

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IMPACT AWARDS



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FOREWORD

In an ideal world, social enterprises would have license to concentrate all of their energies on *generating* impact, without having to divert so much of those energies to *measuring* it. Social impact is notoriously elusive, and measurement is part art, part science. But there are many reasons why the monitoring and measurement of social impact garners the attention that it does.

First, social enterprises operate in an increasingly competitive environment, and the ability to demonstrate impact is a critical differentiator that social enterprises use to set themselves apart from one another and from commercial players. Second, in a world of greenwashing, pinkwashing, sportswashing, rainbow washing, and so on, the credibility of the social enterprise sector hinges to a very large extent on its ability to prove that its impacts are real and lasting. Robust measurement is critical here. Third, social enterprises themselves need to know what aspects of their strategies are and are not working. Like all theories, Theories of Change are laden with assumptions, some of which will inevitably falter in contact with the real world and need to be tested.

The timeliness of the ILDN Social Enterprise IMPACT Awards – the aim of which is to promote and reward good practice in the

monitoring and measurement of social impact – is illustrated by the findings of the OECD's recent in-depth policy review on social enterprise in Ireland. Within the context of a detailed commentary on the importance of effective measurement, the report noted that, "Most social enterprises lack the necessary technical and financial resources to conduct impact measurement, thereby demonstrating their positive contributions to society." A guiding aim of the present initiative was to open the black box of impact measurement by capturing key learnings from those that do it best; you will find those learnings detailed throughout this booklet.

I would like to acknowledge the vital services provided to the social enterprise sector in Ireland by each of the 49 Local Development Companies (LDCs) that ILDN represents. Through the delivery of programmes like LEADER, SICAP, Tús, CE, and ARISE, LDCs are typically the first – and often the only – point of contact that grassroots social enterprises have with the system of supports that exists for them. As we approach the launch of Ireland's second National Social Enterprise Policy, we look forward to playing an ongoing part in the continued growth of the sector.

Lastly, I wish to commend all of the social enterprises that



applied for recognition under this initiative. The overall quality of applications was superb; taken together, they provided a compelling account of the collective impact of our social enterprise sector. A special word of congratulations must go to the six awardees profiled in this booklet, namely: The Shona Project, Together Academy, Football Cooperative, Saoirse – Ethnic Hands on Deck, Sensational Kids, and Clarecare.

ILDN is proud to support your excellent work, and we hope that the key learnings outlined in this booklet will prove to be of value to the wider sector.

Martina Earley

Chairperson
Irish Local Development Network



SOCIAL ENTERPRISE TOOLKIT

The key learnings that are set out in this booklet highlight how our six awardees exemplify some key principles of impact monitoring and measurement. These learnings were derived from the observations of our expert judging panel.

While we hope that these learnings will be of value to the wider sector, they are not intended to serve as a comprehensive “how-to” guide for the monitoring and measurement of social impact. We encourage social enterprises to explore the Social Enterprise Toolkit, developed by Dublin South City Partnership in partnership with Dublin City Council and Community Finance Ireland, for detailed practical guidance on monitoring and measuring social impact, as well as various other aspects of social enterprise management.

socialenterprisetoolkit.ie



WINNER

SMALL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CATEGORY

THE SHONA PROJECT

The Shona Project, which was founded in 2016 by Tammy Darcy, who named the organisation in honour of her late sister, exists to support girls aged 11 and upwards as they navigate the bullying, low self-esteem, and anxiety that have become far too prevalent a feature of the adolescent experience. The seriousness of these problems is well-established: in Ireland, girls aged 13 are four times more likely than male peers to self-harm, one in three 13-year-old girls reports feeling distressed about their weight, and suicide rates among girls and young women is higher in Ireland than anywhere else in Europe.

The Shona Project's effort to counteract these trends is three-pronged, encompassing school workshops and summer camps, a growing online community, and a series of events and projects which includes the enormously successful Shine Festival, an

annual two-day gathering featuring more than 100 inspirational female speakers and attended by several thousand transition year students.

