heritage centre and café offering arts and crafts courses
Music Club (2 participants)	Music venue and lessons, music therapy, workshops
Granard Motte Community Enterpriset (1 participant)	Tourism heritage project – interpretative centre, café, walks and talks
Longford Environmental Alliance (1 participant)	Community garden, community allotments, community exchange shop
Lus na Gréine (one participant)	Charity shop
REVAMP 3R (2 participants)	White goods recycling
Soccer Exchange (1 participant)	Recycling of soccer balls and boots
CASA (2 participants)	Online second hand book sales
EDI (1 participant)	Enclude franchise to supply software to community sector
Angels homecare (1 participant)	Home care services
Centre for Independent Living (3 participants)	Home care services
Drumlisk Community Pavilion (2 participants)	Integrated retirement village
St. Christopher’s Service (1 participant)	Greeting, Xmas, gift cards
EDI Catering (1 participant)	Outside catering business and school meals provision
St. Mary’s Sports Campus (1 participant)	Community sports facility
Life Coaching (1 participant)	Life coaching service for the community sector

Subsequently, two other individuals with an idea to insulate people’s homes came onto the programme at the second workshop.

5.3 Workshop Outline

The feedback from the information evenings and seminars feed into the design of the detailed SEL workshops.

Originally four workshops were planned as follows:

- *The Product and Market*. This was a full day held in June 2012. Twenty-six people participated in the workshop.
- *Structure and Operations*. This was a full day held in July 2012. Sixteen people took part.
- *Financial Planning*. This was a full day held in September 2012. Fifteen people took part.
- *Human Resources and Governance*: A half day was devoted to Human Resources and a half day to Governance. Both workshops were held on the same day in November. Eighteen people took part.

Feedback and discussion during the workshops and peer led sessions made it evident that two other workshops would be needed to fully equip participants to set up social enterprises. The extra workshops that were added were as follows:

- *Marketing on a Shoestring*. This was a full day held in October 2012. Thirteen people took part.
- *Pitching the Idea*: This was a half day held in May 2013. Nine people took part.

Hand outs were developed for each of the workshops for the participants to take away afterwards.

5.3.1 Workshop 1: Testing the Product and Market

Further to many phone calls, broadcast emails, meetings with potential participants the first workshop *Testing the Product and Market* took place on Wednesday 13th June 2012 from 10am to 4.30 pm in the Longford EDI Centre. The day was facilitated by Jennifer Hennessy from Clann Credo/ISFC and breakout sessions and feedback were co-facilitated by Sue Targett and Mary Walsh.

Twenty-four people with 16 enterprise ideas attended the workshop (one other group that had expressed an interest in taking part was not able to attend that day). A number of those attending had been at information evenings or public seminars. The participants who signed in were as follows¹:

EDI Catering/Camlin Catering (3 participants)
REVAMP 3R (2 participants)
Wetlands Heritage (1 participant)
St. Mary’s Community Campus (1 participant)
Drumlish Retirement Village/Drumlish Community Pavilion (2 participants)

¹ Not all participants signed the sign-in sheet.

The Mental Health Centre (1 participant)
A musician with a social enterprise idea
CASA (2 participants)
Longford Centre for Independent Living (3 participants)
Ballymahon AFC (1 participant)
Longford Environmental Alliance (1 participant)
A life coach with a social enterprise idea
Creative Ardagh (1 participant)
St. Christopher’s Services (1 participant)
Edgeworthstown District Development (1 participant)
Granard Motte Community Enterprise (1 participant)

The workshop involved a mixture of presentations and facilitated discussions. The participants looked at what level of knowledge they had on their market, who their target customer is, the size of the market, etc. Groups were asked to gauge how easy or hard it would be to gather this information and then were given homework on researching their market and direction on how to complete this research. Common pitfalls in terms of assessing the market and how to research it were outlined as was how to research the market and local sign-posting to support this.

A similar breakout session was facilitated in relation to who the group’s competition is and what price their target customer would be willing to pay for their product/service. Likewise the group was given homework to complete in this regard and guidance on how to complete this research.

The guest speaker was Veronica Barrett, CEO of Roscommon Home Services who gave a presentation about her organisation which is a social enterprise which the group found very useful.

5.3.2 Workshop 2: Operations & Structures

The second workshop took place on Thursday 26th July 2012 from 10am to 4.30pm in the Longford EDI Centre. It was facilitated by Ann Clarke and Jennifer Hennessy of Clann Credo/ISFC and Mary Walsh, an independent facilitator. The guest speaker was Billy Gavin from Action Against Addiction North East, a social enterprise.

There were 16 participants representing 11 ideas. Participants who signed in were as follows:

Angels Housekeeping/Keeping House (2 participants)
Wetlands Heritage Ireland (1 participant)
Drumlish Retirement Village/Drumlish Community Pavilion (1 participant)
Music Club (2 participants)
Creative Ardagh (2 participants)
Community Campus Edgeworthstown (2 participants)
St. Mary’s Community Campus (1 participant)
Lus na Gréine (2 participants)
Longford Warmer Homes (1 participant)
EDI Catering/Camlin Catering (1 participant)
EDU Centre (1 participant)

The workshop primarily used a series of break-out exercises to assist the participants to work through how they would reach their customers and what resources (physical, human, distribution, etc.) they would need to do this.

The participants broke into three groups generally clustered by tourism/heritage ideas, environmental ideas, home care and other ideas in order to aid networking, sharing of information and potential for co-ordination or co-operation.

5.3.3 Workshop 3: Financial Planning

The workshop was delivered on Wednesday 12th September 2012 from 10am to 4.30pm in the Longford EDI Centre. It was facilitated by Jim Boyle of Clann Credo with the support of Mary Walsh. The guest speakers were Tracey Hannon of Clann Credo and Alan Shanley of LCRL.

There were 15 participants. Those who signed in were:

Creative Ardagh (1 participant)
Angels Housekeeping/Keeping House (1 participant)
Music Club (2 participants)
EDI Catering/Camlin Catering (2 participants)
REVAMP 3 R (1 participant)
Granard Motte Community Enterprise (1 participant)
Lus na Gréine (2 participants)
Ballymahon AFC (1 participant)
Longford Environmental Alliance (1 participant)
Longford Centre for Independent Living (1 participant)

The workshop used a combination of slide presentations, hand-outs and break-out exercises. It explored why financial planning is important, managing cash, budgeting and cash flow forecasting, funding strategy, tax, profit and loss and balance sheets. Group work was used to develop a sample cash flow and explore the impact of a change in assumptions on the cash flow and to develop income and expenditure accounts. The link between sales and marketing potential and the projected financial revenue was stressed.

Tracey Hannon spoke about the work of Clann Credo and what it looks for in assessing the viability of social enterprises. Alan Shanley of LCRL gave an input on the funding available for social enterprises including soft supports, feasibility studies and capital funding.

The day concluded with an overview of some of the major pitfalls to avoid in financial planning.

5.3.4 Workshop 4: Marketing on a Shoe String

The need for a workshop on marketing emerged from participant feedback at earlier workshops and peer support sessions where they sought more support about how to get their products or services to market.

The fourth workshop covered this topic and was a full-day session held in the Longford EDI Centre on Wednesday 24th October 2012 from 10am to 4.30pm in the Longford EDI Centre.

It was facilitated by Gert Ackerman from Clann Credo/ISFC. The guest speaker was Maria Kyte from Suir Valley Railway, a social enterprise.

There were 13 participants².

The workshop covered the key principles in marketing and then explored different ways to communicate with customers and the public. The input from the guest speaker, Maria Kyte, dovetailed very well with the workshop content as it addressed the marketing strategy of the Suir Valley Railway and how it has evolved over time.

The workshop introduced participants to the concept of marketing. It covered understanding the marketing mix – product strategies, pricing strategies, distribution strategies and promotional strategies. This was followed by a group exercise on the marketing mix. It then explored building your brand – what a brand is, what the elements of a brand are and how to create a visual brand identity. This was followed by a group discussion about branding. Creating a marketing plan was examined – the importance of a plan, elements of a marketing plan, situation analysis, knowing and segmenting the target market. This was followed by a group exercise on creating a plan. Finally, marketing in the digital age was covered – websites, social media, email marketing and online advertising.

Workshop 5: Human Resource Management & Good Governance

The fifth workshop involved a half-day session on *Human Resource Management and Good Governance*. It was held on Wednesday 7th November 2012 from 9am to 1pm in the Longford EDI Centre and was facilitated by Paul O’Sullivan, CEO of Clann Credo.

