



THE EMPOWER II PROGRAMME

2020-2022 CASE STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

Guiding talented women from all walks of life towards and beyond their business goals has been a real honour for myself and the rest of the EMPOWER team over the past few years. However, the journey has proven to be about more than results alone. Participants have also established valuable networks of like-minded women that will help to support and sustain them into the future and it is ultimately this spirit of female fellowship that makes EMPOWER so special.

The first EMPOWER programme ran from 2017-2019, across the counties of Galway, Mayo and Roscommon through the GMIT Galway and Mayo Innovation Hubs and was managed by Maria Staunton. It was funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Social Fund as part of the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. Based on the impressive EMPOWER I results, funding was secured to run a second EMPOWER cycle, EMPOWER II* from 2019 and 2022 and we expanded to a six-county region including Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal. It was delivered through the ATU Innovation Hubs in Galway, Mayo, Sligo and Donegal and I was Project Manager and business mentor.

This booklet showcases just some of the female founders who completed the EMPOWER II cycle. Inside, you'll find a diverse selection of businesses; software, social enterprises, retail, food, beauty, consultancy and more with an age profile ranging from 21 to 65. Each case study provides information on the entrepreneur, their business, their experience on EMPOWER and the benefits and challenges of being a female founder in Ireland today.

EMPOWER delivers two distinct programmes. EMPOWER START is designed for those with an idea who are seeking to validate their business concept while EMPOWER GROWTH is for individuals established in business and looking to grow and scale.

Supporting female founders to fast track their business development is a source of economic growth for the West and North West of Ireland. The demand for places on the programmes demonstrates the level of interest in entrepreneurship and the need for support. 170 women applied for 64 places on the EMPOWER I cycle. This increased to over 470 applications for 65 places

on the EMPOWER II cycle. Over 320 applications were received for the START programme and 150 for the GROWTH programme. This is indicative of the wealth of talent and innovative thinking that's out there and I believe that tapping into the potential of that in the longer term is certainly something we need to commit to as a country.

The figures really do speak for themselves. A recent survey of EMPOWER past participants revealed that, since completing the programme, 48% of the businesses had entered new markets. There was also a 70% increase in the number of products or services provided. Furthermore, EMPOWER businesses have reported growth of 56% in their national customer base and 47% globally. A total of 146 new employees have been hired since programme completion and €1.2 million investment has been collectively secured along with various vouchers, grants and innovation partnerships.

The benefits of the programmes were even more wide-ranging. During the EMPOWER II cycle, 30 ATU students completed work placements and assignments in EMPOWER businesses and some of our founders also gave guest lectures to the ATU students. The Local Enterprise Offices in the region also played a pivotal role, providing additional training, support and business mentoring to the EMPOWER participants. WDC, Westbic and the women in business networks also collaborated to support these female founders in many different ways and local radio stations and newspapers shared the participants' stories to inspire and build on the thriving community of female founders in the region. This cross-sectoral support and encouragement was fundamentally important to the writing of the EMPOWER success story and we are very grateful to all who got involved.

These female founders showed remarkable courage, resilience, tenacity and creativity as they managed to start and grow businesses during the exceptionally difficult and uncertain trading conditions which arose due to the COVID 19 pandemic. These business owners created a strong, supportive network where friendships and business relationships were formed and significant results were achieved and I have no doubt that the full scale of their achievements is yet to be revealed.

Sandra Divilly Nolan, EMPOWER Project Manager 2020-2022

*The EMPOWER II cycle was completed in September 2022.



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Báirbre Meehan

PAUSE

Location: Co. Sligo

Báirbre Meehan is an accredited coach and chartered accountant from Sligo. She holds Masters Degrees in both Management and Executive Coaching and spent 25 years in senior management roles for multinational organizations across financial services, banking and manufacturing sectors. Her extensive corporate experience has given her insight into how the pressures and stresses of life and work can adversely affect mental health.

Founded in 2015, PAUSE is an online coaching service that delivers measurable mental well being improvements for large organisations. The company's mission is to help individuals and teams take time to slow down, find a safe space, listen to

themselves, and PAUSE. In doing this, productivity is increased.

Winner of the EMPOWER START 2021 pitch competition, Báirbre's main takeaway was the market research that pushed her to meet and interview people within the HR and CEO community. She was also paired with an experienced mentor whose insight has been invaluable.

Báirbre plans on measuring PAUSE's future growth in terms of profile of conversion and absolute understanding of the market rather than focusing on finances. She also hopes to offer full-time roles to the two people she has trained on her team.

EMPOWER START helped me to really hear the customer's needs and, in understanding those, I was able to refine my business offering.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. The buzz of being in the creative space
2. Gives you work-life balance
3. You get to do your soul-work and give back

Top 3 challenges:

1. Entrepreneurship is lonely, especially when you experience knock-backs
2. Finding the early adopters is challenging
3. Being an entrepreneur can be hard financially



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Carla Rosenkranz

BARTERKIND

Location: Westport, Co. Mayo

Carla Rosenkranz is focused on changing the way we view economic transactions. From Mayo, she graduated from University College Dublin with a BA in Modern Languages, focusing on Spanish, Italian and German, and is a Cambridge qualified English teacher.

Founded in January 2020, Barterkind is an online exchange platform that aims to create a circular, alternative economy where anything can be bartered. Through the website, members can list their skills and services and be paired to swap skills with others, while earning tradeable tokens for their time. It aims to make

services more accessible to all.

The EMPOWER START programme helped Carla to improve her business vocabulary and gave her the confidence to pitch. Though she has also completed a few other programmes, EMPOWER will always stand out for her due to the lack of competition within the participants.

Barterkind will be piloting in Ireland, but Carla hopes to scale the company internationally. Currently, they are getting ready for investment, and they are hoping to launch by the end of 2022.

EMPOWER START gave me structured guidance. The atmosphere between participants was one of genuine encouragement and support, rather than competition. I received the connections, knowledge and confidence I needed to commit to my venture.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Building a career in line with my values and morals
2. Being in control of where/when I work
3. The incredible support there is for entrepreneurs in Ireland

Top 3 challenges:

1. It can be difficult to drive forward alone
2. The risk involved and the sacrifices you may have to make
3. Starting your own business also comes with plenty of rejection



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Catherine Devine PumpsKynz

Location: Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

Originally from London, Catherine Devine moved to Ireland in 1999 to study Theological and Biblical Studies in Trinity College Dublin and went on to work as a journalist for 18 years. In 2013, she was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. She now lives in Donegal with her husband and two children and manages PumpsKynz, her medical accessory brand.

PumpsKynz aims to brighten up the daily routines of those living with diabetes by offering eco-friendly, non-toxic silicone gel covers for insulin pumps and glucose monitoring systems and allowing individuals

to personalize their equipment while protecting it from cracks and scratches.

Catherine says the EMPOWER START mentors helped her to understand the potential difficulties of starting a business. She found the programme to be well-structured with the connections forged establishing an amazing network of female founders.

Catherine plans to expand her product line and create employment locally. Catherine's dream is to collaborate with established lifestyle brands to create product lines.

EMPOWER START has given me a solid grounding in what it takes to become a successful entrepreneur. More than that, it has made me a part of a network of inspirational people and opened doors that may have remained closed.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Having control of your business, future and finances
2. Starting a business that is not just about making money but makes a real difference in people's lives
3. Freedom to organise your day to suit family life, especially as a working mother

Top 3 challenges:

1. Getting access to funding
2. Making sure you are doing everything correctly and professionally
3. Your success depends only on yourself



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Caroline O'Shaughnessy

Cumas Ceangal

Location: Tuam, Co. Galway

Caroline O'Shaughnessy worked in administration for many years and trained as an accounting technician. However, her career was put on hold when she developed a disability. On the verge of losing her home, she looked to work online. Caroline set up a profile on UpWork, a platform for freelancers to collaborate with businesses and individuals, and went on to become a top rated member with 100% success. While completing a BA in Business Enterprise and Community Development with Equal Ireland, Caroline founded her business, Cumas Ceangal.