The Shona Project has so far reached over 100,000 girls in Ireland, but it aspires to go much further. Of the 30,000-or-so girls that have taken part in workshops, 94.8% report feeling more positive, and a belief that they have been seen and heard, afterwards. Similarly, 97.8% of the 75,000 girls that have engaged with the Shine Festival noted that the event had made a positive difference in their lives.

The Shona Project's Junior Ambassador Programme, which has grown steadily since its launch in 2022, is being leveraged as a way of embedding the values of The Shona Project in schools across Ireland in a lasting way.



KEY LEARNING

SEEK THE INPUT OF MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS WHEN EVALUATING IMPACT



The Shona Project helps young girls to cultivate better mental health, greater resilience, improved confidence, and a more positive self-image, empowering them to navigate the many pressures of teenagehood and to become the leaders and change-makers of tomorrow.

Naturally, feedback from the young girls that engage with their programmes serves as the primary barometer of success. But feedback from a wider gamut of stakeholders, including parents and schoolteachers, is diligently collated as well. The Shona Project refers to this as 360-degree impact measurement, and it uses these insights to build a deeper understanding of their role in supporting young girls.

“At The Shona Project, impact measurement is a key focus. Our teenagers are growing up in a world that is incredibly fast-paced with the societal expectations they face changing rapidly. By dedicating time to impact measurement, we can ensure that the work that we do is as relevant and empowering as possible for the young women that we support. We don't just measure impact, we have created an ambassador programme so we can put the voices of our girls front and centre when it comes to decision-making. It is so important to us that we hear their voices, value their opinions and use this information to help us shape our impact projects because they are the experts in what is best for the young women of Ireland.”

Tammy Darcy, Founder at The Shona Project



95,000

free copies of Survival Kit handbook issued since 2019

+30,000

girls have taken part in workshops, **94.8%** reporting feeling more positive afterwards

100

schools involved in Safe Bathrooms Challenge

RUNNER UP

SMALL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CATEGORY

TOGETHER ACADEMY

Together Academy owes its existence to the startling fact that 90% of young adults with Down Syndrome in Ireland are not in paid employment. Since 2021, it has been providing certified culinary training as part of a two-year employability programme that includes work placements and practical experience in its own training café. This year, Together Academy partnered with a local coffee chain to open an inclusive café in Dub Laoghaire which is staffed by an integrated team that includes twelve Together Academy graduates.

Across the past two years, Together Academy has implemented an impact measurement framework to monitor its activities and to build a deeper understanding of its impact. Periodic surveys and one-to-one interviews are carried out, leading to the development of tailored plans that align to the employment goals of each

individual student. Parents and carers also contribute to the design of these plans.

June 2023 saw Together Academy's first cohort of students graduating from its two-year training course. All sixteen of these students, in addition to another twelve that took part in Together Academy's Accelerator Programme, are now progressing to employment, either in a Together Academy Café or with another local employer. Building relationships with local employers is a key priority for Together Academy's Pathways to Employment Team, and 25 employers now offer work experience or employment opportunities to Together Academy graduates. The quality of learning and wraparound supports is evident in the fact that 86% of students feel supported in their learning journey, and 83% feel less lonely since joining the organisation.



KEY LEARNING

MEASURE OUTCOMES, BOTH 'HARD' AND 'SOFT'



Outcomes can be difficult to capture, and certain outcomes can be more difficult to capture than others. 'Hard' outcomes tend to be more objective and definite. For Together Academy, hard outcomes are measured, for example, by the number of students placed in employment and the number of employers offering placements or employment opportunities to Together Academy Students.

Hard outcomes are not necessarily easy to measure – often, they require very long observational periods to be meaningful – but they are generally more amenable to measurement than soft outcomes. Soft outcomes are more subjective, and they are generally measured as a matter of degree rather than in a binary way. Through quarterly surveys, Together Academy measures work readiness, self-confidence, and social connection, and, most importantly, it uses these insights to tailor the supports it offers to students.