There were 18 participants. Those that signed in were as follows:

Angels Housekeeping (2 participants)
EDI Catering (1 participant)
Longford Warmer Homes (1 participant)
Life coaching (2 participants)
Granard Motte Community Enterprise (1 participant)
REVAMP 3R (2 participants)
EDI Centre (1 participant)
Longford Community Voluntary Forum (1 participant)
Drumlsh Retirement Village/Drumlsh Community Pavilion (1 participant)
Lus na Gréine (2 participants)
Creative Ardagh (1 participant)
Granard Motte Community Enterprise (1 participant)
Longford Centre for Independent Living (1 participant)

The workshop linked governance and being an employer together in a way that the participants found very relevant and useful. It covered what governance is, the key principles, why it is important and who is involved. There was group exercises and discussion about key areas of obligation and responsibilities of the governing body. Reference was made to the Governance Code and links to it were provided. The human

² No sign up sheet is available for this workshop.

resource component of the workshop examined the role of the Board as employer, employment law, complaints and grievances, disciplinary matters and mediation.

In the afternoon Rick Rijdsijk of Social Value Lab presented a session to SEL participants on Impact Measurement as part of the overall external evaluation of the SEL programme.

CHAPTER 6 PEER MENTORING SUPPORT & OTHER SUPPORTS

6.1 Introduction

An independent facilitator based in Co. Longford, Mary Walsh, was contracted by Clann Credo/ISFC to provide peer support and one-to-one support to SEL participants. This chapter describes the peer support process. Other types of support that were also provided and these are also described.

6.2 Peer Mentoring Support Sessions

There was a gap of approximately 6 sixweeks between the SEL workshops in order to provide participants with the opportunity to work on their ideas and plans. At three-week intervals in between each workshop event, a facilitated peer support session was provided to assist participants with issues they encountered and to keep them motivated.

The first peer mentoring support sessions took place on July 4th 2012. There were two support meetings held on 4th July, each lasting two hours.

In total, 17 participants attended, representing 13 ideas as follows:

Lus Na Gréine (1 participant)
REVAMP 3R (2 participants)
EDI Catering (2 participants)
Drumlisk Community Pavilion (1 participant)
EDI Centre (1 participant)
Longford Musicians (2 participants)
St Mary's Community Campus (3 participants)
Longford Centre for Independent Living (1 participant)
Life Coaching (1 participant)
Longford Environmental Alliance (1 participant)
Creative Ardagh (2 participants)

Five other groups were unable to attend and either arranged one-to-one support sessions with Mary Walsh or sent in home work for her to assess and provide feedback.

The sessions began with a group contract whereby participants were asked about their expectations of a peer mentoring support session. Most wanted help and advice; a chance to focus on the idea; space for reflection; the opportunity to see if a project/concept is moving forward in the right direction; and sharing of skills within the group of participants.

The discussion allowed participants to put forward specific problems for group discussion. This was considered very beneficial for all present because of the diversity of thoughts and perspectives in the group. From the discussion it emerged that there were requirements for access to specialist expertise, e.g. an architect for one group, and marketing support.

An architect was sourced to provide support to Lus na Gréine. The issue of business mentors was brought up at Advisory Group meetings and is addressed in the next chapter.

The second peer support session took place on August 14th 2012 from 6pm to 8pm facilitated by Mary Walsh. Twelve individuals took part representing nine ideas as follows:

Lus Na Gréine (2 participants)
REVAMP 3R (1 participant)
EDI Catering (1 participant)
Drumlish Community Pavilion (2 participants)
Longford Musicians (1 participant)
EDI Centre (1 participant)
Angels Housekeeping (1 participant)
Longford Warmer Homes (1 participant)
Creative Ardagh (2 participants)

Apologies were received from Life Coaching, Wetlands Heritage Ireland, Longford Environmental Alliance, Granard Motte Community Enterprise, St Mary's Community Campus and Longford Centre for Independent Living.

The evening commenced by clarifying the agenda with participants and recapping the workshop on *Operations & Structure*. This was followed by a review of a sample business plan. There was then a break-out session for the groups to conduct a SWOT analysis of their social enterprise ideas followed by feedback. Some of the key opportunities and threats that were similar for all the social enterprises were discussed.

Some of the common opportunities identified by participants included networking opportunities developing amongst projects with similar themes, e.g. recycling projects; local knowledge and expertise and sharing of same, e.g. Census 2011 statistics were distributed and shared amongst the groups; access to labour market schemes; access to companies with CSR policy for services/products pro bono e.g. REVAMP 3R's relationship with IKEA; joint promotion of social enterprises, e.g. tourism related projects. The participants also discussed the opportunity that the new Social Enterprise Funds at EU level might provide and how to ensure Ireland accesses these funds.

Some of the common threats identified were dependency on volunteerism (seen as both an opportunity and threat) and the challenge of managing voluntary and paid workers so as to avoid dissent within a project; access to seed capital (not loans that have to be repaid) to ease the transition to becoming a social enterprise; accessing grant funding: especially the time and energy required for application and drawdown of grant aid; culture of grant dependency in Ireland; fear of failure; need for the general public to be knowledgeable about social enterprise and its benefits in building communities; legal and insurance obligations were perceived to be costly.

The last session involved input and discussion on how to write up sections in the business plan about staffing and operations. All of the groups left with one section of the business plan completed and an organisation chart for staffing was identified that could be easily completed by each group.

The third peer mentoring session to reinforce the learning from the *Financial Planning workshop* took place on October 9th 2012 from 6pm until 8pm in the Longford EDI Centre and was facilitated by Mary Walsh.

Ten people from each of the following groups attended:

Lus Na Gréine (1 participant)
Soccer Exchange (1 participant)
REVAMP 3R (1 participant)
EDI Catering (1 participant)
Longford Centre for Independent Living (1 participant)
Drumlish Community Pavilion (1 participant)
Longford Musicians (1 participant)
Longford Warmer Homes (1 participant)
Longford Environmental Alliance (1 participant)
Granard Motte Community Enterprise (1 participant)

The session commenced with a preview of the workshop on *Marketing on a Shoestring* that was to be held on October 24th 2012 facilitated by Gert Ackermann. A background to The Wheel organisation and the Funding database was given as some of the participants were not aware of the organisation or its function.

As a follow-up to the workshop on *Financial Planning* a Power point presentation with hand-outs and exercises on income and expenditure budgets, cash flow forecasts and an example of how to work out breakeven point was given by the facilitator, Mary Walsh.

The session also highlighted the importance of completing draft outline business plans with preliminary financial forecasts that would be made available to an assessment panel by December 7th 2012. An overview of how Phase 6 and 7 of the SEL programme, which focussed on business planning and pitching ideas was given.

The final peer mentoring support session facilitated by Mary Walsh took place on November 21st 2012. Ten participants took part as follows:

Lus Na Gréine (1 participant)
Life Coaching (1 participant)
REVAMP 3R (1 participant)
EDI Catering/Camlin Catering (2 participants)
EDI Centre (1 participant)
Drumlish Community Pavilion (2 participants)
Longford Environmental Alliance (1 participant)
Angels Housekeeping/Keeping House (1 participant)

Apologies were received from Creative Ardagh, Granard Motte Community Enterprise and Longford Centre for Independent Living.

The session covered follow-up from both the marketing workshop and the governance/HR workshop. It also covered what the participants needed to do in order to finalise their draft business plans to submit for review by the assessment panel. The facilitator went over the criteria for assessment of business plans and concentrated on market analysis as all participants were finding this aspect of the business plan difficult to write. Group work was

used to review and made comments on each other's business plans and participants found this to be a very helpful exercise.

6.3 One-to-one Support Sessions

As well as facilitating the peer support sessions, Mary Walsh also meet with participants on a one-to-one basis when requested to provide support with the business planning process. She met with the following groups on a one-to-one basis over the course of the SEL programme:

- REVAMP 3R.
- Creative Ardagh.
- Granard Motte Community Enterprise.
- Longford Centre for Independent Living.
- EDI Catering.
- Royal Canal Kayaks (a project that entered the SEL programme towards the end).

Groups submitted draft business plans and she provided feedback and suggestions on how they might be improved.

6.4 Business Mentors

The need for specific business expertise was identified for a number of the projects. This was brought to the Advisory Group on a number of occasions and mentors were identified for three groups by the CEB. These included James Burke who provided retail advice to Lus na Gréine, Tara Walker who provided advice to EDI Catering about public procurement and tendering processes and Rob Maher who provided business advice and advice on how to structure the different aspects of the Creative Ardagh enterprise.