Cumas Ceangal is a non profit social enterprise that helps disabled and other marginalized groups to become freelancers. Caroline helps users to create

great first impressions with their profiles and provides mentorship.

Caroline found the EMPOWER START programme useful because the market research brought up questions she was unaware she needed to address. The programme also taught her the importance of working on her customer persona. Caroline believes that learning to make a Lean Canvas, a one-page live document sheet outlining an entire business, has been a particularly useful exercise.

Cumas Ceangal will initially help users to master Upwork but Caroline hopes to expand to other ecommerce websites. She is also looking towards expansion into the UK.

EMPOWER START was intense but rewarding. It showed me how much I had to learn and the importance of listening to the experts.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Building a legacy
2. Helping people
3. You can work at times that suit you

Top 3 challenges:

1. Second guessing yourself
2. Not being fully aware of what your next step should be
3. Trying to decide who to take on board to help



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Denise Callan

Location: Boyle, Co Roscommon

Denise is a digital and content marketing strategist from Roscommon. She holds a BSc degree in Agribusiness and Rural Development and a BA in English Literature and History. Denise has over twenty years' experience helping national and international brands to shape brand presence and attract customers and now offers her expertise through her website, Denise Callan.

The business was founded in early 2020 to help companies tell their stories and improve communications online. Through creating tailored digital content, she helps businesses to reach their target customers and drive sales. Other services include

strategy and planning and coaching and training.

From the EMPOWER START programme, Denise learned that aspects of herself she perceived to be weaknesses could be restructured as strengths. She enjoyed meeting female entrepreneurs from many different sectors, and she found the mentors and administrators to be wonderful.

Denise is looking to recruit an employee to help with less strategic work so that she can focus on delivering her services. She is currently working at capacity, but hopes to become more streamlined in her work and increase turnover.

EMPOWER START was truly empowering. It was an inspirational group of women, and it was wonderful to get positive feedback from the coaches and the team.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. I only work with people I like
2. I am in control of the work I do
3. When things go well, it is all down to me

Top 3 challenges:

1. When it does not go well, it is all down to me
2. There is no corporate safety net if you get sick
3. You are as good as your skills, so you have to constantly upskill



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Elaine Harrington

InForm Physio

Location: Oranmore, Co. Galway

Elaine Harrington has always been focused on personal well-being. After completing a Physiotherapy Degree in Limerick, she spent ten years working in New Zealand and Australia where she completed an MSc in Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy and qualified as a pilates instructor. She returned home to Galway in 2019.

InForm Physio combines traditional physiotherapy with pilates and aims to offer a hands-off management pathway to recovery. As Elaine has experienced motherhood herself, her focus has been directed towards serving pre-and post-natal moms.

Through the EMPOWER START programme, Elaine learned about marketing and market research which helped her to verify that her business was viable. She embraced the idea of women-supporting-women as she saw how the participants encouraged one another.

Elaine hopes to build up her client base in order to open her own space with a treatment room and a pilates studio for rehab focus. In addition, she hopes to eventually hire a team of physiotherapists that she can mentor to the same level of training in pilates.

The EMPOWER START Programme was an inspiring and motivating journey to meet and work with other women in business. To be surrounded and supported by other women and to give them support was really inspiring.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Flexibility to do what you want to do
2. It is empowering and gives you a sense of purpose
3. You're adding to a service in your own way

Top 3 challenges:

1. You have to really want it, it is time-consuming if you do not enjoy it
2. COVID has challenged business owners to navigate changes
3. Having the confidence to take the leap and take risks



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Fidelma Dunne O'Higgins

Irish Art Emporium

Location: Co. Galway

Galway native Fidelma Dunne O'Higgins completed a microbiology degree in NUIG and worked in genetics for several years. She also went on to complete a Masters in Enterprise Systems. Now, after completing several solo exhibitions, Fidelma is pursuing her dream of creating her own business selling Irish art.

Irish Art Emporium gives artists a vehicle to develop and establish an international market selling Irish themed art, originals and prints. It has a significant potential customer base of 70 million people around the world who claim Irish ancestry.

Through EMPOWER START, Fidelma received great support and comradeship. She could rely on those around her to give her names of service providers and noticed that people were very generous with their expertise. As she stated, "What I lacked in my vision other people were able to help me with."

Fidelma's business plans for the future include the onboarding of more Irish based artists. She also intends to recruit a business partner who is in touch with the art community.

EMPOWER START was run by people who were genuinely invested in your success. The positive and supportive environment reflected my values, and the structure and comradeship were very beneficial.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Establishing financial independence
2. Creating a legacy
3. Helping others to succeed

Top 3 challenges:

1. Fear of failure and doubt of success
2. People not taking you seriously
3. Fear that you will not be able to handle the potential of your idea



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Fran Best

Lissawell Coaching

Location: Lissadell, Co. Sligo

From Sligo, Fran Best holds a degree in Business, Recreation and Leisure, a bachelor's degree in Business and accreditation for mentoring and coaching. Fran has over 17 years' experience in leadership for nationals and multinational organisations. She now helps leaders and teams to achieve strategic goals and develop their brands through her business, Lissawell Coaching.

Lissawell Coaching offers strengths based coaching, working virtually or in person with organisations. She supports startups and inspires existing businesses, empowering leaders and their teams to use tools and

techniques to optimise performance and make sustainable changes.

Fran's biggest takeaway from the EMPOWER START was the network of women. She got the support she needed and was able to bounce ideas off of her peers. It also enabled her to focus on her core values, giving her the confidence to allow her strengths and authenticity to shine through.

In the future, Fran would love to continue to scale the business. She hopes to continue to improve and help more businesses to prosper.

Guest speaker Kelly Hoey best summed up my thoughts on the EMPOWER START network by saying 'This is the perfect tribe.' The community of women in business and the vast amount of knowledge shared was priceless. The programme was facilitated and run extremely well.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Gives the freedom to choose the path your business takes
2. Allows your passion to shine through
3. Exposes how resilient you are

Top 3 challenges:

1. Networking can be challenging
2. Across different channels and platforms there can be a lot of inconsistencies
3. There's a lot of paperwork and processes to go through

 lissawellcoaching.ie

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EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Karen McCormick

InCharge

Location: Inishowen, Co. Donegal

Inishowen native Karen McCormick has an undergraduate degree in Business Administration and French and a Masters in International Business. She enjoyed a successful 20 year career working in a variety of industries, including marketing, economic development, in third level sectors of European projects and local development of social enterprise. Married with four children, Karen now focuses on developing her business, InCharge.

Founded in 2020, InCharge is a technology solution to help individuals with care needs to self manage their health and social care plan funding. InCharge is also focused on keeping their end-users in mind, those who will be enabled through simple digital

management.

Karen got personal insight into a gap in the market when she found that her daughter's after-school services were extremely complicated to access. She discovered that, though individuals with care needs can access their own personal budget, there is a lot of paperwork involved.

EMPOWER START 2020 provided Karen with a network of other women to connect with who helped to discuss issues and possibilities. She found the environment to be supportive and uplifting and benefited greatly from the expertise of the leadership team.

EMPOWER START 2020 was inspiring and supportive. It allows time for you to gather your thoughts and move your business ideas forward.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Working on something you are really passionate about
2. Being an architect of your own destiny
3. Getting to talk to really interesting people

Top 3 challenges:

1. Not having enough time in the day
2. If you are a solo-founder, it is difficult to find a co-founder
3. Having patience around gaining traction and waiting for doors to open



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Lisa Marie Gallagher

Be Yew

Location: Swinford, Co. Mayo

From Mayo, Lisa Gallagher spent 9 years abroad, learning about many new cultures and had mentors on the way. On returning to Ireland in 2018, she was inspired to start BeYew. She received training as a shamanic practitioner and sound therapist and works to improve mindful and mental wellbeing through focusing on alignment with the natural environment.