"Impact measurement and monitoring is continuously evolving in the Together Academy as we develop an understanding of how best to convey the outcomes of our work to our stakeholders, donors and participants. Being able to communicate the outcomes of our programmes in a clear and evidence-based way has been critical for us in both securing funding and understanding the effectiveness of our programmes. We are continuing to expand our approach to ensure the voice of our students is heard and ultimately at the heart of decision making within the organisation. We try to adopt an approach of 'measuring what matters' and being open to continuous improvement as we cycle through new pilots and programmes."

Edel Lynch, Finance Manager at
Together Academy



17

students
placed into
paid
employment in
the community

86%

of students
feel supported
in their
learning
journey

83%

of students
feel less lonely
since joining
the
organisation

WINNER

EARLY-STAGE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CATEGORY

FOOTBALL COOPERATIVE

Football Cooperative places recreational football as a vehicle to promote physical activity and healthy ageing, and to encourage social contact and positive mental health, among men in Ireland. The Football Cooperative model is underpinned by the principles of accessibility (community-based amenities are used for games), flexibility (games are held two to three nights per week, but participants are welcome to take part as and when it suits them), affordability, and inclusivity (participants are welcome regardless of levels of fitness or footballing ability).

Through a partnership with South East Technological University (SETU), Football Cooperative is conducting a holistic evaluation of concept efficacy and social return on investment. As part of this study, various dimensions of participants' physical, social, and emotional health were systematically tracked using a

mix of self-reported and observational measures. Initial results are exceptionally positive.

Football Cooperative's social return on investment was estimated to be €17.60 for every €1 invested. This is based on more than 50% of participants achieving a threshold improvement in physical health, 31% achieving a threshold improvement in mental health, and 37% achieving a threshold improvement in social health. Football Cooperative's reach is also growing rapidly, with over 800 registered members across its two main target communities of Dublin and Limerick, where a cumulative total of 349 games of 'pick up football' were played in 2023. Avenues to scale the Football Cooperative intervention – both nationally and internationally – are being explored through its partnership with SETU.



KEY LEARNING

WHEN IT COMES TO MEASURING OUTCOMES,
TAKE YOUR TIME



Outcomes generally take time to crystallise. Sometimes, outcome effects can be fleeting, where an intervention generates a momentary ‘bump’ that gives the illusion of efficacy, but that doesn’t linger for long enough to produce the kind of lasting change or virtuous cycle that we had envisaged. For these reasons, the tracking of outcomes requires ongoing observation across – sometimes lengthy – periods of time.

For Football Cooperative, this meant conducting assessments at quarterly intervals over the course of 12 months, which was deemed to be a sufficiently long observational window to gauge the effect and health impact of the intervention on participants’ physical, emotional, and social health.

“Football Cooperative is committed to an approach that sets out to do it once and do it right. Forming a social-enterprise/academic partnership has not only served this philosophy but supported a deeper understanding of participant population and served to bring our key stakeholders to ensure the impact can be realised and replicated beyond our current community football sites.”

Steven O’Connell, Founder at
Football Cooperative



50%

of participants
saw
significant
improvements
in physical
health

31%

of participants
saw significant
improvements
in mental
health

37%

of participants
felt
significantly
less lonely

RUNNER UP

EARLY-STAGE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CATEGORY

SAOIRSE – EHD

Saoirse – Ethnic Hands on Deck (Saoirse EHD) is a Cork-based social enterprise which is committed to the economic empowerment of migrant women in the county. The organisation aims to nurture and showcase the creative abilities of its 30+ members, thereby helping to replace the ‘deficit-based narrative’ that is widely associated with migrants – and particularly migrant women – with a ‘strength-based narrative’ that emphasises their agency and capabilities.