Facilitation skills for Longford Centre for Independent Living and for St Mary's Community Campus were also recommended. Helen Emmerson from the FEM project was approached in this regard and she facilitated Longford Centre for Independent Living to explore its future viability and how to operate in a practical business-like manner.

CHAPTER 7 BUSINESS PLAN ASSESSMENTS & POST SEL SUPPORTS

7.1 Introduction

The Advisory Group discussed the feasibility of the various projects towards the end of the workshop programme. Up to this point the programme has been kept as inclusive as possible and all were made welcome. Individuals and groups had been able to attend some or all of the workshops. Towards the end of the workshop and peer mentoring support programme the emphasis was very much on supporting groups to develop their business plans as this was considered key proving which projects were feasible and likely to commence operations at the end of the SEL programme. This chapter sets out the process used to assess the business plans and subsequent support provided to groups.

7.2 Development of Phases 6 of SEL

Following consultations with the Advisory Group, Clann Credo wrote to LCRL outlining proposed changes to the final two phases of SEL. The revisions addressed the issues that were raised regarding the feasibility of projects. It was agreed that for the remainder of SEL, resources should be focused on projects showing real potential. An assessment process was developed to assess the preliminary business plans to aid this process.

7.3 Assessment of Preliminary Business Plans

After completing the workshops and peer led sessions in 2012, participants were expected to develop preliminary business plans for their social enterprise ideas. These plans were submitted for consideration by the Assessment Panel in December 2012.

The Assessment Panel comprised a representative from LCRL, the County Enterprise Board and Clann Credo/IFSC. The Panel met on December 17th to go through each business plan in detail in order to determine future support needs and to provide feedback for each project.

A total of 10 plans³ were put forward for consideration as follows:

Project	Social Enterprise Idea
Creative Ardagh	Arts and crafts
Royal Kayak Canal Hire	Kayak touring
Lus na Gréine	Café/shop
REVAMP 3R	White goods recycling
Keeping House	Home help for older people
Longford Centre for Independent Living	Personal assistance for people with disabilities and others
Camlin Catering	School dinners and other catering
Drumlish Community Pavilion	Day centre and related services
Longford Environmental Alliance	Garden allotments
St. Mary's Community Campus	Community Hall

The criteria used by the Assessment Panel to review the outline business plans included clear identification of the product and market and the route to the market, the quality and capacity

³ Granard Motte Community Enterprise was in the process of a feasibility study and was awaiting its completion before submitting a business plan.

of the team, realism of the operations and financial plans, articulation of the structure and jobs potential. The weightings were determined by the Assessment Panel and projects were scored on a scale of 1 to 3 where 1 = not feasible, 2 = potentially feasible but more work required, 3 = good prospect of start-up.

The outcome of the assessment process was that eight projects were considered to have potential as social enterprises. These were as follows:

Project	Outcome of Assessment Process
Creative Ardagh	Considered to have potential as a social enterprise.
Royal Canal Kayak Hire	Considered to have potential as a social enterprise.
Lus na Gréine	Considered to have potential as a social enterprise.
REVAMP 3R	Considered to have potential as a social enterprise.
Keeping House (formerly Angels Housekeeping)	Considered to have potential as a social enterprise.
Longford Centre for Independent Living	Considered to have potential as a social enterprise.
Camlin Catering (formerly EDI Catering)	Considered to have potential as a social enterprise.
Drumlisk Community Pavilion	Considered to have potential as a social enterprise but more work was needed on the idea.
Granard Motte Community Enterprise	Was in the process of conducting a feasibility study with grant support from LCRL and upon completion of this study it presented its business plan in 2013 and was assessed in the final assessment phase.
Longford Environmental Alliance	Considered to have potential as a community project but not as a social enterprise.
St. Mary's Community Campus	Insufficiently clear or developed idea to be assessed as a social enterprise.

Supports identified for projects included:

- Feasibility study grants (3, including Granard Motte Community Enterprise that had such a study underway and was awaiting results before presenting its business plan).
- Business mentors (2 projects).

7.4 One-to-one Support

Individual verbal and written feedback based on the outcomes of the assessment process was also provided to each of the projects by the SEL Training Co-ordinator in January 2013. This included how to access potential supports such as feasibility study grants or mentors, eligibility for grant aid, challenging underlying assumptions, outlining areas where greater clarity was required particularly in respect of markets and marketing, and requesting that each

project develop a one page summary of their business proposition. Verbal feedback on the interim feasibility study developed for Granard Motte Community Enterprise was also provided and areas outlined where further work would be required.

The group were given a deadline of the end of March 2013 to resubmit revised business plans. In the interim, regular contact was made with them to see what progress they were making.

On April 11th 2013, a series of 45 minute clinics were provided by the CEO of Clann Credo/ISFC and the SEL Training Co-ordinator to the eight organisations that resubmitted business plans. These clinics discussed areas of weakness or challenges and how they might be addressed.

The groups that took part in the clinics were Keeping House, Camlin Catering, REVAMP 3R, Lus na Gréine, Creative Ardagh, Drumlish Community Pavilion and Longford Centre for Independent Living.

7.5 Follow-on Work by Groups

Following on from the one-to-one clinics each of the groups worked on their business plans.

Creative Ardagh accessed the services of a mentor through the County Enterprise Board, which they found to be very useful. As a result, Creative Ardagh explored the feasibility of developing three separate legal entities to provide a range of services including art classes and art-related events using a partnership structure, a local craft network and craft shop using a co-operative structure and a company limited by guarantee to manage the heritage centre including the hiring out of rooms and its other facilities.

Camlin Catering conducted additional market research with local schools on tendering for school meal provision and commenced pilot cookery demonstration classes. Two primary schools expressed an interest in receiving a tender for Camlin Catering.

Keeping House commenced pilot operations using volunteers to work out what services would be provided and how they would be provided, resulting in much greater clarity over the target market, service provision and pricing structure.

REVAMP 3R visited other recycling centres including Bryson in Belfast and Clondalkin Recycling and Rehab in order to tease out the most appropriate strategy for white goods recycling. Unfortunately, a key part of the original plan, i.e. provision of training in white goods certification and repair through a FAS supported programme, could not go ahead as planned and this has resulted in a rethink of the business strategy. Subsequently, after conducting research REVAMP 3R was able to identify other training certification options.

Longford Centre for Independent Living identified the number of potential customers and their requirements as well as pricing structure.

Drumlish Community Pavilion undertook further market research and held public consultation meetings in order to identify suitable premises. This latter issue proved to be a major challenge for the group. The group explored how existing buildings, e.g. community hall, sports centre, etc., could be modified and adapted to meet the needs of older people.

Lus na Gréine investigated the practicalities of setting up a café in an area beside the Resource Centre. They concluded that it was not feasible but that the concept of a monthly pop-up shop selling crafts and local produce would be and as a result the business strategy was re-worked to reflect this.

The individual that was the driving force behind Royal Canal Kayaks obtained full time employment and was not therefore in a position to pursue the project but hoped to do so in 2014.

St. Mary's Sports Campus held a board meeting to discuss the SEL project and subsequently wrote to the SEL programme indicating that they no longer wished to pursue the social enterprise idea.

7.6 Workshop on Pitching the Business Plan

A workshop on *Pitching the business plan*, including developing a one page summary and elevator statement was held in the EDI Centre on May 8th 2013. It was facilitated by Ann Clarke of Clann Credo/ISFC.

There were 12 participants. The groups that were represented included:

Creative Ardagh (2 participants)
Camlin Catering (2 participants)
Keeping House (2 participants)
REVAMP 3R (2 participants)
Lus na Gréine (1 participant)
Drumlish Community Pavilion (1 participant)
Longford Centre for Independent Living (2 participants)

The workshop took participants through the process of critically reviewing their plans to make sure they contained key information and clear messages.

The do's and don't's of pitching to an audience was also covered along with some examples of elevator statements.

Participants broke out into working groups to work on their own pitches, summaries and elevator statements and then engaged in some practice pitching.

7.7 Final Assessment of Business Plans

Following the workshop on *Pitching the Business Plan*, groups finalised their business plans and submitted them to the SEL team by May 27th 2013 for circulation to an Expert Panel.

This Panel consisted of three people nominated by Clann Credo and LCRL to assess the plans and to hear the pitches. These were Seamus Butler chairperson of LCRL and Longford Chamber of Commerce, Derek Scanlon, Head of Intermediary Services of RSM Farrell Grant Sparks and Paul O'Sullivan, CEO of Clann Credo. The assessment criteria used by the Panel included the following:

- Product/service is clearly identified.