BeYew offers courses to promote self-awareness and healing through connections with the elements and sound, all to help customers create harmony and achieve a sense of health, well-being and personal growth. The primary market is females between the ages of 35-55 who

are looking to learn skill sets for a sustainable life balance between their career and their responsibilities outside of work, such as children and family.

Lisa enjoyed learning how to run her business while engaging with other entrepreneurs on the EMPOWER START programme. She became motivated to research further into the market, and she developed the confidence to try again after making mistakes.

Lisa's plans for the future business expansion include rebuilding the company website and building a fully comprehensive online school with community forums.

I discovered the difference between how I thought a business should be run and how it actually needs to be run. I found the support of the community to be really empowering, and they helped me through a difficult learning curve.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Managing your own time and energy levels
2. You can feel the benefits of your work
3. The ability to create freely

Top 3 challenges:

1. Knowing when to take a break
2. Constantly pivoting to market changes and trends
3. The lack of security



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Margaret Rae

Konree Innovation Ltd.

Location: Athenry, Co. Galway

Based in Athenry, Co. Galway, Margaret Rae is an advocate for the ocean, focused on preparing for a brighter future. Educated to PhD level, she currently works at Rockfield Medical and is the EU Co-Chair of the Atlantic Marine Microbiome Group while developing her business, Konree Innovation Ltd. Margaret was awarded the Inaugural WomenTech EU award 2021-2022.

Founded in March 2021, Konree Innovation is working towards developing ocean technology for aquaculture and ocean monitoring. Passionate about preparing a better future, Margaret is working towards a new strategy to change the paradigm in

ocean awareness. Her initial target market is Norway, which has a majority of salmon aquaculture.

Margaret found the EMPOWER START very useful, for it addressed the daily obstacles women face. She enjoyed the collaborative nature of the programme and how everyone helped each other out.

Margaret is in the process of adding a co-founder to Konree Innovation. First, she plans on bringing her technology to a prototype stage to move forward with funding, grants and other investments to become a production prototype.

EMPOWER START improves the prospects for women by further preparing us for the obstacles we face day-to-day, especially as entrepreneurs. Because it is a women's network, the collaborative network was a fantastic aspect.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. You have created your own business
2. You are addressing a customer pain
3. Freedom to drive and steer the business where it needs to go

Top 3 challenges:

1. It is a solo endeavour, so it is easy to become isolated
2. Not having formal training or experience in business
3. Becoming familiar with legal and financial issues



EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Michelle McLoughlin

Fit Fun Adventures

Location: Leitrim

Michelle McLoughlin attended University College Dublin and is a lawyer. She has also worked as a lecturer and tutor for the past 19 years while serving as a trainer and business consultant since 2011. Michelle loves to explore Ireland and this inspired her to found her newest venture.

Fit Fun Adventures was founded in 2019 to make it easy for the public to find things to do. The website aims to centralise activities and speed up the process of finding accessible activities.

Michelle enjoyed EMPOWER START for the strong support network it provided. She also appreciated the support of the ATU group, mentors and speakers. These contacts did not stop when the programme ended, for Michelle still has a lifelong community to rely upon for help.

In the future, Michelle wants Fit Fun Adventures to be a platform for all 32 counties. She hopes to continue to develop the proper software for her website and expand the company to have a greater base of more activity listings.

EMPOWER START has enabled me to step back and challenge the idea and take time out from working in the business to focus on the strategic level of the business.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Complete freedom to do what you want
2. Gaining positive feedback and constructive criticism to build your business
3. You get to do something you are passionate about and help others

Top 3 challenges:

1. There are not enough hours in the day, so you have to prioritise and master delegation
2. Learning to get comfortable with continuous change
3. Budget all of the time

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EMPOWER START 2020/2021

Trèasa Fitzgibbon

Trèasa Fitzgibbon Coaching

Location: Castlebar, Co. Mayo

Trèasa Fitzgibbon is a professional career and life coach based in Mayo. She has more than 20 years of experience in the financial services industry, working in Dublin, London and New York. With her experience leading teams globally, she understands what it takes to be successful in the modern corporate world. Trèasa Fitzgibbon Coaching was established in early 2020.

Trèasa helps women live their best lives by clarifying their values and building a life and career based on them. She also helps them to develop the mindset, habits and behaviors needed to reach their full potential. Her services include free-format

coaching, webinars and two programmes focused on helping women re-energize and accelerate in their careers.

Trèasa's biggest takeaway from the EMPOWER START programme was the connections she established with the other women. Having not worked in Ireland since 2004, she enjoyed forging friendships with other women in business, sharing and listening to their stories.

Looking forward, Trèasa is focused on growth for her company, wants to turn it into a more financially viable long-term business.

EMPOWER START gave me the opportunity to meet like-minded women with similar passions, ambitions and goals. The energy I got from other people being on the same path with me was helpful to keep me motivated.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Freedom
2. Creativity, for you decide where to take your business
3. A sense of empowerment in not having to act according to what someone else decides

Top 3 challenges:

1. Financial insecurity, you do not have a set, scheduled paycheck
2. Discipline, for you are not answering to anybody so it can be easier to procrastinate
3. Lack of support from co-workers



EMPOWER GROWTH 2020/2021

Ann Butler

Higgins Pharmacy

Location: Sligo

Originally from Mayo, Ann Higgins moved to the UK at 17 and received an MSc in Pharmacy from the University of Brighton. She worked in hospital pharmacy for two years before returning to work in Irish community pharmacy in 2006. She then worked as a pharmacist manager until 2016, when she purchased Higgins Pharmacy in Sligo with her twin sister Deirdre.

Higgins Pharmacy is a family run business with locations at Market Cross and Teeling Street. The business aims to emulate the patient-centered approach the Higgins

family have provided since the doors first opened in 1948. They also have worked to expand the business' online presence and introduce more services and products.

Ann feels that EMPOWER GROWTH helped her a great deal. It taught her to be more goal oriented, without worrying unduly over how she would achieve them. She also took away the importance of always celebrating the wins, no matter how small. Ann enjoyed the support network, for she felt it was good to have feedback from a variety of voices, which inspired her to look at things from multiple angles.

The programme can be summed up in three words: an excellent support network. It truly was a programme I learned a lot from.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. You get to be your own boss
2. It is a privilege to be the leader of an amazing team
3. Everyday is different and dealing with the public is exciting

Top 3 challenges:

1. Sometimes you do too much and are constantly on the go
2. It is hard to take time off
3. Work life balance could be better- it is hard to schedule downtime

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EMPOWER START 2018, EMPOWER GROWTH 2020/2021

Asumpta Gallagher

Best Practice

Location: Co. Galway

Asumpta Gallagher worked as a trainer for Vision Express Ireland before completing a diploma in PR. She went on to manage large general practices for over 17 years before establishing Best Practice in 2018. She now manages the business in her home county of Galway.

Best Practice provides training and consultancy services in practice management, business mentoring and HR and Asumpta offers one to one sessions with family doctors, general practice reviews and training. She works directly with GP's, practice managers, administrators and primary care managers to create a more efficient working

environment with empowered staff, improving patient experience.

Asumpta completed EMPOWER START in 2018 and GROWTH in 2021, and found both to be extremely helpful. Other participants served as a mini board of directors sharing valuable feedback. Asumpta also found that monthly meetings provided accountability to complete short-term business goals.

She hopes to develop a full consultancy business that will supply services not only to general practice but to other areas within the healthcare sector and to build a team of professionals.

