



**EMPOWER**  
*Female Entrepreneurship*



# THE EMPOWER PROGRAMME

The Risk Takers: Case Studies

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Ireland's European Structural and  
Investment Funds Programmes  
2014-2020  
Co-funded by the Irish Government  
and the European Union



EUROPEAN UNION  
Investing in your future  
European Social Fund



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt  
agus Comhionannais  
Department of Justice  
and Equality

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# INTRODUCTION

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The EMPOWER Programme has run in GMIT since 2017. The EMPOWER programme is funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Social Fund as part of the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. The Local Enterprise Offices are also very supportive of the programme locally. "As part of a drive to increase the number of female entrepreneurs in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon, GMIT Innovation Hubs set out in 2017 to increase participation with the launch of EMPOWER, expanding to Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal for EMPOWER II. Bringing more women entrepreneurs into the economy will help improve economic growth and stability and is particularly needed in the rural and peripheral West and North-West of Ireland."

Feedback reveals that lack of self-belief can be a big deterrent for women starting a business. Whilst Ireland has the right conditions for women owned businesses to thrive, there is also a problem with motivation and self-belief. Ensuring that business women realise their full business potential is a major priority for EMPOWER. While Ireland has made much better advances in relation to female entrepreneurs over the last number of years and women in the workplace, the rate of women starting their own businesses is still below that of what it could be.

Maria Staunton, Manager of GMIT's Mayo iHub and the EMPOWER

programme, says: "The Programme has proven that there is lots of demand from females looking to start their own business. In 2018, we had 90 women applying for Cycle 1 and 80 women in 2019 for Cycle 2. I really believe female-led businesses are an underexploited source for economic growth and jobs."

"The women I have worked with on this programme have shown tenacity and determination to get their business up and running. Whilst I have observed high levels of ambition some lack confidence and have low perceptions of capability. Sometimes aversion to debt and a conservative approach to risk-taking can hamper ambition. Often entrepreneurship is seen as providing more flexibility for women, however work-life balance still remains a challenge, particularly so during this COVID-19 lockdown. The 'guilt' factor often comes into play amongst women as they spend time on their business whilst having other responsibilities. They face numerous challenges in terms of work-life balance something which shouldn't and cannot be overlooked by policy makers. Women often choose self-employment for lifestyle reasons, particularly when the children are young, while men, to a larger extent, are driven by pecuniary motives".

"One interesting observation is that these women are paving the way for future entrepreneurs. I often remark that female founders teach their children (boys and girls) all about

entrepreneurship as they often have to have the kids beside them when on telephone calls, or have to bring them to meetings. I know some who involve their kids in helping to pack orders. One person on the programme even brought her four-week old son along on some occasions as she was breastfeeding him. It's important for us on the programme to ensure there are no barriers put in place. In the future the bigger impact – apart from job creation – may be the impression they leave on their children. We talk about implementing entrepreneurship in schools but what better way to learn about entrepreneurship than listening to and being involved with your parents on topics such as generating new ideas, ordering stock, listening to customers, cashflow etc. This might be the bigger impact supporting women entrepreneurs has on the economy”, adds Ms Staunton. EMPOWER I has had fantastic results. Over 40 businesses have been set up by women who completed the course. 146+ people are employed full-time in these businesses. 94% of the programme participants have a third level qualification. We are looking forward to seeing the results from EMPOWER II.

For more information about the programme see **EMPOWERHer.ie** and **[www.facebook.com/empowerher](http://www.facebook.com/empowerher)**. **ie** Applications are available on the home page of **[www.empowerher.ie](http://www.empowerher.ie)** or **@Empowerherie** and Instagram Page **empowerher.ie**



# ANNE BYRNE

## ANNE BYRNE DESIGNS

Anne Byrne Garden Designs produces garden plans to help you make the most of your outside space.

The result is a plan or set of plans drawn to scale, showing every detail in the proposed garden, including paving, paths, steps, walls, boundary solutions and planted areas.

Anne spent several years in the financial services industry, culminating in a role as trust officer for a private bank. Sparked by an interest in people and what makes them tick, this allowed her to hone her communication skills.

A growing interest in gardening led her to pursue Royal Horticultural Society qualifications in horticulture and garden design, both awarded with commendation.

Anne believes strongly that a beautiful, useful, affordable garden is a possibility for everyone.

She has designed gardens for clients all over the west of Ireland, including home owners, nursing homes, hotels

and community groups. Her weekly Gardenwise column has been appearing in the Advertiser Group of Newspapers since 2016 and she is a monthly contributor to Galway Now magazine.