- Market and customer base is clearly identified.
- Route to market is clearly identified.
- Quality and capacity of team.
- Structure is articulated.
- Operations plan is realistic and implementable.
- Capacity to commence start-up in a reasonable timeframe.
- Underlying assumptions are realistic.
- Financial projections are realistic.
- Jobs potential.

The SEL participants were made aware of these assessment criteria.

The Panel devised a scoring system to mark each of the projects presented to them. This scoring system was as follows:

- A possible 20 out of 100 marks went towards sustainability.
- A possible 20 out of 100 marks went towards viability.
- A possible 20 out of 100 marks went towards community development potential.
- A possible 20 out of 100 marks went towards promoters.
- A possible 10 out of 100 marks went towards delivery of the presentation.
- A possible 10 out of 100 marks went towards the business plan.

Groups were competing for start-up seed fund totalling €7,100.

Eight groups made a pitch as follows:

- Keeping House.
- Creative Ardagh.
- Camlin Catering.
- Lus na Gréine.
- Longford Centre for Independent Living.
- REVAMP 3R.
- Granard Motte Community Enterprise.
- Drumlish Community Pavilion.

Drumlish Community Pavilion had completely revised its thinking about its health pavilion idea and was not in a position to present a revised business plan, but they did make a presentation on their plans for proceeding with their revised idea which was the provision of day care services for the elderly.

Granard Motte Community Enterprise submitted a feasibility study that had been carried out by an independent expert and made a presentation on it to the expert panel.

All of the other groups submitted finalised business plans and made pitches based on these to the Expert Panel.

The Expert Panel was encouraged to see so many projects still involved in SEL and noted that the groups had come a long way since commencing the SEL programme.

The social enterprises are summarised below:

- Creative Ardagh: provision of art and creativity activities for all age groups. It will also support the establishment of a craft network and shop and it established a separate committee to oversee the running of the heritage centre.
- Camlin Catering: provision of school meals to local primary schools, cookery classes and demonstrations, particularly for low income families. In the longer term, it plans to provide catering services for functions such as parties and funerals.
- Keeping House: provision of home services for older people to enable them to remain in their homes for as long as possible, e.g. garden care, repairs and maintenance, shopping, cleaning, etc.
- REVAMP 3R: provision of training for young people to test and refurbish second hand white goods and sale these as part of its existing furniture range.
- Longford Centre for Independent Living: provision of personal assistants to people of all ages with physical and sensory disabilities.
- Drumlish Community Pavilion: continued exploration of how the local community centre can be refurbished to provide a day centre that will meet the needs of older people.
- Lus na Gréine: provision of a pop-up retail outlet to sell second hand clothing, bric-a-brac, etc. in order to generate income to support its family services.
- Granard Motte Community Enterprise: planning to establish a cultural and heritage centre and park including café, craft shop, heritage centre and Anglo-Norman settlement.

7.8 Post SEL Supports

The Advisory Group met on May 30th 2013 to discuss support mechanisms post the SEL programme.

It was agreed that a SEL network for existing and emerging social enterprises would be established. This network would be facilitated by the EDI Centre.

Access to business mentoring as required will also be provided through the County Enterprise Board and LCRL.

LCRL also intends to provide on-going assistance and encouragement in the overall culture of social enterprise in Co. Longford.

CHAPTER 8 AWARDS

8.1 Introduction

The original intention of the last phase of SEL was to hold a show case event of the social enterprises that completed the programme. As the programme progressed it became evident that seed capital was an issue for participants with social enterprise ideas. The possibility of having a competition for seed capital followed by an awards ceremony instead of a showcase event was discussed with the Advisory Group and subsequently Clann Credo submitted a revised plan for phase 7 which LCRL accepted. This chapter describes this final phase.

8.2 Seed Capital Fund

A seed fund of up to €7,100 was made available under the SEL programme.

Eight projects were put forward for the seed capital fund and eight awards were made by the Expert Panel as follows:

Award	Group	Idea
First place, €2,000	REVAMP 3R	White goods recycling training and retail project.
Second place, €1,500 each	Lus na Gréine	Pop up shop.
	Keeping House for its	Home services for the elderly.
Fourth place, €500 each	Creative Ardagh	Arts and crafts centre.
	Granard Motte Community Enterprise	Norman settlement tourism project.
	Longford Centre Independent Living	Personal assistants for people with disabilities.
	Camlin Catering	School dinners and catering services.
Eight place, €100	Drumlisk Community Pavilion	Day care services for the elderly.

The social enterprise idea put forward by the winning group, REVAMP 3R, was considered to have met the award criteria and the project had excellent prospects of starting, of being viable and sustainable, of having good community development capacity and promoters committed to and capable of delivering the business plan. The project proposed to address both social needs, i.e. training of young unemployed people and provision of safe, quality white goods at affordable prices to low income families and an environmental need, i.e. recycling of white goods that were going to land fill. It had the potential to create training places as well as part-time employment and to secure existing jobs in the REVAMP store.

8.3 Awards Ceremony

Radio interviews and other forms of publicity were used to highlight the projects that completed the programme and that are starting up. A brochure outlining the projects and their journey was produced detailing the finalists. This brochure is presented in the appendix to this report.

An event to hand out awards and certificates of completion by the Minister for Social Enterprise, Sean Sherlock, took place on 15th July 2013.

The Minister spoke about the potential of social enterprise and one of the programme facilitators summarised the achievements of the projects to date.

Twenty-five people attended the event including representatives from Clann Credo/ISFC, EDI Centre, LCRL, Longford Chamber of Commerce, SIPTU, Longford Women's Link and the projects that completed the SEL Programme.

Each SEL participant was presented with their certificate of completion by the Minister. Twenty-one certificates were handed out. The recipients were Valerie Moran, Elizabeth Moore, Mary Harton, Pauline Rogers, Tom Chapman, Padraic Gallogy, Geraldine Greene, Veronica McGee, Bride Murphy, Siobhan Coppinger, Mary Morrissey, Jennifer Hutchinson, Mary Walsh, Paul Flood, Fr. Simon Cadam, Trish Gettings, Sean Kilbride, Sadie Sheridan, Annette Corkery, Ann Gerety Smyth and Ger Walsh.

The awards for the seed capital fund were then presented by the Minister.

The Longford Leader had a two page article on the event the following week including photographs.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the main lessons from operating the SEL programme, the outcomes achieved by the programme and makes recommendations for the future.

9.2 Awareness Raising

A wide range of organisations were made aware of the programme as well as a wider audience through radio interviews. The use of local databases, local sources of publicity and local contact points were important components of the awareness raising strategy. The awareness campaign covered information about social enterprise as well as the SEL programme.

Forty-six people attended the information evenings held around the county and 69 people attended the public seminars. While not all of these people went on to take part in the SEL programme, their awareness and understanding of social enterprise should have increased and it may be that as a result they will consider establishing a social enterprise sometime in the future.

9.3 Participation

While the workshop programme was free to participants, people were required to sign up for SEL. It was hoped that at least 15 people would take part in the programme. As it turned out, 26 people representing 17 ideas signed up to take part.

Some of these people demonstrated real commitment to the idea of setting up a social enterprise and they attended as many of the workshops and peer mentoring support sessions as possible. Ten groups submitted business plans for assessment and one other submitted a full feasibility study. The preliminary assessment showed that one project would make a good community project but was not viable as a social enterprise and that another required more focus. The driving force in one project obtained full-time employment and was unable to complete the SEL programme but hoped to be in a position to pursue their social enterprise idea in the future. Eight groups submitted final business plans and received awards. Twenty-one individuals received certificates of completion for the SEL programme.

As the SEL programme progressed it became more apparent that some groups needed specialist supports, e.g. architect, archaeologist, retail expertise, etc. Experts were accessed through LCRL and the County Enterprise Board to support these projects. These helped groups to hone their ideas, and in some cases to change them.

The business planning process was an important tool that helped groups to work through the feasibility of their ideas. For some groups, it became apparent that their idea was not suitable as a social enterprise or was not feasible and they dropped out of the programme. In the case of two groups, it became apparent that there was insufficient support from the boards of management to carry through with the development of a social enterprise. However, it is hoped that by taking part in some of the workshops, these groups will have acquired new business planning skills that will be useful to their existing organisations.

9.4 Skills

The public seminars and workshops aimed to provide participants with the tools and skills to test the feasibility of a social enterprise idea and to develop a suitable business plan. Hand-outs that participants could take away from each session were a feature of the SEL programme.

The evaluation scores show that participants valued the content of the SEL programme and found the public seminars and workshops interesting.