EMPOWER START and GROWTH were both an incredible resource for me. Having a supportive network along with mentoring and access to other key expertise has been critical. I would highly recommend this programme to any female entrepreneur who is ready to grow and scale their business.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Having the freedom and autonomy to shape things
2. Be able to provide solutions that weren't in place previously in my sector
3. Opens me up to an incredible network of people

Top 3 challenges:

1. Feeling isolated when starting out
2. Staying motivated
3. Overcoming the fear of failure



EMPOWER GROWTH 2020/2021

Carly Hillier

Whitethorne Equine Health

Location: Cashel North, Co Sligo

Carly Hillier is a trained and qualified Applied Equine and Canine Zoopharmacognocist. Following her studies in Equine Science at the University of Limerick, Carly graduated from the Ingraham Academy of Applied Zoopharmacognosy (UK) and relocated to Ireland over 30 years ago. She has worked with horses for over 25 years, breeding and training as well as teaching riding lessons.

Whitethorne Equine Health offers a natural approach to healing horses. Through the use of herbs and essential oils, each animal's unique ability to self-medicate is enabled. The company provides one-to-one mentoring, equine and canine

workshops, an in-person clinic and sells herbs and essential oils online.

Through EMPOWER GROWTH, Carly was inspired to move online, which was a huge pivot in the business. She was also inspired to get out with a camera and film her work and found the support, network and lead mentors to be very helpful.

In the future, Carly is hoping to open a clinic for people to bring their horses. She would also like to make her workshops accessible throughout the globe. Lastly, she would like to publish research on race horse's ability to self-medicate.

EMPOWER GROWTH helped me expand my business virtually which allowed me to open up to a global market with confidence.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. It is incredibly satisfying to run your own ship
2. You get to make your own decisions and only respond to yourself
3. It is a fantastic personal growth tool

Top 3 challenges:

1. Remembering to clock-off
2. It can be difficult to employ people who are committed and diligent
3. Learning how to manage people and staff

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EMPOWER GROWTH 2020/2021

Emer Flannery

Kocoono

Location: Belmullet, Co. Mayo

Emer Flannery is based in Mayo and is passionate about mental health and wellbeing. She completed a Bachelor's Degree and Higher Diploma in Psychology before working as a behavioral therapist for children with autism.

Kocoono is an online business that creates quality weighted blankets. They use deep-touch pressure stimulation, aid relaxation and promote sleep through stimulation of pressure points to ground you and can help those struggling with sleep difficulties, insomnia, alzheimers, autism, anxiety, a heightened nervous

system and restless leg syndrome.

EMPOWER GROWTH provided Emer with valuable mentorship. Throughout the 11 month programme, each participant went through business and personal problems, so it was valuable to have a network for comfort and problem-solving.

Emer plans on developing new products for mental and physical wellbeing. Kocoono is also working on expanding its reach beyond Ireland, having recently soft launched in the UK and hoping to expand into the EU and U.S. markets.

EMPOWER GROWTH was outstanding. It provided me with mentorship and a community of excellent support both personally and professionally. I would recommend it to anyone starting a business or looking to scale.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Freedom to make decisions aligned with your own ethics
2. Contributing in a different way to the world and creating your own script
3. The thrill in seeing your ideas materialize from nothing

Top 3 challenges:

1. Trying to switch-off from the work mindset
2. Delegating, taking time to train other people and finding people with the right skill sets
3. Making fast and effective decisions, not getting hung up and having decision overload



EMPOWER GROWTH 2020/2021

Helen Nolan

Spraoi agus Spórt

Location: Carndonagh, Inishowen, Co. Donegal

Helen Nolan was raised in Co. Donegal before moving to Dublin where she received a BA in Accounting and Finance from DCU and trained as a chartered accountant with the Kepak Group. She returned to Carnadonagh in 2007, where she currently lives with her husband and four daughters.

Spraoi agus Spórt focuses on providing recreational activities that are accessible, affordable, and aligned to the needs of the community. Over sixty classes are offered weekly with capability for 600 attendees ranging from age 0 to 90. This social enterprise was awarded “Social Enterprise

of the Year” at the Charity Impact Awards in 2018 and 2019.

Helen found the EMPOWER programme to be very beneficial, in particular the great peer-to-peer support. The programme also highlighted the importance of networking and reaching out to others for help when needed.

Spraoi agus Spórt’s future plans include building an auditorium, youth space, community kitchen, sensory garden, public changing space, a bigger Fablab, more coworking space and a creative makers hub by Autumn 2023.

The EMPOWER programme taught me to work on my business rather than in my business. It guided me to take the time and space needed to grow Spraoi agus Spórt.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Doing what you love to do
2. Being rewarded by seeing goals materialize
3. Flexibility of being an entrepreneur allows you to work on the business at times that suit you

Top 3 challenges:

1. Accessing the right funding can be tricky.
2. While having more people at management level is useful, finances dictate that that is not always possible
3. COVID has been a massive challenge to adapt to

 spraoiagussport.ie

 [Spraoiagussport](https://www.instagram.com/Spraoiagussport)

 [spraoiagussport](https://www.facebook.com/spraoiagussport)

 [Spraoi agus Spórt](https://www.youtube.com/Spraoiagussport)

 [@SpraoiSport](https://twitter.com/SpraoiSport)



EMPOWER GROWTH 2020/2021

Melissa Moore

The Retail Advisor

Location: Co. Mayo

Raised in London, Melissa Moore has a Masters degree in Business Studies. She spent 20 years working with Irish and international retail brands, such as Brown Thomas, IKEA, and Kilkenny Design. She now lives in Mayo with her husband while managing her own company, The Retail Advisor.

The Retail Advisor aims to help independent retailers and Irish craft and design makers to reach their full potential. Working with independent retailers, Melissa

identifies operating obstacles and offers solutions to create more sustainable, efficient businesses.

Melissa's biggest takeaway from the EMPOWER GROWTH programme was to work on her business rather than in her business. Therefore, she took time each week to look at her business's strategy, planning and growth. The programme taught her to focus on her customer, therefore taking steps to provide services they want and need.

I thoroughly enjoyed the Programme. I found it very engaging and inspiring. My biggest takeaway is that I learned to work on my business rather than in my business for long-term growth.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Getting to do something you love and enjoying your work
2. Being able to manage your own schedule
3. Wearing all the hats as an entrepreneur, therefore learning about marketing, digital and social media, websites, finance and other aspects to business

Top 3 challenges:

1. It can be lonely to work on your own
2. It is a constant hustle to look ahead and keep moving forward, looking for your next job and apply for things, not knowing what is coming next
3. Having to learn certain aspects of running your business that you are less savvy at, such as finance or law



EMPOWER GROWTH 2020/2021

Rita Oates

Rita Oates Artist

Location: Roscommon

Rita Oates is an Irish artist born in Kansas City, USA. She grew up traveling between Kansas and Leitrim and is now based in Roscommon. After qualifying as a maths teacher, Rita followed her real passion and completed a college course in art.

Rita Oates Art was founded in 2018 and produces meaningful products inspired by mindfulness and nature combined with words of encouragement and hope. Rita produces quality, Irish-made and sustainable framed prints, greeting cards and scarves.

EMPOWER GROWTH was very beneficial for Rita, as she was able to meet women from a variety of businesses, each with the common theme of being determined, focused, hardworking, and passionate.

In the future, Rita will continue to work on new collections of cards, prints and scarves based on new themes in her life. She also hopes to eventually export to shops and retailers looking for authentic Irish-printed art in America and the United Kingdom.

