

ACORNS

Accelerating the Creation Of
Rural Nascent Start-ups



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





'Early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, are invited to apply for a place on ACORNS 4.'

'Those who successfully completed a previous cycle of ACORNS are being offered the opportunity for further support.'

ACORNS
Accelerating the Creation Of
Rural Nascent Start-ups 

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

ACORNS

Early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, are invited to apply for a place on the ACORNS programme, now in its fourth year.

The intention is to provide up to 50 entrepreneurs with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their current aspirations.

The programme will run from October 2018 until April 2019. Selected participants will be those who, on a competitive basis, best demonstrate their potential to advance their businesses and their commitment to fully engage in the initiative.

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

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

WHO QUALIFIES FOR THE PROGRAMME?

ACORNS is designed for nascent female rural entrepreneurs. To qualify for consideration, a woman (i) must have recently set up a new business which she owns or part owns, and which has generated sales no earlier than 27th June 2016 or (ii) must be at an advanced stage of planning a new venture and have a clear idea of what she wants to achieve. If she is not already trading, activities such as organising the start-up team, looking for equipment/facilities, saving money for the start-up, or writing a business plan would all be considered as active commitments to starting a business.

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

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

If selected, applicants must be available to attend the first residential session on 15th October/16th October 2018 in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath.

HOW TO APPLY

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

Application forms can also be sent and received by post. Please contact us on 01 845 0770, if you would like a form posted to you or if you have any difficulties in registering online. **Closing date for receipt of completed applications is the 21st September 2018. No applications received after this date can be considered.**

SELECTION PROCESS

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

There are up to 50 places available for suitable candidates. The ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs will meet in late September to assess the applications received. Successful candidates will be notified in the following days.

WHAT TIME COMMITMENT IS INVOLVED?

The cycle will start with a residential Developmental Forum, which will get underway in Mullingar on the **15th October / 16th October 2017**. The theme of this Forum is *Establishing Good Foundations*. At this event, the participants will meet each other, their ACORNS Lead Entrepreneur and their round table group for the first time. An overnight stay is incorporated into the event.

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

A second residential Development Forum will be held on **8th April / 9th April 2019**. The theme of this Forum will be *SMART Planning - The Roadmap Ahead*.

Selected candidates are expected to attend all events.

WHAT'S THE APPROACH?

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

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

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

LEAD ENTREPRENEURS

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

On Friday 4 May 2018 the ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs met with President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina at an event in Áras an Uachtaráin to celebrate female entrepreneurship.

Left to right: Triona MacGiolla Rí, Caroline McEnery, Alison Ritchie, Sabina Higgins, President Michael D Higgins, Anne Cusack, Mary B Walsh, Anne Reilly, Deirdre McGlone



ALISON RITCHIE - Polar Ice, Laois

Alison Ritchie is the Managing Director of Polar Ice Ltd., Ireland's leading manufacturer of dry ice products since 1996. Polar Ice is located in Portarlinton, Co Laois. As a serial entrepreneur, Alison established her second business Polar IceTech Ireland Ltd. in 2005, growing the business to become the market leader in Cryogenic Cleaning, and successfully selling the business earlier in 2016.

Alison has a Business Degree from DCU. She subsequently trained and qualified as a Financial Accountant (CPA) and a certified Tax Advisor. Alison was awarded the Ulster Bank Business Achievers Award for Women Led Business in Leinster 2015, named the Women Mean Business Entrepreneur of the Year 2016, awarded Accountant of the Year 2017 and most recently accredited 'Thought Leader - Enterprise Development' at the All Star Business Awards 2018. www.polarice.ie



ANNE CUSACK - Critical Healthcare, Westmeath

Dr Anne Cusack is the cofounder and managing director of Critical Healthcare Limited, an Irish company offering a comprehensive range of emergency medical products and SAAS to the pre-hospital market and ambulance service providers in Ireland, the UK and Europe. The key to Critical Healthcare's success has been their ability to respond quickly and efficiently to their clients' changing requirements, through a range of services including Medlogistix, their online procurement platform, Duramedic and MediLinen. Critical Healthcare was the only Irish company to be listed on the NHS Framework Agreement for medical consumables by the NHS Ambulance Procurement Group in 2016. Critical Healthcare employs 22 people in Ireland, the UK and Europe, supplying product to over 3,000 ambulances through Medlogistix. Anne and her team have won numerous awards including the SFA Innovation Award 2013 and the IMSTA (Irish Medical and Surgical Trade Association) Best Services Company Award 2014. Most recently, Critical Healthcare has been asked to participate in the Enterprise Ireland Competitiveness Campaign. The business is continuing to grow at over 20% annually and the focus for 2018-2020 is mainland Europe. www.criticalhealthcare.com



CAROLINE MCENERY - The HR Suite, Kerry

Caroline McEnery set up The HR Suite in response to the demand for an outsourced expert HR department being necessary and accessible for all companies who employ people. The HR Suite offers specialist tailored and effective human resources and business solutions to clients throughout Ireland. Based in Tralee, Co. Kerry, with a nationwide client base, The HR Suite also has an office in Dublin. Demand for the services of The HR Suite has been growing steadily over the last nine years.