Content of Public Seminars & Workshops

Seminar/Workshop Topic	Score on Content of Seminar/Workshop					Mean score ⁴
	Boring 1	2	3	4	Interesting 5	
	Number of responses					
Recognising opportunities (N=18)	-	-	-	5 (28%)	13 (72%)	4.72
Business planning (N=16)	-	-	-	7 (44%)	9 (56%)	4.56
Evaluation & social impact measurement (N=12)	-	-	1 (8%)	6 (50%)	5 (42%)	4.33
Testing the product & market (N=20)	-	-	-	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	4.50
Operations & structure (N=15)	-	-	-	4 (27%)	11 (73%)	4.73
Financial planning (N=9)	-	-	-	3 (33%)	6 (67%)	4.67
Marketing on a shoe string (N=10)	-	-	-	1 (10%)	9 (90%)	4.90
HR & governance (N=15)	-	-	-	4 (27%)	11 (73%)	4.73

Participants also considered the workshops to be extremely useful.

Usefulness of Workshops

Seminar/Workshop Topic	Score on Usefulness of Seminar/Workshop					Mean score ⁵
	Not useful 1	2	3	4	Useful 5	
	Number of responses					
Recognising opportunities (N=18)	-	-	1 (5%)	7 (39%)	10 (56%)	4.50
Business planning (N=16)	-	-	1 (6%)	5 (31%)	10 (63%)	4.56
Evaluation & social impact measurement (N=12)	-	-	2 (17%)	3 (25%)	7 (58%)	4.42
Testing the product & market (N=20)	-	-	-	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	4.55

⁴ Range of 1 to 5 where 1=boring and 5=interesting. The higher the mean score the more interesting the course was.

⁵ Range of 1 to 5 where 1=not useful and 5=useful. The higher the mean score the more useful the course was.

Operations & structure (N=15)	-	-	-	3 (20%)	12 (80%)	4.80
Financial planning (N=9)	-	-	1 (11%)	1 (11%)	7 (78%)	4.67
Marketing on a shoe string (N=10)	-	-	-	1 (10%)	9 (90%)	4.90
HR & governance (N=15)	-	-	-	2 (13%)	13 (87%)	4.87

As well as new social enterprises, the programme supported existing organisations to become more entrepreneurial. For example, Lus na Gréine operates in a sector that is traditionally reliant on grants. The development of its pop-up shop idea will help it to reduce its reliance on grant aid.

The Longford Centre for Independent Living, which traditionally has been dependant on HSE funding, has become more entrepreneurial and will use its existing expertise in providing personal assistance to people with a disability to expand its services thus ensuring its long-term viability and retention of jobs.

REVAMP 3R identified another part of the recycling market that is not being addressed in County Longford and came up with a viable solution that will not only serve a gap in the market but that will also develop the acquisition of skills through training for unemployed people, including young Traveller men.

Camlin Catering will use existing kitchen equipment and facilities in EDI to address gaps in the provision of food services in the county.

9.5 Confidence

It was hoped that by imparting practical knowledge and skills, the SEL programme would increase the confidence of participants to explore and test ideas and develop business plans to put the ideas into action.

The evaluation scores show that participating in the SEL programme has increased the confidence levels of participants to identify gaps in the market and suitable products and services to address these gaps, to assess the feasibility of an idea and to develop a business plan.

Change in Confidence of Participants

	None 1	Some 2	Considerable 3	Mean Score ⁶
Confidence to assess the market after first workshop on the market (N=20)	1 (5%)	11 (55%)	8 (40%)	2.35
Confidence to assess the market after second workshop on marketing (N=9)	-	1 (11%)	8 (89%)	2.89
Confidence to communicate effectively with customers (N=9)	-	- (11%)	8 (89%)	2.89
Confidence to assess the competition (N=19)	2	10	7	2.26

⁶ Range of 1 to 3 where 1= no change and 3= considerable change. The higher the mean score the greater the level of confidence.

	(10%)	(53%)	(37%)	
Confidence to work through operational aspects (N=14)	2 (14%)	8 (57%)	4 (29%)	2.14
Confidence to determine most appropriate structure (N=14)	3 (21%)	4 (43%)	5 (36%)	2.21
Confidence to work through financials (N=9)	1 (11%)	6 (67%)	2 (22%)	2.11
Confidence to develop a cash flow after workshop (N=9)	-	6 (67%)	3 (33%)	2.33
Confidence to develop a cash flow forecast after peer support session (N=8)	1 (13%)	3 (37%)	4 (50%)	2.88
Confidence regarding responsibilities as a board member (N=13)	-	5 (38%)	8 (62%)	2.62
Confidence regarding responsibilities as an employer (N=13)	-	4 (31%)	9 (69%)	2.69

9.6 Length of SEL Programme

The SEL programme ran for 18 months. This included promotion and awareness raising as well as workshops, peer mentoring supports and project assessment phases. A programme of this length is needed to take participants through the feasibility testing and business planning process.

The gestation period for some of the projects proved to be longer than anticipated, particularly as many of those involved had other jobs and could only devote part of their time to their social enterprise ideas. The length of the programme facilitated this. It also facilitated changes to original ideas and emergence of new ones. For example, the process of going through a formal feasibility highlighted that Longford Environmental Alliance's idea for garden allotments was not viable as a social enterprise but would make a good community development project while and Lus na Gréine changed its clothes recycling idea to a pop-up shop.

The length of the programme facilitated the piloting the ideas. This proved to be a very useful exercise to test and refine the ideas of Keeping House and Camlin Catering.

It also supported new participants coming onto the programme at later stages. For example, the Royal Canal Kayak joined the SEL programme later than other participants but progressed to having a viable enterprise idea.

9.7 Impact

The SEL programme has increased awareness across the county about social enterprise and its potential. It has increased the confidence and skills of participants to test and plan for a social enterprise.

SEL facilitated close co-operation between LCRL and the County Enterprise Board, not only in oversight of the programme and inputs to the programme, but also in facilitating access to supports and the direct provision of supports to SEL participants.

One of the aims of the programme was to support the creation or retention of 20 jobs in the county. Based on the business plans of the enterprises that made it through to the final assessment and awards ceremony it is estimated that up to 50 full time and part time jobs and training places could be provided in time.

To status of the eight finalists for the SEL awards as of December is as follows:

- REVAMP 3R: The white goods recycling enterprise is up and running. A certified training programme in white goods testing has been provided. Ten trainees recently completed this course. The project is selling c.10 recycled white goods a week.
- Lus na Gréine: A pop up shop has been set up to take advantage of the Christmas period. However, there are now plans to keep the shop open all year round. It is currently staffed by 3 existing staff members but additional staff may be required if it opens all year round.
- Camlin Catering: This enterprise is up and running. It tendered for and won a contract to supply school meals. It is supported by 2 existing EDI staff and 2 new part-time staff.
- Keeping House: The enterprise is up and running. It has a growing customer base including regular weekly and fortnightly private customers as well as once off deep clean jobs referred by local Public Health Nurses. It is employing two part-time staff and two TÚS workers.
- Creative Ardagh: This was an established social enterprise that needed guidance and direction. It has expanded its existing arts and creativity workshops for children, parents and adults of all ages. Two people are being employed to operate the Heritage Centre that it operates from and a craft co-operative has been set up for local crafts people. This co-operative is holding its first Christmas Market.
- Longford Centre for Independent Living: This is an organisation that had suffered from funding cut-backs. It has put into action its business plan developed while on SEL and has expanded its services to fee paying clients which has supported the creation of two new part-time posts and the retention of existing part-time jobs.
- Granard Motte Community Enterprise: Significant fundraising activity is underway. The project received considerable publicity on the Pat Kenny Show during its Summer Carnival. It recently launched its feasibility study and c.150 people attended the launch.
- Drumlish Community Pavilion: Work is on-going to locate a suitable premises from which to provide day care services to the elderly.

As of December 2013, positive progress towards employment creation and retention is being made. This progress is summarised below.

Progress in Employment Creation & Retention December 2013

Social Enterprise	Retained Jobs		New Jobs/Trainees		
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Trainees
REVAMP 3R	2	-	-	1	10
Lus na Gréine	3	-	-	-	-
Camlin Catering	2	-	-	2	-
Keeping House	-	-	-	4	-
Creative Ardagh	2	-	-	2	-
Longford Centre for Independent Living	-	30	-	2	-
Total to date	9	30	-	11	10

9.8 Overall Conclusion

The delivery of the workshops and seminars was successfully achieved and there is now a greater awareness and understanding of social enterprise and its ethos in the county.

Overall, the combination of information seminars, formal workshops, peer mentoring support sessions, access to business mentors and other experts, feasibility testing, business planning with verbal and written feedback, helped participants to refine and progress their ideas.