I enjoyed every aspect of EMPOWER GROWTH and learned so much. The learning will continue through my business career. It opened so many doors and truly was special as it was female-based, so we were able to relate and understand each other's problems that you wouldn't get through any general webinar on business.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. You are your own boss
2. You can choose the direction the company goes, so you can keep your company authentic
3. You feel great value from being proud of your business choices

Top 3 challenges:

1. The marketing world can be very crowded
2. Finding the correct retail space
3. Navigating the world while staying true to your passions in life



EMPOWER START 2018 and EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Suzanne Carney

Anatomy Physiotherapy

Location: Claremorris, County Mayo

Suzanne Carney is an experienced Clinical Specialist in Pelvic Health Physiotherapy. Born and raised in Mayo, she achieved her undergraduate degree from Manchester Metropolitan University and her Masters degree in Clinical Physiotherapy - Continence and Women's Health from Curtin University, Perth.

Established in 2018, Claremorris Anatomy Physiotherapy aims to provide patients with expert care, especially in treating pelvic and continence issues. Suzanne is also a registered Mummy MOT practitioner and certified Pre and Postnatal Coach.

Suzanne completed both EMPOWER

programmes, and felt that they each helped boost her confidence and grow her skillset as an entrepreneur. EMPOWER START supplied her with basic knowledge of how to run a business, while GROWTH helped her further establish her business long-term, focusing on aspects such as income, margins, and profits.

In the future, Suzanne would like to expand her business and take on a specialised multidisciplinary team. She wishes to also be connected with a musculoskeletal therapist, clinical psychotherapist, dietitian, and occupational therapist to bring on quality experts to create a comprehensive one-stop centre for pelvic health.

EMPOWER has given me the confidence and knowledge to take Anatomy Physiotherapy from a part-time clinic to a viable, thriving full time business. It has provided me with the tools to have a better work life balance.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Freedom and flexibility to choose your own working hours
2. Ability to work without constraints of a normal workplace
3. Easier to maintain a work-life balance

Top 3 challenges:

1. Learning to switch off thinking about the business
2. Running a company individually without a team can be challenging
3. You are not on a steady, guaranteed income

 anatomyphysiotherapy.ie

 [anatomyphysiotherapy1](https://www.facebook.com/anatomyphysiotherapy1)

 [Anatomy_physiotherapy](https://www.instagram.com/Anatomy_physiotherapy)



EMPOWER GROWTH 2020/2021

Trish Hegarty

Inis Communications

Location: Co. Donegal

Donegal native Trish Hegarty is a graduate of Queen's University Belfast and Dublin City University and spent 14 years working in the print and broadcast industries, mainly for the Irish Times and the BBC. In this time, she developed many media and public relations skills and contacts that equipped her to deliver effective PR.

In 2004, she founded Inis Communications, an agency managing social media, digital content, print media, radio, TV and services including in-house mentoring and training. Inis Communications serves public, private and voluntary sector clients across the

North West and in Europe.

Trish enjoyed the structure of the EMPOWER GROWTH program, and was motivated to work on her goals. The support system of the programme was also invaluable, as she learned a lot from the mentors, key speakers, and other participants.

Looking to the future, Trish plans to sell online content template packages that include purchase options for PR strategy, social media, action plans and website building.

The EMPOWER GROWTH programme forced me to take time out to examine the steps I need to take to grow my business. The support structure of the programme also helped me explore the full potential of my business.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. It's exciting to be your own boss
2. Being an entrepreneur allows you to innovate your business and adapt to changes in society
3. It allows for flexibility in your lifestyle

Top 3 challenges:

1. Entrepreneurs face every challenge themselves, so it is hard to take time off when needed
2. Staying on top of the necessary skills and adapting to a constantly changing environment
3. Growing and managing a growing team can seem daunting at first



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Dani Baumgarten

Dani Teal Studio

Location: Co. Mayo

Dani is a creative entrepreneur and a self-taught textile designer with a bachelor's degree in business. She has always wanted to own her own business and in 2021 launched a textile design studio offering one-of-a-kind prints for fashion brands. She has created and sold 1000+ digital designs that sell on autopilot 24/7!

Dani Teal Studio offers Design and Education Services:

Design:

- Bespoke print designs that are tailored based on the client's brief. A global client

base with clients in Australia, the US, Portugal and many other countries.

- Artwork licensing, where a brand can use existing designs for a limited period of time and print their own fabric

- A portfolio of over 1000 designs sold by fabric manufacturers where the studio receives lifetime royalties on every sale.

Education:

Training programmes for print designers on how to get started in the industry, how to sell their artwork and how to work with clients professionally.

I am honoured to have been selected to participate in the EMPOWER START program. I was able to understand my unique strengths and how to use them to grow my creative business in just 12 weeks. Sandra and the other mentors were tremendously helpful. The course really opened my eyes and gave me the confidence to embark on my entrepreneurial journey.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Being part of a support network
2. Access to female-focused initiatives and funding
3. Women's inherent inner strength and resilience

Top 3 challenges:

1. Social expectations
2. Work-life balance
3. Lack of capital



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Adriana Taheny

ZZZANA

Location: Co. Galway

With a strong background in commercial retail, Adriana took the plunge into self-employment in 2019 with the establishment of her consulting agency, The Collaborative Consultants. Working with clients in the areas of idea generation, new product development and team development this inspired Adriana to create her own product-based business, one that made a difference. Frustrated by an inability to sleep due to night sweats and the lack of useful solutions on the market ZZZANA was born.

Made from 100% organic bamboo ZZZANA pyjamas are naturally temperature regulating, anti-bacterial, hypoallergenic, sustainable, and vegan. The bamboo is certified organic

and fair trade. ZZZANA pyjamas are perfect for those experiencing night sweats which are a common side effect of menopause and medication. Research conducted shows that temperature plays a significant role in one's ability to get a good night's sleep. Incorrect temperature affects the body's ability to fall into REM (Rapid Eye Movement) Sleep. This is the best quality 'deep sleep' one can get. Bamboo as a material is naturally temperature regulating. It is often used in sportswear and in hotter climates for those working outdoors. Adriana designs and produces pyjamas, made from 100% organic bamboo which are comfortable, cool, stylist, luxurious and most importantly help you get a good night's sleep!

The EMPOWER Program built my confidence as a businesswoman and gave me access to not only to professionals but a network of other amazing female entrepreneurs. It also forced me to deep dive into my business and challenge my thoughts and ideas.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Opportunity to pursue a passion
2. Level of support from other females and female-led programs
3. Ability to make a difference and challenge the status quo

Top 3 challenges:

1. Work life balance, it is hard to switch off
2. Some areas where support is needed, such as finance, can be male dominant and your vision is not always understood
3. The pressure sometimes to believe women have to be able to do it all, that is why a strong supportive network of women around you is important



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Denise Duffy

Room for a Trade

Location: Cnoc Na Ri, Co. Leitrim

Denise Duffy lives in Mayo and has have 3 adult children. She previously started up a business in 1994 when she returned from the UK, which was very successful. She has a desire to do something meaningful with her life that will benefit others and believes that her new company, Room for a Trade, will allow her to do this.

Room for a Trade matches a tradesperson to a homeowner who wants a particular job done in their home or garden. In exchange for an agreed amount of hours

worked per day the tradesperson and their family get accommodation and breakfast for the agreed duration of the job as well as a family holiday, as the rest of the day is their own. Work offered can be gardening, painting, plastering, tiling, etc. No money changes hands and the homeowner saves time and money.

EMPOWER START enabled Denise to meet likeminded people who were on the same journey as her and this helped to build her confidence.

EMPOWER START helped my confidence. A lot of us felt like imposters at first, but we had so much support from everyone on the EMPOWER team, and all the guest speakers, that by the end, we felt absolutely EMPOWERed!

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Opportunity
2. Validity
3. Innovation

Top 3 challenges:

1. Lack of self-belief
2. Fear of failure
3. Failing to see my own strengths



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Elaine Doherty & Sandra Ginnelly

Elasan Solutions Ltd.