With the list of counties covered always expanding, she has her sights set on the UK market in the longer term.

A graduate of the inaugural Empower Growth programme, she says “Empower helped me because it was great to talk business with like- minded people. Starting a business from scratch is very lonely. You have to figure out everything for yourself, especially if it’s something nobody else is doing. It was great to see how other people, in completely different businesses, are handling challenges and working towards growth.”

### LINKS



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



[Anne Byrne Garden Design](#)



[@annebyrnegardendesign](#)

# ANYA ASEVA

## JOYCE COUNTRY BAKERY



Anya Aseva who hails from Russia moved to Ireland in 2014. With an (MA) in Economics and Politics she is a co-founder of the Joyce Country Bakery (Bácús, Dhúiche Sheoigheach), a micro bakery in Clonbur, Co. Galway.

The bakery specialises in traditional Irish and Russian breads and sourdoughs, various baked treats, and cordials, syrups, and chutneys. It operates an online shop with free delivery within 10 km from Clonbur. Customers order online at <https://joyce-country-bakery.shoplo.com>

“Our products are a fusion of Irish and Russian flavours, traditions, and techniques. All bread is made in small batches using only fresh ingredients, real butter, and free-range eggs. We forage and grow some of the produce for our cordials, syrups, and chutneys.

“We launched our bakery during the lockdown, which seemed like a crazy time to start a new business. But we had so many orders in the first week and such a great response from everyone in the community that we

realised that perhaps in the times of crisis what everyone really wants and needs is good food and good bread”.

Anya says: “The EMPOWER Programme has been life-changing. The practical skills I gained in all aspects related to starting and running a business have been key in helping me on my journey as an entrepreneur. The programme taught me to think like an entrepreneur and to believe in my ideas. It also helped me gain confidence and overcome my natural shyness. For an immigrant like myself who had no connections in Ireland, the EMPOWER Programme has given me the resources to tap into, the people I can ask for help from.”

### LINKS



<https://joyce-country-bakery.shoplo.com>



[@joycecountrybakery](https://www.instagram.com/joycecountrybakery)



[Joyce Country Bakery](https://www.facebook.com/JoyceCountryBakery)



# ASUMPTA GALLAGHER

## BEST PRACTICE

Asumpta Gallagher set up Best Practice in 2018 following a redundancy. With over 18 years experience in Practice Management, a Diploma in PR and having completed a number of other courses including ICGP Management in Practice, Training Delivery & Evaluation QQI Level 6 and several other workshops through GES Skillnet, she felt the time was right to launch Best Practice.

Best Practice was founded to address and support the many challenges within General Practice and to allow Healthcare Professionals to do what they do best which is to provide excellent patient care. They help GPs to work smarter not harder while ensuring that they are maximising on income and that their staff are fully trained in their respective roles.

Best Practice also offer Practice Staff and GP Management training programmes which can be delivered in a number of ways. Training can be carried out in-house and tailored to each Practices individual needs or it can be done by dialing in remotely. There are a number of external

workshops which are run in a number of centres across the Country. Plans are now in place to provide an online training platform to provide training to Practice Staff to cover all areas from working in Reception to Managing a successful Practice.

Asumpta and her team work directly with GP's, GP Trainees, Practice Managers, Practice Admin Staff and Primary Care Managers.

When asked how the EMPOWER Programme benefitted Asumpta she said "it gave me increased confidence, new tools to work with and a network of ladies, many of whom continue to be an amazing support to me and my business".

## LINKS



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



[Asumpta Gallagher](#)



[@bestpracticeGP](#)

# AVELINE O'SULLIVAN

## BLOOM IN A BOX



Based in Moycullen Co. Galway, Bloom in a Box is a B2C (business to consumer) internet based business whose primary route to market is to drive sales through their website. Offering a uniquely engineered and patent pending product that disrupts the traditional gifted flower market. This solves the transport challenge that impacts the floral retail sector; providing an alternative single cut bloom transported in an engineered box containing the protected bloom.

Aveline holds a BSc, a BA in Personnel Management, a HND in Management and is a Qualified CIPD Trainer, Aveline's insights from floral retail, combined with enterprise business, have informed the business model required for the new venture, Bloom in a Box.

Coupled with her education and ten years prior experience in the retail florist industry, Bloom in a Box developed a product that solves a shift in customer buying behaviour; connecting people at a more affordable price point.