Six months after completion of the SEL programme, six social enterprise ideas have become operational. They are supporting the retention of 9 full-time jobs and 30 part-time jobs and have created 11 new part-time jobs as well as provided training for 10 young people.

9.9 Recommendations

The SEL programme has shown that it is possible to animate social enterprise and to provide a range of relevant supports that result in social enterprise and job creation. A challenge that emerged was that starting the programme towards the end of the current Rural Development Programme limited access to possible sources of funding under the RDP.

It is recommended that the SEL programme be repeated in County Longford and that it commence at the start of the next RDP in order to facilitate access to suitable RDP funding for social enterprises that meet RDP criteria.

Having a programme of sufficient length to enable participants to fully explore their ideas and pilot them if necessary was critical to the success of most of the enterprises that are now established.

It is recommended that any future programme should run for not less than 18 months.

There are many organisations in County Longford that have the potential to be a social enterprise or that are in fact already a social enterprise but do not realise it. The SEL Programme engaged in a wide public awareness campaign about social enterprise. Going forward, more time should be devoted to identifying and working with these groups to explore the potential for social enterprise in their organisation or the creation of new social enterprises. The creation of the social enterprise network could support this process by spreading the word about the potential of social enterprise.

It is recommended that the programme be front-loaded to include more time for small group sessions exploring the potential for social enterprise in specific areas.

Close co-operation between LCRL and the County Enterprise Board were one of the key success factors in the operation of SEL.

It is recommended that for any future programme of this nature that this level of co-operation is replicated.

Access to one-to-one support and mentoring proved critical for some projects, e.g. Creative Ardagh. For others, access to feasibility study grants was necessary in order to progress their ideas, e.g. Granard Motte Community Enterprise. Seed capital was identified as a need to progress ideas and the final phase of SEL was changed to reflect this by providing a small seed capital fund that projects competed for.

It is recommended that for any future programmes of this nature that a fund be established to provide seed money for participants to hire business development mentors to support them through the first three years of start-up. A sliding scale of support could be employed, e.g. 100% funding towards such costs in Year 1, 70% in year 2 and 50% in year 3, with projects providing the balance of funds required for years 2 and 3.

Longford Centre for Independent Living and Lus na Gréine are examples of organisations that are heavily reliant on State funding that saw the necessity for developing alternative sources of income to sustain their existing operations and to expand their services.

It is recommended that LCRL discuss with state agencies operating in Longford, e.g. HSE, the potential to put in place structures and supports that would allow community services to develop revenue generating social enterprises.

The SEL workshops generally took place over the course of a day. They used a mix of theory and practical exercises and included guest speakers, many of whom were involved in social enterprises. The workshop covering HR and governance however took place over a half day and this limited the use of practical work.

It is recommended that all workshops take place over a full day and incorporate practical exercises, examples and group work.

Having access to local peer mentoring support proved crucial to helping participants to explore and test their ideas and to keeping them motivated to continue. The group sessions took place at regular intervals in between workshops but did not extend beyond this. However, flexibility was built into the programme to facilitate one-to-one support when required.

It is recommended that peer mentoring support should continue to form an integral part of this type of programme and that it be extended to include the period when business plans are being finalised and the first six months of becoming operational.

In order to support the development of a vibrant social enterprise sector in County Longford, a network of social enterprises, social entrepreneurs and those who can support them needs to

be developed. There may also be opportunities to link into other social enterprise networks that are beginning to emerge at county and national levels.

It is recommended that efforts to establish a social enterprise network continue. In order to sustain the development of a network, some level of resourcing will be required from LCRL.

Appendix: SEL AWARDS CEREMONY BROCHURE

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE LONGFORD (SEL)



SEL

Social Enterprise
& Entrepreneurship
Development Programme

SEED CAPITAL
AWARDS CEREMONY

July 15th 2013



THE SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUND
ESTABLISHED 1996

Longford Community
Resources Ltd.



'The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development:
Europe Investing in Rural Areas'

Comhshaoil, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

This project was assisted by Longford Community Resources Ltd. through the Rural Development Programme which is part-financed by the European Union and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government

Presentation of
Certificates of Completion
and
Announcement of SEL
Seed Capital Awards

GUEST OF HONOUR
Seán Sherlock TD

Minister for Social Enterprise



Introduction

Longford Community Resources Ltd (LCRL) was established in 1995, initially formed for the purposes of implementing the LEADER II Programme. In January 1996, it broadened its Board representation to take on the management of the Local Development Programme and since then LCRL has operated as the integrated local development partnership company for County Longford. The company is guided by a voluntary Board of Directors who are responsible for deciding the strategic approach of the company and formulation of policies.

In County Longford this provided the first major opportunity for the community, voluntary and state sectors to work together to identify and plan a coordinated response to the challenges facing the county. The core purpose of the company is to promote rural and economic development and tackle social exclusion. LCRL does this through the management and delivery of various development programmes. One of these programmes is the Rural Development (LEADER) Programme which is part-financed by the European Union and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

The project 'Social Enterprise Longford' has strong linkages with the LCRL Rural Development Programme Strategic Plan 2007-2013 by improving the quality of life for the rural population, enhancing the local rural environment and supporting business creation. This project explored the potential for developing social enterprises in Co Longford and set in place a development plan to determine the way forward for the development and implementation of social enterprise. In line with there being no social enterprise strategy in place for Co Longford and as stated by Mr Pat Rabbitte, TD, Minister of Communications Energy and Natural Resources in May 2011, "Social Enterprise has the potential to create 25,000 new jobs over 5 years" and as a sector which offers excellent growth prospects and opportunity for community organisations, LCRL saw that there was a clear need for the development of this sector.

The aim of the project was to lay the groundwork and foundations for the development of a social enterprise culture in Co Longford and create a suitable environment for the development of social enterprise projects in Co Longford. This involved working with any community organisation that was interested in looking at the idea of social enterprise as a means of benefitting the local community as a whole over an 18 month period.

continued >

The goal of LCRL is to bring the potential of the RDP (Leader) to a much wider cross-section of the community, demonstrating that it is a meaningful and exciting Programme that is open to all who live and work in rural communities. As this project was aimed at the community sector and the development of the rural community environment, through social enterprise it therefore fitted perfectly within the remit of the Rural Development (LEADER) Programme.

In conjunction with developing a strategy for social enterprise in Co Longford it is hoped that a social enterprise culture will be developed and harnessed to ensure that social enterprise projects can be encouraged and established in Co Longford.

Following the completion of the Social Enterprise Longford project our goal is to set up a network of aspiring, emerging and established social enterprise projects and the network will be supported by LCRL, Longford CEB and the EDI Centre. LCRL would also hope to provide on-going assistance and encouragement in the overall culture of Social Enterprise in Co Longford and wish every success to each of the enterprises that have been established through the Social Enterprise Longford project.

Adrian Greene

CEO

**Longford Community
Resources Limited (LCRL)**





SEL

Seed Capital Awards Ceremony July 15th, 2013

PROGRAMME

- 10.00** **Registration:**
- 10.30** **Formal Opening of Awards Ceremony and Address of Welcome**
Adrian Greene, CEO, Longford Community Resources Ltd
- 10.40** **Social Enterprise - The Potential**
Paul O'Sullivan, CEO, Clann Credo - the Social Investment Fund
- 10.50** **Social Enterprise Longford - Project Showcase**
Ann Clarke, SEL Training Coordinator
- 11.05** **SEL the Longford view**
Pat Kelleher, Longford EDI Board of Management
- 11.15** **Presentation of Certificates of Completion**
- 11.25** **Keynote Address**
Mr Seán Sherlock T.D., Minister for Social Enterprise
- 11.45** **Announcement of winner of the SEL SEED Capital Award and**
Presentation of Awards by Minister Seán Sherlock,
Minister for Social Enterprise
- 12.00** **Close - Adrian Greene: LCRL**
- Finalists** **Camlin Catering, Centre for Independent Living, Creative Ardagh,**
Drumlisk Health Care Pavilion, Granard Motte Community Enterprise,
Keeping House, Lus na Gréine, Revamp 3R.

The Enterprise Culture

Those who work at the coalface of social enterprise are often confronted with two fallacies: that great ideas alone are sufficient and that talent will always triumph.

Both of these assumptions are misleading and damaging, as they suggest that enterprises can succeed without assistance and that current support structures are adequate.

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of community development is fully aware that communities across Ireland are bursting at the collective seam with great ideas, initiatives and plans.