The company now has over 500 clients throughout Ireland and employs nine full time staff including a specialised recruitment consultant. Caroline is a member of the Low Pay Commission and is also an adjudicator in the Work Place Commission. She has completed a Masters in Human Resources in the University of Limerick and is a trained mediator. www.thehrsuiteonline.com



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

CIARA SHINE, SHINES SEAFOOD



DEIRDRE MCGLONE - Harvey's Point, Donegal

Deirdre McGlone began her career in the hospitality industry at the age of 13, working in local hotels. After graduating from University of Limerick with a degree in European Studies, she went on to play a pivotal role in the development of the multi-award winning Harvey's Point Hotel, Lough Eske, Donegal. This family owned and managed resort is synonymous with world class hotel-keeping blended with genuine Irish hospitality. Harvey's Point was awarded TripAdvisor No. 1 Hotel in Ireland for five consecutive years (2013 – 2017). Other awards include 'Georgina Campbell 'Hotel of the Year' and the RAI Best Customer Service, Donegal, Ulster, and all Ireland in 2018.

Deirdre is a board member of Donegal Tourism Ltd and has been appointed by the Government as a member of the National Tourism Leadership Group. She was nominated for WMB and IMAGE magazine 'Business Woman of the Year' awards. In 2016, she was awarded the 'Donegal Person of the Year'. Deirdre is President of the Donegal Women in Business Network. www.harveyspoint.com



MARY B WALSH - Ire Wel Pallets, Wexford

Mary B Walsh is the founder and Managing Director of Ire Wel Pallets Ltd. Established in May 1990. IWP is a pallet and packaging solutions provider, supplying pallets, boxes and crates to its exporting customers. The company's customer base includes organisations in the Medical Devices, Pharmaceutical, Food, Drinks Electronics and Engineering industries. Based near Gorey, Co. Wexford, IWP operates from the first purpose-built pallet manufacturing facility in Ireland. The company operates from a 300,000 sq.ft. ventilated storage facility for Kiln Dried Timber Pallets, in addition to the production facilities on-site. A 2015 investment of €1.5m. and an additional €1m. in 2017 has introduced new technology on site that has given the company more control over its production, quality and stock. With customers nationwide, the experienced and skilled IWP team are now exploring export markets, including the UK. IWP currently employs 50 staff in Gorey and plans to expand further. www.iwppallets.com



TRIONA MAC GIOLLA RÍ - Aró Digital, Galway

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



HEATHER REYNOLDS - Lead Entrepreneur ACORNS Plus

Heather Reynolds is a co-founder and CEO of an award winning Irish company, Eishtec, delivering over 1500 jobs across four locations in Ireland and the UK. Eishtec is an ethical and trusted outsourcing partner creating an environment of value delivery for customers and a place of growth for employees.

Heather has over 25 years industry experience in the services sector across a number of Blue Chip organisations including AOL Inc, Dell UK and TalkTalk Group, where she held a number of senior roles including Customer Experience Director, Global Performance Director and the role of Operations Director responsible for over 5000 service and sales employees over five geographies. Heather holds a Business Degree and an Executive MBA.

In 2013 Heather was appointed to the Action Plan for Jobs based on her track record of job creation and developing a business, and to both the National Competiveness and Labour Market Councils. In early 2014 Heather was appointed a Non-Executive Director of Respond Housing Association. www.eishtec.com



ANNE REILLY ACORNS Special Advisor

PaycheckPlus was founded by Anne Reilly in 2005. Head quartered in Drogheda, Co Louth, PaycheckPlus provides Irish and UK Payroll outsourced processing services to clients across a range of sectors. The emphasis of the Payroll Team is to help employers structure their payroll in the most efficient and cost efficient way while ensuring legislative and compliance requirements in a timely and accurate manner. PaycheckPlus is the recipient of a number of awards including The Global Payroll Provider of the Year 2017. Anne is a mother of four boys, a former lecturer in Irish payroll and a graduate of the Institute of Directors. She sits on a number of Boards and enjoys speaking and sharing her experience in business with aspiring entrepreneurs. www.paycheckplus.ie



PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

ACORNS is now in its 4th year. There was a clear desire on the part of those who completed ACORNS previously to stay connected with the initiative and to participate in a further development phase. Thanks to the funding being provided through the Rural Innovation and Development Fund by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, past participants of ACORNS are offered the opportunity to participate in a further development phase and to join the ACORNS Community. This helps ensure that they continue to reap the benefits of the programme and of the valuable connections they have made through broadening their support network.