Customers want the creative florists' touch. Bloom in a Box designed products to solve this problem, filling the gap between traditional florist Bouquets and Supermarket flowers. 40% of customers who walk through the door of traditional florist shops are looking for something in the €20 to €30 price range.

When asked how Empower impacted Bloom in a Box, Aveline responded:

"The advice and support acquired from Empower is priceless. The topics discussed and the ability to ask questions in an empowering environment is so important. Maria brings the whole programme together with her "can do" and "nothing is a problem" attitude. Every support is offered and available to all participants; The network and the friends I made are of huge benefit."

## LINKS



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



[Aveline O'Sullivan](#)



[@bloominabox](#)





# CAITRIONA WATTERS

## PREPARE ME

Prepare Me is a social enterprise, creating resources for children and adults with additional needs; allowing them to have informed experiences in everyday activities.

After 20 years of working in the disability sector, Caitriona Watters Crehan (CEO of Prepare Me) was frustrated at how difficult it was to access visual resources; essential to prepare many of the people she supports for everyday activities which include:

- Doctor appointments
- Dentist appointments
- Hospital appointments
- Navigating public transport
- Haircut appointments etc.

As well as that, Watters was also frustrated when simple activities would go wrong for some. Very often the assumption was that it was their 'disability' that was the cause of their stress. More often than not the person simply did not feel prepared for what to expect and what might be expected of them.

Her background containing a Post Grad Cert in Education in Autism, BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies (Disabilities), Qualified Nursery Nurse, and Studio 3 (Behaviour Management) Trainer, prepared Watters for this field of work.

Prepare Me offers beneficial products for their audience and narrows in on their needs. Uniquely, they create video models of 'typical' experiences in action. Then, from that footage, they build usable teaching video models, picture stories, visual schedules and also multi sensory resource packs.

The Empower Programme influenced Caitriona in a number of ways:

"Empower was fantastic. The workshops on market research and planning really gave me the insight needed to explore my concept through the eyes of a consumer. The research we did allowed us to prove that this was a problem 'worth' solving. My biggest takeaway from Empower was the support of my peers.

## LINKS



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



[Caitriona Watters-Crehan](#)



[@prepare\\_me](#)



[@prepareme.ie](#)

# CATHERINE MACKLIN

## HEAVENLY BIA



Catherine Macklin had worked for many years running Heavenly Foods in Athlone. She spotted an opportunity to redevelop and rebrand the business. Working in food was an area Catherine didn't imagine back when she qualified as an Accountant in 2008 and a Tax Consultant back in 2012. Heavenly Bia was set up in 2018 and has been successfully growing under the guidance of Catherine since.

Heavenly Bia supply natural delicious Irish produce directly to your door. Their chicken and beef is all traceable back to its Irish source with nothing added to it but pure goodness, they also have a wide range of fish and shellfish caught by the finest fisherman in the great seas and oceans around us. They are now supplying to many parts of Ireland.

"Our target market is mainly working families and busy professionals who are time poor and need to come home from work and prepare a wholesome dinner"

Catherine says 'The EMPOWER Programme helped me enormously as running a business is a tough and lonely journey. Some days you have issues regarding administration, HR, logistics etc. I looked forward to our meetings with my fellow peers where I could discuss the issues I had and then we would all brainstorm to help come up with answers to the problems. It also enabled me to get the frustrations out and to see that I was not going through these things on my own. I also enjoyed some of the guest speakers as they showed us that yes there are tough days but you can get through them.'

## LINKS



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



[Catherine Macklin](#)



[Heavenly Bia](#)



# CATHERINE O'GRADY POWERS

GLEN KEEN FARM

In 1999, at the request of the previous owners (her uncles), Catherine O'Grady and husband Jim Powers embraced the opportunity to take over Glen Keen Farm.

Located in County Mayo, along the shores of Killary Harbour and along the Wild Atlantic Way, Glen Keen Farm hosts a visitor center and allows guests to experience the workings of a typical Irish sheep farm – sheepdogs and all. The visitor centre offers a Café, Craft shop, and demonstration areas for the visitors to enjoy watching the sheepdog doing their job; herding the sheep. Additionally, guests can learn about traditional turf cutting, and experience first hand an historical walk taking in Bronze age sites.

Having a background in Business Studies, Food Safety, and a Diploma in Tour Guiding, Catherine is well informed of how to best cater to Glen Keen's target market.

About 70% of Glen Keen visitors are from the US, and the remainder are from Germany, Canada, Ireland, and China.