But that abundance of natural talent is mirrored by an absence of adequate resources - financial and physical - and inadequate support systems. At the moment most social enterprises rely on local goodwill and volunteerism to survive.

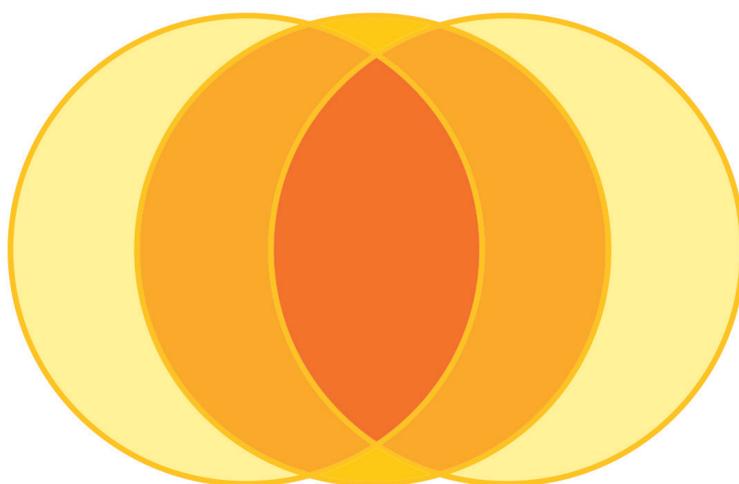
The Social Enterprise Longford (SEL) programme was established to try and rectify this deficiency.

There is no plan that cannot be bettered through learning and external critically supportive review and analysis. The real task of the Longford pilot was to prove this instinctive truth.

People and communities require the skills and capacity to help themselves. The report of the Social Enterprise & Entrepreneurship Task Force identified social enterprise as a valuable but hidden aspect of the Irish economy.

However few state support systems are open to it. *“This contrasts with the substantial palette of supports available to private sector, which includes over 28 tax breaks, a government department with a budget of €2 billion and a variety of support agencies ranging from County Enterprise Boards and Enterprise Ireland to specialist agencies such as An Bord Glas.”*

Equality means nothing if it does not mean equality of opportunity.



Putting the Word Out

Work began in January 2012 as project organisers set out to canvas the local community and find credible projects that could, with some support and guidance, be brought to fruition.

In that sense, the SEL programme was to act as an incubator for local social enterprise.

The first stage involved advertising and awareness-raising efforts that were run through local media outlets.

Despite the near perfect storm that has engulfed the media industry, forcing wholesale closures and job losses, local media in Ireland has retained the ear of the community and is often the primary news source for people outside the major urban areas.

Trusted voices travel further.

In addition we utilised the contacts and networks of a number of community groups to ensure news of the initiative reached key targets. These included LCRL, the Community and Voluntary Fora, the Chamber of Commerce, the GAA and the Longford Youth Service.

Leaflets were also circulated in schools and charity retail outlets.

But this public phase followed only after consultations with local groups and research carried out to better understand the prevailing enterprise and social environments.

An advisory group comprising of LCRL, local business and community leaders as well as Clann Credo social enterprise experts was also established to advise on and monitor the programme.

Healthy Scepticism

The initial waves of publicity were designed to attract interested parties to a series of information evenings, where expert speakers would outline how the Social Enterprise Longford project would work.

Almost 50 people attended the three information evenings in early April, which were held in Granard, the EDI Centre and Lanesboro.

Not all were immediately taken with the project. Some welcomed the initiative immediately, some maintained a healthy scepticism.

It could hardly have been otherwise. Many recalled how the community and voluntary sector only ever seems to get to the front of the line when programmes are being eliminated or downgraded.

In recent years, they have seen wave after wave of cuts and job losses wash over communities and towns thinned out by emigration.

Longford has been hard hit, with unemployment in the county and the wider region running well above the national average.

Ultimately, it is not the absence of material or financial resources that kills communities, but the absence of hope. And this is what gives the SEL initiative its urgency.

In the longer term, this is about restoring much of what has been stripped away in the last five years of crisis, of tapping the great wealth that lurks beneath the surface of each community and exploiting it for the gain of all.

Learning Curve

The key to the process was listening to participant feedback, particularly when it identified the supports needed.

This informed the development of a number of detailed workshops that examined key areas of business in greater depth: marketing, financial planning, operation, human resources and enterprise structure.

Indeed, a key outcome of the initial workshops was the organisation of two further workshops specifically to look at low budget marketing and how to pitch ideas.

At each stage, participants gained in knowledge and confidence as the worth of the initiative became clearer, as extracts from participant feedback demonstrates:

“Every piece of information was relevant – I really enjoyed it all and found it all excellent.”

“The simplified approach took the mystery out of finance and brought it down to basics without overwhelming me.”

“The questions forced me to step back and take an overview on the proposed project.”

Following the comprehensive workshop and mentoring programme, it was the turn of participants to develop concrete business plans for their enterprise ideas, to turn that original insight into a clear, workable proposal.

A total of 10 proposals were submitted by December 2012 and considered by an Assessment Panel, comprised of representatives from LCRL, the County Enterprise Board and Clann Credo.

The panel applied rigorous criteria to each project, judging them on their capacity to create jobs, on their financial viability and on whether a clear market for each product or service had been identified.

Ultimately eight projects emerged from this searching process, with each having been identified as having real potential.

They were: Creative Ardagh, Royal Canal Kayak Hire, Lus na Gréine, Revamp 3R, Keeping House, Longford CIL, Drumlish Health Pavilion and EDI Catering.

A further initiative - from Granard Community Development - entered the process at a later stage, while the promoter of Royal Canal Kayak Hire put the project on hold until a later date.

The winners then underwent a further phase of mentoring and advice clinic bootcamp, as each participant was sent back to the drawing board to re-examine their original plan.

The aim was to identify weaknesses, maximise strengths and hone proposals until they were pitch perfect.

The plans were then resubmitted for a second assessment with accompanying pitches.

Those that emerged successfully from that process now face the biggest test of all: making their plans work in practice and building social enterprises that will endure down the years.

We have no doubt that they will succeed and are certain that they are just the first of many.

Taste of Success

In an age of scarcity, there is something rather incongruous about under-utilised resources. Equally, where there is a thriving social enterprise sector it is unlikely that any resource will stay that way for too long.

And it is this very capacity for adaptation and innovation that is key to the on-going success of the sector.

When Camlin Catering laid their collective eyes on the state-of-the-art kitchen facilities in the Longford EDI Centre, they saw immediately that this was an opportunity waiting to be grasped.

The kitchens at the EDI Centre are equipped to a commercial standard and for Camlin that meant potential that was not being fully exploited - for the benefit of the wider community.

Camlin Catering brings a strong social vision to its work, and incorporates critical training and educational components in all that it does.

That broader vision means their concern extends beyond simple profit and into the needs of the community in which they are rooted, with a key focus on job creation for youth in the community.

And so a plan was developed that would see the capacity of the catering facilities fully utilised, while maximising the training potential of the operation for the community.

This involved healthy cookery classes for lower income families - on the premise that eating well is cheaper than eating badly - the provision of school lunches for primary schools in the area and catering for community events and special occasions.

The idea is to grow the business in a timely, ordered manner over a number of years, with each stage of development based on good research and a clear understanding of the conditions in each market.

For example, research among local primary schools uncovered strong interest in cost efficient and high quality meals for schoolchildren.

Camlin is a prime example of how commercial methods and strategies can be marshalled and put to work for the gain of the wider community.

Independents' Day

Modern culture places a high premium on independence and personal freedom, often overlooking the simple fact that not everyone gets a choice.

An illness or disability can result in enforced dependency on others, compromising people's independence and freedom of movement. The physical scars may be obvious, the emotional less so.

Longford Centre for Independent Living (LCIL) has a unique insight into the issue, having been established on the direct initiative of the disabled community in the area.

"Nothing about us, without us" ran the founding slogan, summarising the ethos of a service designed by people with disabilities, for people with disabilities.

Almost 15 years later, LCIL has an extensive network of some 36 Personal Assistants across the county, working to ensure that people regain some element of control over their personal lives and have the freedom

to make basic, everyday choices.

They offer assistance to people with physical and sensory disabilities with their basic household tasks, mobility and social activity.

Crucially, LCIL stresses that all assistance is must be provided under the direction of the person with a disability and carried out with complete discretion and respect.

The service is centrally located in Longford town with access to training rooms and transportation. And now they are ready to expand, offering increased cover to those they already work with and also widening the range of that cover outside the 18-65 age bracket.

This unique enterprise was designed from the ground up by those who have first hand, real life experience of the problems affecting the disabled community.