ACORNS 3 participants left to right: Back: Ciara Mulrooney, Recalibrate Sligo Injury Clinic; Karina Kelly, 360 Crew; Claire McDonough, Wild Atlantic Interiors; Bernie Murphy, Bernie Murphy Textile Artist; Carina Monteith, TeamBride.ie
Front: Denise Mulvaney, Astara Creative; Deirdre McGlone, Harvey's Point, Lead Entrepreneur; Rajni Carney, Une Écharpe Une Vie; Arantxa López, ID Translation.



Pictured at the inaugural ACORNS Showcase are former ACORNS participant Joanne Browne, Jo Browne, Carlow, and Colm McKiernan, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

The Further Development phase is offered to participants in the year after their initial ACORNS programme and includes:

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

Former participants are also invited to continue to avail of ACORNS support through the ACORNS Community, through which they can attend a variety of topic-based workshops over a six-month period and take part in the annual ACORNS Forum and networking event. Those that have already completed a Further Development phase and who wish to strongly drive growth in their business, can also apply to participate in ACORNS Plus, a growth-focussed round table initiative.

PROGRESS MADE BY PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

Over 150 female entrepreneurs have taken part in ACORNS to date. Many report increased sales, exports and job creation. Progress made by participants on the last programme, ACORNS 3, which ran from October 2017 to April 2018, demonstrates these encouraging outcomes:

- Participants reported an increase in annualised sales of 97% over the six months of the cycle.
- There were nine participants that became exporters for the first time, representing an increase of 112%.
- There were 13 additional fulltime employees and 19 additional part-time employees hired during the period.

ACORNS NATIONAL FORUM AND SHOWCASE

The six month cycle of the programme concludes with the ACORNS National Forum. This event includes a variety of elements designed to boost motivation and provide an opportunity for structured networking and engagement. A highlight is the ACORNS Showcase where those interested can apply to display their products and services, giving a flavour of the rich diversity of the new businesses being set up by rural female entrepreneurs from across the country.

'The ACORNS Programme was an invaluable opportunity for me to meet and now work with amazing, talented women. They continue to inspire and motivate me, leading to an acceleration of the development and growth of my business'.

CAITRIONA CONSIDINE, MOHER COTTAGE



WHO WE ARE

FITZSIMONS CONSULTING

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

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

Having just completed a 10th cycle, Going for Growth has supported over 600 women entrepreneurs to achieve their growth ambitions and measures its success in terms of the participants' increased turnover, additional employment created and the number of new exporters.

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

More recently, Fitzsimons Consulting has developed and delivered Back for Business, an initiative to support early stage entrepreneurs among returned Irish emigrants. This programme is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Having successfully designed and implemented the ACORNS pilot and ACORNS 2 and 3 programmes, Paula and her team in Fitzsimons Consulting are very enthusiastic about implementing this latest phase of the ACORNS initiative.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO CONTACT US

Email info@acorns.ie

Tel: (+353) 1 845 0770

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



SPONSORS

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



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

MICHAEL CREED TD, MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE

Minister Creed said ***'I am delighted to continue to provide support to this initiative through my Department's Rural Innovation and Development Fund. This is a tremendous opportunity for rural based female entrepreneurs and I urge them to apply to participate in this exciting initiative. Each year, the participants give an overwhelming endorsement of the role ACORNS has played in supporting them to grow their business. Once again, female entrepreneurs have the opportunity to avail of ACORNS and all that it has to offer to help them realise their ambitions. This is an opportunity not to be missed'***.



'Starting a business can be a lonely, isolating experience, especially as a female entrepreneur living in rural Ireland. ACORNS was instrumental in helping me network with fellow women business owners and in helping me successfully grow and scale my business.'

CORI CALVERT, GES ENERGY



ACORNS

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

Phone: (+353) 1 845 0770

Email: info@acorns.ie

www.acorns.ie

August/September 2018