"The EMPOWER Growth Programme was of tremendous help to me in growing our business and increasing awareness of our visitor attraction. Empower provided me with access to experts in in every field of business; Moreover, Empower facilitated many mentoring sessions for me which encouraged a major boost to my business operation. I am presently setting goals and objectives for the business and for myself personally; this is hugely important. Just knowing there is a circle of like minded people that are on this journey, is so important; being an Entrepreneur can sometimes be a very lonely route to navigate."

## LINKS



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



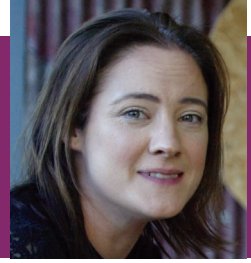
[@glenkeenfarm](https://www.facebook.com/glenkeenfarm)



[Catherine O'Grady Powers](#)

# CELINE FOLAN

## EAT UNIQUE



Eat Unique is a thriving healthy Grab & Go Café based in Monksland, Athlone. Created in 2015 by local sisters Celine Folan & Edel Larkin, along with Celine's partner Nigel So, this dynamic trio set about developing a creative and healthy food concept for the Midlands which focuses on local, seasonal and quality produce.

With a background in sport, nutrition and food, they have combined their valuable knowledge and vast expertise to create a Unique foodie destination.

Their very diverse customer base from elite athletes, working professionals, business CEO's, busy parents, young teenage sports enthusiasts to those just beginning their health journey, shows the increasing demand for healthier options that are both accessible and affordable.

Due to the rising demand for Eat Unique in Monksland, they have now opened a second operation at the Regional Sports Centre in Athlone in October 2019.

"The support from Maria and Declan and especially the ladies on the programme was invaluable. It took away the feeling of isolation that is so often felt by women who are self-employed. The daily struggles of running your business while raising a young family can be challenging and knowing you were not alone on this journey really helped me. Listening to the stories and challenges the other ladies on the programme were facing inspired me. The support, monthly meetings and catch ups were so important. The programme also helped me to flesh out the idea of opening a second facility and gave me the confidence to do this in Oct 2019."

## LINKS



@eatunique



@eatunique1



# CEPTA MAHON

## COOKALICIOUS

Galway has a new, innovative 'Pop-Up' cookery experience, created by food lover Cepta Mahon. Cookalicious provide customised cookery classes which they bring to clients in their own home or workplace. They also provide classes in the Cookalicious kitchen in Cepta's home. "We are all about encouraging & inspiring people to eat real food. We use fresh, local ingredients and share with clients, the skills on how to prepare simple, nourishing and delicious meals for families and friends"

Each Cookalicious experience is shaped around what the client is looking for. Whether this is how to create an Indian feast, how to host an elegant dinner party, how to create quick and nutritious family food or simple summer entertaining ideas, Cookalicious promise to have a menu to suit everyone.

Having designed and delivered numerous classes and courses for Galway Community College, Connacht Rugby, Deafhear, Early School Leavers Programmes and Supper Clubs for

family and friends, Cepta is more than tuned into the appetite and need for cookery experiences in the Galway region.

When asking Cepta how the EMPOWER Programme helped her business, "Empower has helped me to shape my idea into a business that has the potential to earn money. It has helped me and is continuing to help me to look at things differently, to adapt & tweak and change things and to simplify. The continuing support of the programme has given me the confidence to bring my idea to life. Words cannot describe the importance of the encouragement, the support and the mentoring we are given."

### LINKS



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



[Cepta Mahon](#)



[@cookaliciousgalway](#)

# DEIRDRE O'DWYER VEERASINGAM

## CARDIOTECH HEALTHCARE



CardioTech Healthcare Ltd, is a Galway based company, founded by Deirdre O'Dwyer Veerasingam and her husband. Their core business is to promote innovative devices that help to improve the detection and management of Cardiovascular diseases. Their flagship products are two non-invasive (PC enabled) diagnostic cardio-vascular devices called:

- The VASCULAR EXPLORER: comprehensive examinations of central and peripheral blood vessels and risk stratification of cardio vascular diseases.
- The CARDIOLOGIC EXPLORER: diagnosing ischemic heart diseases in 12 seconds.

With a background in Cardiac Nursing and Clinical Information Management Systems, Deirdre has ensured CardioTech has gotten off to a strong start.

All products are currently made in Germany, with CE certification, and are sourced directly from the manufacturer. CardioTech is compliant with Irish and

European regulations for the distribution and sale of the products in Ireland.