Their independent thinking has helped transform the lives of people for the better across the region.

Creative Community

There's much to learn about Ireland through the ages in the town of Ardagh.

Immortalised in the pagan myths of Brí Leith and in tales of Midir and Etain, it is also home to a number of early Christian sites, the most well-known being the church of St Mel, the fifth century saint reputedly installed as a bishop by St Patrick.

The town is celebrated in literature and features in Oliver Goldsmith's classic, *She Stoops to Conquer*. In recent years, Ardagh's physical charms have won many plaudits, including three national Tidy Towns titles and the Prix d'Honneur in the prestigious Entente Florale.

And yet, in a town where the ancient past is part of everyday life, there was no operative heritage or historical centre, no visible sign of a community coming together to tell its story to the wider world.

The town's original heritage centre had closed in 1994 and lay dormant for a number of years. It was as if Ardagh's vital link with the past had been broken.

But in 2011, Annette Corkery and Ann Gerety Smyth applied to Longford County Council to take over the old premises and transform it into a vibrant, community-based resource centre that would bring Ardagh's rich tale to a whole range of new audiences.

The envisaged centre duly opened during National Heritage Week, in August 2011, as an art-based exploration of the town's rich past.

But the original vision saw a far greater role for the Ardagh Heritage & Creativity Centre and in order to realise this ambition, the founders turned to the wider community.

Thus, the company was restructured to facilitate the involvement of more people and greater expertise in the management of the initiative.

The thriving centre is now an artistic and cultural hub for the local community, catering for all ages and tastes, with a wide variety of facilities and services on offer, from school programmes to family events, exhibitions and crafts.

The centre's all-embracing motto says it best: Explore, Be Inspired, Create.



Health Matters

Thinking big comes naturally to the social enterprise sector, despite the almost daily battle to access resources.

It is ingrained and inbuilt, arising naturally from the broader social concern that drives the social economy.

Thus, it was hardly surprising that when an audit identified deficits in community health care provision, the response of those behind the Drumlish Health Pavilion amounted to no less than an overhaul of existing care services in Longford and its environs.

These deficits affected the older community especially: an absence of facilities for meeting and socialising, a lack of beds in nursing homes, problems with community transport and a lack of primary care facilities in the area.

Left unaddressed, these would inevitably exacerbate problems of social exclusion and isolation among the elderly and other vulnerable groups, such as unemployed males.

In response Drumlish Health Pavilion envisaged a comprehensive 10 year strategy that could reshape services for those at risk, enhance quality of life across the community and help create jobs.

The initial plan included the establishment of a Menís Shed - an Australian idea that uses skill and craft training to combat exclusion and mental health problems among unemployed males - along with Sheltered Housing for the elderly and a 40 bed day care centre.

It was both audacious and ambitious. But a lack of suitable premises in the area proved a major stumbling block.

Undaunted, the organisers reshaped the plan and set about examining existing buildings - community hall, sports centre - to see how they might be modified to provide the services in question.

While the route may differ, the destination remains the same. They're thinking big and thinking flexibly.

Hope and History

The figures are shocking: more than one in four males in Granard cannot find work, while the figure for females is only slightly lower.

If those figures were replicated at a national level, we would see some 700,000 people out of work.

With good news in short supply, it has fallen to the people of Granard to make their own news, a challenge readily taken up by groups such as Granard Motte Community Enterprise (GMCE).

The organisation takes its name from the Granard's historic motte and bailey, which dates from early Norman times.

At the foot of this ancient structure, GMCE has located an opportunity to provide a significant boost to the economic life of the town and set its future on a more secure footing.

It consists of two modern commercial units on some 15 acres of land, which the group believes is the ideal location as a new social enterprise hub for the town.

The enterprises will aim to harness the town's abundance of historical wealth and cultural treasures to the task of local development and growth.

Granard's strategic location means there is a huge catchment area on its doorstep, while the proximity of key traffic routes will allow the targeting of national and international visitors too.

The centre will be developed on a phased basis, initially to accommodate a cafe and craft shop that will highlight local produce and skills, while a later Cultural and Heritage Centre will house an exhibition focusing on the unique history of the locale through the ages.

It is also intended to develop schools' programmes to assist students and teachers of history.



In addition, space will be developed for local markets. There will also be a focus on outdoor activities such as walking, cycling and equestrian pursuits.

The benefits of the project are clear, not least its capacity to get people back to work and boost local economic activity.

Less obvious is the sense of hope and optimism that surges through a community wrestling back control of its own destiny and working to shape a better future for all.

No one can put a price on that.

Order in the House

It is the small things that matter, especially for older members of the community. It's the grass that goes uncut or the hedge that's left untrimmed. It's the washing that can't be hung, let alone ironed, and the shopping left undone because of bad weather.

These are trivial matters for most, but often a source of great anxiety for elderly people, especially when their families are grown or departed.

As a result, the daily struggle with basic household tasks damages their quality of life. But in an age of straitened budgets the issue is not deemed severe enough to warrant a public sector response.

But a solution may have been found, in the form of Keeping House.

This innovative organisation offers a range of essential household services to the elderly - shopping, cleaning, meal preparation - and works primarily through referrals from Vincent de Paul and the public health nurse network.

It is organised and overseen by five local women - Anne Harte, Catherine Kane, Mary Morrissey, Jennifer O'Regan and Mary Walsh - who bring a vast repository of skills and experience to the initiative, in the areas of care, public health and the social economy.

Indeed, it was their experience of witnessing the difficulties faced by the elderly that prompted the establishment of Keeping House.

It began life under the Social Enterprise Longford initiative and has operated successfully on a pilot basis since March 2013.

Keeping House now hopes to expand the range of services on offer by building up a database of reputable trades people to carry out basic home maintenance for older members of the community.

Ultimately, the aim is to free people from unnecessary worry and stress, enhance their quality of life and ensure they stay in their own homes for as long as possible.



Pop-Up Shop

While the Pop-Up Shop concept has been utilised by retailers for over a decade, in the current recessionary climate it seems like an idea whose time has come.

The people who run Lus na Gréine Family Resource Centre in Granard certainly think so.

For them, the Pop-Up Shop offers an opportunity to raise income in a cost-effective manner, income that will help fund the wide range of family support services provided by the centre.

Essentially a temporary and very mobile retail outlet, the Pop-Up Shop can be established virtually anywhere, usually when a particular supply of goods become available. It can be closed and folded when sufficient sales have been achieved.

This flexibility makes the Pop-Up Shop option highly cost effective, particularly for fundraising.

Established in 2007, Lus na Gréine has seen demand for its services rise as families feel the strain of the crisis, in common with similar facilities around the country.

Many are families who have no experience of dealing with financial difficulties and related problems.

In addition, the reduction in official funding means Lus na Gréine, has been forced to seek new ways of raising resources to help cope with the new demand.

Their plan is for a Community Pop-Up Shop that will trade in new and used clothing, locally-produced crafts and general bric-a-brac.

It will offer bargains to shoppers, help showcase local skills and bring some retail excitement to this historic town.

Equally, the extra traffic and footfall generated by the outlet would have a positive spillover effect on the rest of the retail sector in Granard.

An initial trial opening over the Christmas period proved very successful and demonstrated the support and goodwill of the wider community for the initiative.

Waste High

Where others saw only waste, the Revamp 3R Furniture Store saw enterprise and opportunity.

In its four short years of existence, the project has saved over 100,000 kilos of used furniture from the local dump. Often the furniture was of high quality and in need of simple repair and refurbishment.

Their core philosophy is simple: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

The enterprise is embedded in the local community, creating up to 15 jobs and producing quality, affordable furniture for the local market. This support is illustrated by the thousands of pieces of furniture delivered to their premises, rather than the local landfill.

Revamp has also developed a highly popular furniture restoration service.

Revamp has worked closely with a supportive local business community - including the local waste operator - and even brought multinational giant IKEA on board. The company operates a 'take back' returns policy which they use to assist Revamp and similar initiatives nationally.

Having conquered the furniture market, Revamp has turned its attention to the white goods sector in Longford and its environs.



A community survey revealed huge support for such an initiative, with 85% stating they would donate used white goods and purchase refurbished items, while local businesses were similarly enthusiastic.

In addition, visits were made to successful white goods recycling initiatives, in both Dublin and Belfast, to learn from their experience.

The project is run in partnership with the flagship EDI Centre.

Although, the project is still in its infancy the track record and experience of those involved bodes well for the future.

The benefits of the project to the local community are clear: high quality, low cost goods are produced, jobs are created, waste materials are efficiently recycled, local skills are enhanced and income is generated from within the community's own resources.