Location: Co. Mayo

This partnership has a combined total of twenty-four years of experience in the digital space with a focus on digital marketing, digitalisation and business development. Having worked in the construction industry, this team are all too familiar with the limitations of paper-based reporting. They have coupled this experience in the construction sector with Sandra's business development expertise and Elaine's qualifications and experience in Digital Transformation Management to deliver a unique tailored solution for clients which other mobile forms companies cannot compete with.

Elasan Solutions provides a robust Digital Forms App and Reporting Platform to SME's across Ireland and the UK. It allows teams to collect data from site accurately, quickly and in real-time both modernising and streamlining business operations in such areas as compliancy, health and safety and more.

Elasan Solutions not only provides a user-friendly digital solution, the team of specialists also conducts in-depth consultations with each client to develop a bespoke library of forms, based exactly on their individual needs.

There were many benefits to taking part in the EMPOWER START programme for both of us. The number one stand out benefit is the network of like-minded and extremely supportive females that you gain just by taking part, it is something that you cannot put a value on.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Freedom
2. Being your own boss
3. Flexibility

Top 3 challenges:

1. Finding the right balance between work and home life
2. Coping with the fear of failure
3. Battling against traditional business ways

 elasolutions.ie

 [elasolutions](https://www.instagram.com/elasolutions)

 [elasolutions](https://www.facebook.com/elasolutions)

 [elasan-solutions](https://www.linkedin.com/company/elasan-solutions)



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Goretta Dwyer

PilatesNow.ie

Location: Co. Roscommon

Goretta is a Coru Registered Physical Therapist and Pilates Instructor who has worked with thousands of women over the past 20 years from her physical therapy practice in Roscommon town, alongside her dedicated pilates studio. She has recently qualified as a 3rd Age Practitioner through Burrell Education and is developing midlife programmes for perimenopausal women.

PilatesNow.ie is an online membership platform that provides a space and community for women to access evidence-based advice and information alongside

effective workouts that are appropriate to their life stage. Pilates Now offers short, bite sized workouts on demand, and is accessible anywhere, anytime, on your terms. It is PILATES IN YOUR POCKET.

With her professional and personal experience, Goretta is well positioned to understand the needs and challenges of modern women and recognises how precious their time is. She creates courses with the most up to date, evidence-based information in an accessible format, science made simple, alongside enjoyable movement classes.

EMPOWER START is a brilliant opportunity to look at your business from inside out, to assess it objectively, discover what works and what does not and learn how to improve and develop your business. Having access to a variety of experts is invaluable. It is an amazing community of woman that encourages and supports each other, it really is a special tribe to be part of.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Collaboration
2. Opportunities
3. Independence & Freedom

Top 3 challenges:

1. Lack of confidence
2. Balancing it all
3. Isolation

 pilatesnow.ie

 pilatesnow.ie

 pilatesnow.ie

 goretta-dwyer-b805791ba



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Katie Cadden

Location: Co. Mayo

Mayo based Katie is a governance expert who EMPOWERS boards of directors to build trust and integrity in their organisations. Her business leverages her legal background as a solicitor and legal educator, together with lived experience as an independent governance expert, lawyer, independent Non-Executive Director and accredited mediator.

Katie Cadden is a unique governance consultancy and board training company of choice for boards of directors. The business is dedicated to delivering elegant solutions to the governance

needs of boards of directors across Ireland's charity, voluntary, public and private sectors. The company specialises in governance excellence. Delivered in a signature style, through face to face or online interaction, bespoke services include: board evaluations, governance audits, board training, board diversity assessments, chairperson coaching, board conflict resolution and tailored governance advice.

She found EMPOWER START to be both well-structured and beneficial to the success of her business.

The programme was structured and delivered in such a way that enabled me to explore and reflect not only on my business proposition, but on myself as a woman; a woman with many desires, including the desire to found and build her own business.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Collaboration
2. Tenacity
3. Perspective

Top 3 challenges:

1. Handling the inner critic
2. Achieving a work/life balance
3. Fear of failure



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Michelle Boland

AONACH

Location: Co. Galway

First a mother and now an entrepreneur. Michelle had worked managing a design store before the pandemic. On reevaluation she decided she wanted to start to create her own product rather than curate other people's creations. On joining the EMPOWER START programme, Michelle had designed her first product. During the programme she got the motivation, support and 'push' to develop a brand and follow her dreams.

Michelle designs and makes organic cross body bags. They are extremely durable and contemporary in style. The sustainable element makes it a conscientious accessory to own and it is designed to last for a lifetime. It is a functional, multipurpose bag which sells to a wide variety of people. It is proving particularly popular with summer festivals goers, sporting enthusiasts and busy mothers.

Without the programme I truly believe I would not have come as far as I have. It has instilled in me a great business sense but also a self-belief which has not left me.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Being a role model
2. Embracing the multitasking
3. Doing what I love

Top 3 challenges:

1. Balancing work/life
2. Not having a male advantage
3. Having to multitask



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Dr. Natasha Langan

Location: Co. Sligo

Natasha is a trained clinical psychologist, psychosexual therapist and mindfulness teacher with a passion and interest in women's health and psychosexual difficulties. She trained in the NHS and worked as lead clinician in a psychosexual service. During COVID, she decided after 12 years in the UK to move back to Ireland. She now works in the HSE as a Senior Psychologist in an Adult ADHD service while she sets up her business.

This business is a science informed online psychological and psychosexual therapy service for women and their partners. The service offers one to one therapy for women, couples' psychosexual therapy,

online mindfulness groups and educational workshops. In the future, Natasha plans to hold retreats for women. Today psychosexual therapy is not widely available in the HSE nor in the NHS. Natasha's service will offer specialist online psychological and psychosexual therapy services from a clinician that is passionate about sexual health and wellbeing and compassionate to challenges women face in developing presence, pleasure and connection in their intimate lives. This business is primarily online to be able to reach clients in more remote locations where accessibility to specialist services is more difficult.

The programme was an overall amazing experience, from the other female entrepreneurs I met and the peer support they offered, to the organizers and the speakers. It gave me the space to reflect and consider my business, to learn about starting and growing my business, and to meet others that faced similar challenges to know that I was not alone. I felt I had people behind me rooting for me to succeed. The course gave me confidence to believe in myself and my business idea and a road map for going forward.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Doing what I love and am passionate about
2. Allows me to be creative
3. Creating a business with values

Top 3 challenges:

1. Confidence
2. Prioritising time
3. Changing relationship with money



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Nicola Kearns

Leitrim Writing Cottage

Location: Cnoc Na Ri, Co Leitrim

Nicola Kearns is the best-selling author of three novels, (The Malta Saga). She is also a creative writing coach, qualified proof-reader and editor and lecturer of Italian Language and Culture. Nicola is a frequent speaker on podcasts/radio, appears at writing events across Ireland and has contributed to various anthologies.

Leitrim Writing Cottage is a Rural Writing Workshop based in a newly restored 19th

Century cottage, situated in the quiet countryside. Services offered include weekend and midweek workshops and short story writing courses. Nicola also provides an editing and proofreading service including manuscript assessment and reader's reports.

Nicola found the EMPOWER START programme to be hugely beneficial to her business growth and the fulfillment of her professional ambitions.

EMPOWER START absolutely changed my life. I now have the new business that I had dreamt of for over ten years. I have clients. I have my own income. I have so much joy every morning going to work at something that I created myself.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Independence in earning my own money
2. Pride in what I do
3. The feeling of accomplishment

Top 3 challenges:

1. Beating imposter syndrome
2. Being my own boss
3. Feeling the fear and doing it anyway



EMPOWER START 2021/2022

Sinéad Foyle

The Sea Hare Kitchen

Location: Co. Galway

From Connemara, Sinéad grew up in the family run hotel business. At college she studied travel and tourism. Sinéad spent ten years in Dublin working in the corporate world but always had a drive to return to the west.