CardioTech's primary target markets are:

- Hospitals
- Primary Care Practitioners
- Medical Research entities
- Health Insurance companies delivering a Health Screening Programme

"The Empower Programme has helped me acquire the relevant skills I need to run my own business. The course instills the importance of group/team work and networking, applying principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and sharing. I have more confidence in my ability to structure CardioTech and position it in the marketplace. Over the course of 12 months, while participating on the Empower Programme, I came to appreciate the continued and unique collegiality developed with fellow participants. Equally, the closed discussion forum, where we discuss our progress or barriers, is an excellent platform of support for each other."

## LINKS



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



[Deirdre Veerasingam](#)



[@cardiotechhealthcareltd](#)



# ELAINE KENNEDY

## HAWTHORN HANDMADE SKINCARE

Using 100% natural plant seed oils and butters blended with essential oils, Elaine Kennedy selects the ingredients in Hawthorn Handmade Skincare for their restorative properties. Lightweight in texture, they absorb easily into the skin. The range currently includes products for lips, face, body and hands.

Elaine has a wealth of knowledge from working in the retail sector for over ten years. During this time, Elaine gained experience of Visual Merchandising and Fashion Display. While still in London, she participated in a business mentoring programme with Melinda Coss, learning how to formulate and sell handmade skincare products.

Hawthorne Handmade Skincare range launched into a number of local Spas, a key to the business sales strategy. This creates an air of exclusivity around Kennedy's brand. Moreover, there is great potential for expanding the current collection of skincare products. Kennedy intends to build on her bestsellers by introducing new

essential oil blends. The range will continue to grow with new products planned for launch seasonally.

We asked how EMPOWER influenced Kennedy's creation of Hawthorne Handmade Skincare and Elaine responded:

"For me, the programme offered the opportunity to build relationships with like-minded women. I was one of six finalists to take part in a video-pitch competition at the end of the EmpowerSTART programme. Through the invaluable support of the programme mentors and participants, EmpowerHer has provided me with the tools to overcome any challenges my business may face. The most valuable benefit of taking part, is that I now have the support of an incredible network of the most talented, inspiring female entrepreneurs the West of Ireland has to offer."

### LINKS



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



[@hawthornhandmadeskincare](https://www.facebook.com/hawthornhandmadeskincare)



[Elaine Kennedy](#)

# EMER BURKE and SIOBHÁN HENNELLY



## FOOD FITNESS FERTILITY

FOOD FITNESS FERTILITY supports women and couples who are trying to get pregnant, educating them on how to optimise fertility through:

- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Sex education
- Implementing lifestyle changes

The courses are accessible on [www.foodfitnessfertility.com](http://www.foodfitnessfertility.com) via a learning platform with weekly meal plans, video workouts, accountability and support.

Siobhán is a nutritional therapist registered with Nutritional Therapists of Ireland and also a personal trainer with years of experience facilitating workshops, classes and dealing with private clients; After a ten year span of no menstrual cycle, Siobhán, conceived a little girl in 2015 by making effective dietary changes.

Emer, a personal trainer qualified with ITEC health and fitness, has over 5 years' experience running her own women's fitness gym specialising in pregnancy and postpartum fitness.

Emer overcame secondary infertility to have her second child.

The evidence based courses, designed by Emer and Siobhán, is based on The Nurses Health Study. The study followed 18,000 women and found infertility associated with ovulation issues coupled with diabetes are largely preventable; with lifestyle modifications.

"The Empower Start programme helped us identify who our target market is; it gave us valuable resources and contacts to help set up the company with financial templates, forecasting information, and legal requirements. Moreover, the programme also highlighted funding and grants available to us. Attending a programme over a 12-week period encouraged us set goals, not to mention strive to achieve them."

## LINKS



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



[@food\\_fitness\\_fertility](https://www.instagram.com/food_fitness_fertility)



[@foodfitnessfertility](https://www.facebook.com/foodfitnessfertility)





# FINOLA McDERMOTT

## DYNAMIC VOICES

Finola McDermott is the sole founder of Dynamic Voices, this is a Voice coaching consultancy and she also runs a sales training company which is currently being branded. The inspiration for starting the company Finola told us “was seeing individuals struggle with public speaking, and watching fear build up in people before a speaking event, thus resulting in a poor performance. I am a singing coach who has worked as a corporate trainer, with a degree in business and numerous business qualifications including NLP.” The Company is based in Westport, Co. Mayo and Finola hopes to expand across Ireland and the UK.