The organisation’s flagship programme is the Mother Tongue Brand, through which it successfully launched a line of 200 luxury tote bags that were subsequently showcased at a number of prominent fashion festivals and sold via local craft shops and markets. The project involved 35-40 women across five Direct Provision centres in Cork, and helped to alleviate the mental

Around twenty women continue to participate in weekly workshops which advance the dual aims of socialisation and skills development.

Saoirse EHD has seen its impact broaden considerably since the launch of its Mother Tongue initiative in 2022. Through a 2023 Christmas Campaign, it successfully raised over €10,000 to organise Christmas parties for children in eleven Direct Provision and emergency accommodation centres in Cork. The parties were attended by 400 children, each of whom received a personal gift.

More recently, Saoirse EHD has established an interagency group to explore the issue of nutrition within IPAS centres, and is currently in the process of developing a business plan for a catering project aimed at ensuring that IPAS residents – particularly children – have access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food, while at the same time providing training and employment opportunities to migrant women.



KEY LEARNING

BE ATTENTIVE TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT, PARTICULARLY EARLY ON



Social enterprises exist to address social problems, but how they frame the essence and boundaries of those problems can often be quite fluid. This is especially common among early-stage social enterprises, and among social enterprises that are working in contexts characterised by change or upheaval.

Saoirse – Ethnic Hands on Deck is both of these things, and its adaptability is reflected in the many strands of its impact. This adaptability is predicated on a keen understanding of the support needs of migrant women, which is predicated, in turn, on the close relationships that it maintains with its members, who are afforded the opportunity to shape the organisation’s training and development strategy via extensive consultations.

“As a team run by, and dedicated to supporting, migrant women, we invest substantial time in measuring and monitoring our social impact to ensure our initiatives genuinely meet the needs of our members. Through this ongoing process, we’ve learned the importance of adapting our approach based on the evolving challenges faced by migrant women, and we believe in the power of actively listening to their voices to drive meaningful change.

To fellow social enterprises, our advice is to establish robust feedback mechanisms, incorporating the authentic experiences of those we serve to guide and enhance the impact of our collective efforts.”

Vera Stojanović, Programme Coordinator at Saoirse EHD



35-40

women across **5** Direct Provision centres in Cork were involved in the Mother Tongue project

400

children attended Christmas parties organised by Saoirse EHD across **11** Direct Provision centres

20

women engaging in weekly workshops

WINNER

MEDIUM/LARGE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CATEGORY

SENSATIONAL KIDS

Sensational Kids provides timely and affordable therapeutic supports for children with additional needs. At present, around 86,000 children are on waiting lists for speech and occupational therapy, and private services are prohibitively expensive for most families. Across its four Child Development Centres – located in Kildare, Mayo, Monaghan, and Cork – Sensational Kids is working to ensure that children with additional needs have access to the services that they need to reach their full potential.

Since its foundation in 2007, Sensational Kids has directly supported more than 10,000 children across Ireland, and – through its subsidised service model – has saved families more than €2.5m in therapy fees. Every year, more than 500 parents and childcare and healthcare professionals avail of training workshops, while graduate

programmes in Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy serve as a pipeline for skilled personnel in a sector that has long struggled with staff shortages.

The quality of therapeutic interventions, as well as the scale at which they are delivered, is also evident. Clinical outcomes are measured across a period of two years using the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure, which is designed to capture a client's self-perception of performance in everyday living. Sensational Kids monitors change scores – the average difference in ratings over time – to gauge efficacy. Results demonstrate not only that interventions are having an effect, but that the scale of this effect is very significant – something that is expressed vividly in the accompanying testimonies of parents.



KEY LEARNING

WHERE POSSIBLE, USE VALIDATED SCIENTIFIC MEASURES TO TRACK OUTCOMES



Quantifying social impact is notoriously difficult, but successfully moving beyond generic KPIs – like the number of people engaged – can yield a twofold payoff. First, a wider range of metrics can deliver a wider range of insights, and a richer and more compelling body of evidence. Second, choosing the right metrics can itself signal a deep knowledge of the organisation’s area of work, and a commitment to transparency and results.