Having returned to Connemara, using her years of experience and knowledge of the food industry, she along with a friend Philippa Duffy created The Sea Hare Tamarind Sauce in 2019. It was batch produced, on shelves and available to purchase in 2020. It is now sold to independent grocery shops around the country. It has an umami flavour of sweet, sour, salt and gives extra depth of flavour

to soups, stews and is great with toasted cheese sandwiches.

In the summer of 2022 Philippa and Sinead set up a pop-up café, The Sea Hare, in Cleggan, Co. Galway. The Sea Hare partners with local Connemara producers to bring customers amazing tastes from the west. The food they produce is either grown locally, caught in the waters surrounding Clifden or foraged from the Connemara shoreline. In September 2022 The Seahare Kitchen was awarded the BEST CAFE IN CONNAUGHT at the Irish Restaurant Awards.

I cannot believe the amount of knowledge and direction I got from the Empower program. It completely opened up my mind to so many avenues I didn't know about, and how to tap into so much information that's out there. The help I got with conducting research and pitching our products was invaluable.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Freedom
2. Creativity
3. Working in an area you thrive

Top 3 challenges:

1. Multitasking
2. Choosing the best idea to develop
3. Managing the impact of the external environment



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Aisling Kelly Hunter

WB's Coffee House and
Sligo Oyster Experience

Location: Co. Sligo

Aisling grew up in Sligo where her family ran a pub named The Punchbowl which was opened by her father in 1968. She completed a national diploma in business and tourism from ATU, Sligo in 2000. She continued her studies in Edinburgh at Napier University where she was awarded an honours degree in business and entrepreneurship. On moving home to Sligo, she opened the award-winning business, WB's Coffee House in 2014. Having married an oyster farmer and identifying another business opportunity, Aisling set up Sligo

Oyster Experience in 2018.

Located in the centre of Sligo town, WB's Coffee House serves food and beverages to the Sligo community and visitors to the area. It sells a select range of food and gift products instore and operates an online business selling food hampers and Irish made goods and products.

The Sligo Oyster Experience offers unique guided tours of the farm and an oyster tasting experience.

Brilliant. It got me through Covid19 which was a very difficult time. Declan and Sandra were brilliant in getting me to dive into my business and customers. I never 'had the time' but this is critical to understanding your business and seeking new opportunities.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Flexibility to raise my little girl
2. Develop ideas
3. Meet other inspiring ladies

Top 2 challenges:

1. Juggling family life
2. Speaking up



wbscoffeehouse.ie
sligooystereperience.ie



sligooysters
wbscoffeehouse



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Cepta Mahon

Cookalicious

Location: Co. Galway

Cepta left a successful career in the finance industry to be a stay-at-home Mom for her three children. She completed the EMPOWER START 2018/2019 programme and set up her own business Cookalicious - a heart centred business doing something she loves, sharing her talents and making a difference in people's lives. With the business established she secured a place on the EMPOWER GROWTH programme in 2021 to support her to grow and scale her business.

Cookalicious is now an award-winning cooking school helping people transform their everyday cooking. Cepta's customers

are busy people with families who want fuss-free fabulous food, that is healthy, homemade and fits in with real-life. As well as online classes, she hosts Live Cookalongs, Cooking Camps for Teens, In-Person Supper Clubs & Corporate Events. Cepta's Supper Clubs offer a unique dining experience for her customers. By sharing her passion, she gives her customers confidence and connection. For her customers it is a journey, a cooking & learning adventure, filling them with the confidence that they can do it too. A class with Cookalicious is more than a cookery class, it is a cookery experience - engaging, full of energy with fun & passion shining through!

The EMPOWER Programme is like having a support group, connecting you with women in the same boat as you, with the same challenges, with the same doubts and fears but with the same passion and drive as you, to do something great, to write your own story and to honour your talents. When we help each other, we all flourish and grow. We are stronger together.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Flexibility
2. Creative Autonomy
3. Freedom to be you

Top 3 challenges:

1. Doubt
2. Loneliness
3. Juggling motherhood, life, career - everything!



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Edel McWeeney Moran

EZxploring

Location: Co. Leitrim

Edel McWeeney Moran is a mother of four and has worked in education for over twenty years. Outside of school, Edel has been an education coordinator, museum guide and visual art curator in museums, galleries & festivals in Ireland. A culmination of these life experiences led Edel and her husband Kevin to develop the concept for EZxploring, which is designed with families in mind.

EZxploring creates interactive walking trail games, enabling visitors and locals to easily explore, connect and engage with the rich heritage found in Ireland's villages, towns and waterways and from a fresh new perspective.

EZxploring games feature colourful printed maps, self-guided walking trails & fun activities designed to challenge the greatest of explorers of all ages and interests. It has also created The Playground Passport, a colourful guide for children and their families which highlights all the local authority playgrounds found in a county. EZxploring customers include Tourism Officers, Heritage Officers, County Librarians, Healthy Ireland Coordinators & Community Development Officers. And best of all, because EZxploring works with local authorities, all EZxploring games are provided free to the end users through tourism offices, heritage centres, libraries and schools.

EMPOWER provided a network of supportive knowledgeable women and tutors who were able to help navigate businesses through the most difficult of Covid times. The connection between these women really spurred each other on. As a new business, it was reassuring to hear similar issues and concerns from those in much more established businesses, and as a group help resolve those issues.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. The flexibility of being able to run our business and balance family life
2. I am passionate and proud of what we do
3. We work with local people to bring stories from the past into the minds of young and old, keeping history alive in a visual and fun manner that appeals to all

Top 3 challenges:

1. The challenge of running a business and creating a work life balance. Particularly difficult if working from home
2. Learning to delegate. While time consuming, it's important to know when to do it
3. Having to step outside your comfort zone, running a business is a huge learning curve. Some tasks come easy, some not so



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Ellie Loftus Nickeze

Location: Co. Galway

Ellie Loftus is qualified in General Nursing and has a postgraduate both in Paediatrics and Intensive Care. She also has a law degree and is a qualified barrister. Her latest venture is her company, Nickeze.

Nickeze designs period underwear, period sportswear and period swimwear that offer an environmentally friendly and cost-effective solution to periods that help

prevent concerns such as leaks. Nickeze are reusable, absorbent & leakproof, and come in a variety of absorbencies and colors as no two girls or women are the same. Nickeze are also passionate about working with girls that are often forgotten in conversations on periods, such as those with intellectual and physical disabilities in helping period solutions that are inclusive of all.

I found a community of like-minded women, who were passionate about their business. I found myself amongst women that really did want to make a difference and where money was rarely the motivating factor. When you are running a business, you often feel overwhelmed but when you spoke to the other Empower Women, you did not feel alone, and we shared solutions that we found worked for us to see if it helped the other. I have made friends for life.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Autonomy
2. Learning new skills
3. Exciting journey

Top 3 challenges:

1. Being the sole decision maker
2. Not having all the answers
3. All the bureaucracy around running a business



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Gina O'Neill

TheGiftShop.ie

Location: Co. Galway

Gina graduated with a Master of Business and is a mother of two children aged four and two. With a background in marketing and Google Adwords she decided not to return to her marketing job after her first baby was born. Gina wanted to work for herself so she could achieve the perfect work/life balance. Today she runs a thriving, award winning gift business, with a five-star Trustpilot rating, serving thousands of customers in Ireland and from around the world.

TheGiftShop.ie supply personalised gifts including candles, cushions, mugs, chocolate, wine and prints to their customers. Every order is important, and quality products and service are guaranteed when one orders from this business. The team members are available from morning until night to assist customers. Offering a next day service for high quality, personalised gifts sets this business apart from the competition.

The EMPOWER programme was an amazing experience that I will never forget. I learned so much about myself and my business. The support from Sandra and Declan and the women of the group was priceless to my business. Saved me both money and time to which I am forever grateful.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Time to enjoy life and my family
2. Being creative and having the platform to do so
3. Being a boss lady :)

Top 3 challenges:

1. It is all on you
2. Pressure to fail at the start
3. It can be hard work



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Janine Van Someren

The Wellbeing Advantage

Location: Co. Sligo

Prior to March 2020, Janine was working in England as an accredited transformational wellbeing coach. When Covid-19 brought the world to a standstill it afforded her the time and space to explore life priorities. That led Janine to return to Sligo with her family where she launched The Wellbeing Advantage.

The Wellbeing Advantage support wellbeing in the workplace for employers who want to support their staff and empower stressed and overwhelmed employees to increase their health, happiness and productivity through

programmes, workshops, and talks.

Wellbeing talks and programmes combine over 20 years of experience in high performance sport to deliver customised transformational wellbeing that make the best better. It is this understanding of high performance that allows Janine and her team to stand out from competitors. They are passionate about applying the learning from high performance sport, such as the value of marginal gains, importance of sustainable change and adapting behavioural change strategies for the corporate world.

The Empower programme allowed me to develop my mindset as a company founder – giving me the confidence to move from academic researcher and a coach for individual clients to recognising my new position as a female founder and all that it entails. The friendships made amongst my fellow founders is what gave me a safe space to explore the challenges of this new role and having their support within and between sessions has been invaluable.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Independence
2. Freedom
3. Friendship

Top 3 challenges:

1. Visibility
2. Work/life balance
3. Mindset



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Lynsey de Burca

Lynsey de Burca Jewellery

Location: Co. Galway

Lynsey de Burca is an award-winning jewellery designer. She achieved a degree in jewellery design from NCAD and continued her education in the University of Galway, earning a diploma in gemmology. After spending over fourteen years in the jewellery and fashion retail industry she decided she was ready to start her own jewellery business.

Lynsey creates beautiful jewellery pieces which are organic in form and focus on a

minimal design aesthetic. Lynsey de Burca Jewellery is unique, each piece is different from the last. Using ancient jewellery making techniques, each piece is made entirely by hand in her studio in Galway. She is one of a very small number of handmade jewellery makers in Ireland today. Lynsey is passionate about creating things which are both beautiful and skilfully made by hand.

I found the course to be great for networking. A fantastic opportunity to bounce ideas off other members and to get ideas, feedback, and advice. A great sense of camaraderie.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Flexibility
2. Creative control
3. Independence

Top 3 challenges:

1. Long hours
2. Requiring a vast skill set
3. Unpredictable income



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Melissa Walsh

MW Design, Print & Signs Ltd.

Location: Claremorris, Co. Mayo

Melissa Walsh is the proud owner of MW Design Print Signs Ltd, a multi-award-winning company based in Mayo which was established in 2003. She has a Diploma in Industrial Design from ATU Sligo, a BA Honours Degree from the University of Ulster and in May 2022 she completed a Master of Science, Business - Leadership Development from the University of Galway.

Melissa's experienced team are passionate about creative designs and about producing bespoke and practical design solutions and printed products. The services available include graphic designs and corporate branding, general printing, large format printing, label printing, shopfronts, 3D lettering and window graphics, creating signs, displays, posters and banners and vehicle graphic, vehicle wraps and chevrons.

The EMPOWER GROWTH programme was a fantastic opportunity for me as a female entrepreneur to connect with like-minded businesswomen. The programme also helped me focus on growing my business by implementing a clear strategy for growth.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. Passion for the business I love
2. Flexibility
3. Personal achievement and success

Top 3 challenges:

1. Time management
2. Financial challenges
3. Having sole responsibility for the running of the business

 mwdesignprintsigns.ie

 Melissa Walsh | MW Design Print Signs

 [melissawalshmwdesign](https://www.linkedin.com/company/melissawalshmwdesign)

 MW Design Print Signs



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Sandra Ganley

Jiving Juniors Dance School

Location: Co. Mayo

Sandra is a full-time dancer and owner of Jiving Juniors Dance School. She has a bachelor's degree in Irish Music and Dance from the University of Limerick where she graduated in 2015. Sandra also holds a master's degree in Primary Education from Hibernia College graduating in 2016. Along with running her business, Sandra is a podcast host and a TV and radio presenter.

Jiving Juniors Dance School is based around the Irish country music scene and

teaches toddlers, children, teenagers, and adults how to social dance. It is a family friendly business teaching dances such as jive, waltz, line dance, foxtrot, and quickstep. The services on offer include weekly dance classes, seasonal camps, one day workshops, primary and secondary school workshops, hen and birthday parties, private lessons, and classes for forige groups.

As the youngest member of my group, I learnt so much from women who had been in business for 10 or 20+ years and who had life experience, and the realities of running a business and having a family. The programme made me more focused, and I achieved all my goals I had set out to do at the start of the programme.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. The flexibility to design the business how I want to design it
2. Having networking groups and programmes specific to women to help develop and grow
3. Hopefully leading the way for other up and coming businesswomen and inspiring them

Top 3 challenges:

1. The loneliness of running a small business on your own
2. Not being taken seriously as a young woman, having set up the business when I was 23
3. Trying to plan ahead regarding having a family, and running a family/household on top of work



jivingjuniorsdance.com



[jivingjuniorsdanceschool](https://www.instagram.com/jivingjuniorsdanceschool)



[Sandraganleydancer](https://www.facebook.com/Sandraganleydancer)



EMPOWER GROWTH 2021/2022

Sinéad Carroll

Irish Blogger Agency

Location: Co. Galway

After a 15-year career in banking and finance, in 2015 Sinéad established one of Ireland's first, dedicated agency for Digital Influencer Marketing. Since 2013 she has been immersed in digital marketing and the blogging industry running her own fashion, beauty & lifestyle blog and she founded the highly successful blogger network called Into The West Blogger Network in 2014. Sinéad is recognised as an expert in her field. She was nominated as a finalist in the Accenture Digital Media Awards 2016 in the category Best Brand/Company Using Digital, she received an Award in 2017 for Outstanding Contribution to Irish Blogging

by the Waverley Academy and won the Network Ireland Galway Solo Businesswoman of the Year Award in 2021.

Irish Blogger Agency is home to more than 750 bloggers, vloggers and social influencers. It is a web platform that allows brands to collaborate with online influencers and social media content creators. It facilitates authentic, meaningful relations between influencers, brands and consumers. Irish Blogger Agency connects and advises brands and influencers to create and deliver the best influencer marketing strategies and campaigns.

The EMPOWER programme brought a new perspective to me and my business. It was fantastic to be part of a group of like-minded female founders. It was somewhere for me to show up and express any concerns about my business or share my wins instead of doing it solo. During the programme we had a 33.3% increase in influencer sign ups, an increase of 80% in sales and our online presence grew by 50%.

Top 3 things about being an entrepreneur:

1. I get to chart my own course and I am in charge of my career and future
2. I get to use my power of visualisation and make things happen
3. Social networking

Top 3 challenges:

1. Balancing business and family life
2. Managing self-doubt
3. Accepting the greatness of your successes and owing them

“

*For most of history,
'anonymous' was a
woman.*

Virginia Woolf

”

Along with the female founders included in this booklet the following inspirational and ambitious female founders also completed the programme:

START 2020/2021

Aisling Duffy
Ann Marie Devereux
Ann Marie Durcan
Ashleen Nee
Cait Kenny
Clemence Guiraut
Munaza Gilmore

GROWTH 2020/2021

Charlene Flanagan
Collette Mc Gowan
Denise Rocks
Evy Perez Alvarado

START 2021/2022

Andrea Vytaite
Jess Harkin
Joy Colleran
Martina Ni Chulain
Rabiya Celik
Sharon Conroy
Valerie Dodd

GROWTH 2021/2022

Áine Faughan
Gina Witherrow
Jennifer Dempsey
Maura Fahy



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EUROPEAN UNION

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An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