Sensational Kids draws on validated scientific measures to evaluate outcomes, ensuring that measurement is effective, comparable, and robust. The use of complementary qualitative approaches, along with more bespoke quantitative techniques, brings richness and depth, and helps to convey the human value of those outcomes.

“It’s usually easier to be able to report on outputs and numbers of children supported, but it’s a real challenge to be able to prove your outcomes and that your service is making a real difference by significantly moving the dial for children. We are so happy that we can now report our proven outcomes. It takes time and investment, but it’s proven to be invaluable to know that our service is not only making a big impact but is also reaching clinical standards of change above and beyond the norms. Measuring our impact has been a very positive and valuable experience for us.”

Karen Leigh, Founder and CEO at Sensational Kids



10,000

children across Ireland have been supported since 2007

€2.5M

have been saved by families in therapy fees

500+

parents, childcare and healthcare professionals avail of training workshops every year

RUNNER UP

MEDIUM/LARGE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CATEGORY

CLARECARE

Clarecare was established in 1968 (initially as the Clare Social Services Council) to coordinate services for the elderly in Co Clare. Clarecare now employs over 400 staff and operates from six locations across the county. Clarecare provides three core services – addiction treatment, care of the older person (which includes home support and social work for older person services), and Family Support Services – and works in partnership with the HSE, Túsla, the Department of Justice, the Department of Social Protection, and others.

Clarecare's impact is set to deepen further across the lifetime of its Strategic Plan 2022-2027, which will guide the enhancement of services to meet current and future needs of the people of Clare. Notably, there are exciting plans in progress for the establishment of a new Clarecare Community Care Centre in Shannon. This initiative aims to

enable Clarecare to expand and improve its services for the residents of Shannon and the surrounding areas.

Additionally, substantial renovation works are currently underway at their Residential Addiction Treatment Centre in Bushypark, Ennis.

Clarecare's vision remains true to its origins, aspiring to be a trusted quality care provider within the county by supporting individuals and families to reach their full potential. Clarecare's work is underpinned by a person-centred, rights-based approach to service provision which is founded on respect for the service user's autonomy and preferences. Echoes of these principles can be found in the qualitative data that Clarecare collects systematically from its various client groups.

Quantitative metrics indicate considerable reach: in 2022, more than 273,000 hours of home support were provided across 700 clients, with an additional 771 people attending its day care service each month. Meanwhile, 105 people took part in its 28-day addiction treatment programme. The development of a state-of-the-art Community Care Centre at its Shannon site will see Clarecare's impact continue to grow in the years ahead.



KEY LEARNING

IMPACT IS ABOUT “WHAT WE DO” AND
“HOW WE DO IT”



The positive impact of Clarecare's work is striking in its range. Equally striking is that, for Clarecare, impact is about means as well as ends. Close attention is paid not only to the effectiveness of services, but also to the environmental costs incurred in the delivery of those services.

In this respect, management at Clarecare is keenly aware that “impacts” are not always intentional, nor are they always positive. A range of environmental initiatives, including waste-management processes, an energy-management strategy, and the elimination of environmentally harmful cleaning products, have already been rolled out to advance Clarecare's commitment to “climate conscious care.” A board sub-committee has also been established to monitor progress and to identify opportunities for future improvements.

“The essential process of tracking, measuring, and monitoring social impact at Clarecare is not just about numbers for each of our service areas, it's about learning, adapting, and continuously improving to maximise the positive effects of Clarecare's efforts. Tracking impact is crucial for the success and sustainability of any social enterprise. By continuously refining your approach based on data and insights, your social enterprise can maximise its positive influence on the communities it serves.”

Martina Minogue, Social
Enterprise Development Officer at
Clarecare



273,000

hours of home
support
provided
across **700**
clients

771

people
attending its
day care
service each
month

105

people took
part in **28-day**
addiction
treatment
programme

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES

ARE PROUD TO SUPPORT IRELAND'S SOCIAL ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY





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