The business is service based, which offers coaching and training in speech and confidence, and training to sales teams and individuals. Finola has developed a unique methodology around training delivery, and she works face to face with clients either on a one to one basis or with groups. She also caters for aspiring leaders, entrepreneurs and ‘thought’ or industry leaders and builds authenticity and status in their vocal delivery.

“Empower restored my confidence after having time off with my son. It helped me identify a clear brand offering and separate the other work I do around selling. Being able to mix and network with other entrepreneurs reminded me of the strengths I had and helped me get back to ‘dreaming big’.”

### LINKS



[www.dynamicvoices.org](http://www.dynamicvoices.org)



[Finola McDermott](#)



[dynamicvoicesIRL](#)



[@FinolaMac](#)

# GILL BERRY

PerCen



Gill Berry is a qualified clinical nurse specialist. Some of her most recent roles she has undertaken have been in Education, Practice Development Facilitation and Project Management. She is driven by Quality, Patient Safety and Person Centred Care. Gill takes part in continuous education programmes in both health, health innovation and digital health.

Gill founded PerCen Technologies in 2019 in response to challenges that she felt were not addressed in Healthcare. PerCen is pronounced 'Person' and represents 'Person Centred' Technologies. Her business idea is supported by the first national HIHI call by the Health Innovation Hub Ireland. It was set up to create person centred innovative solutions to clinical unmet needs. Its aim is to use scientific knowledge and the latest technologies to compliment clinical evidence based practice. They are working on a class 1 medical device which is at an early stage of prototype development. Gill is currently collaborating with the Tyndall Institute in Cork.

Gill was one of 33 health innovation enthusiasts selected to participate as a wildcard in the EITHealth Hackathon. She competed in Amsterdam for a prize pot of €4million. She has since participated in EIT Health digital health validator in Trinity College and a European road trip.

"The EMPOWER Programme was my first step in the entrepreneurial process. I had been an intrepeneur in the HSE. It provided me with an understanding of the journey, gave me real world learning from others who had started their own business. It gave me the courage to step forward and work on my innovation."

## LINKS



Gillian Berry



# JANE DOWNES

PART-TIME.IE

Jane Downes is a Chartered Accountant by background and spent 10 years working full-time in practice and multi-nationals. Jane took a part-time role to accommodate family life for 10 years. She then realised there was no platform to help find part-time work, yet she knew so many experienced mothers who were not working as they could not find roles to fit in with family life.

Part-time.ie was launched in January 2018 and is a cost effective recruitment platform specialising in part-time and contract roles across Ireland.

Working part-time allows parents, in particular, but also many others seeking better work life balance, the opportunity to continue working for longer, deriving not only financial benefits but also maintaining confidence, skills, their network and overall well-being. 'Research identifies part-time workers as the most productive in the workforce, so it is time employers measure performance based on output rather than hours

worked. Our employers are finding fantastic candidates as they recognise the contribution that the right candidate can make, even in reduced hours'.

"The EMPOWER Programme has been a fantastic support by allowing me to throw out ideas and get really good and constructive feedback, all the time building your confidence that you are making the right decisions. I got to meet with experts in different fields so I have gained so much knowledge on a practical level over the year. It is great now to have our network of entrepreneurs all with very different businesses but facing similar challenges along the way so we can really support each other."

## LINKS



[www.part-time.ie](http://www.part-time.ie)



[Jane Downes](#)



[Part-time.ie](#)

# JO ANNE BUTLER

## SUPERFOLK



Jo Anne Butler and Gearoid Muldowney make household objects and botanical prints. Their range of products are inspired by outdoor living and the natural world and are crafted using the finest natural materials and time-honoured techniques. Superfolk are now based at the GMIT Innovation Hub in Mayo. Jo Anne has a Masters in Architecture and a Degree in Architectural Science and a Degree in Fine Art and History of Art.

Superfolk make a range of products such as hand made block prints on washi paper, wooden trivets and brass candleholders. Their customers range from gift buyer for weddings, christmas, new homes, significant birthday, designers and creative people who love both design and natural world. They currently sell into high end shops such as The Conran Shop (UK), Mjolk (Canada), Humble and Grand (California) and ByMolle (Holland). 'We will continue to design and develop new products to add to our product offering. We will continue to build export markets by adding additional retailers with a focus on the US,

Canada and northern Europe.' When asked about the EMPOWER Programme, Jo Anne stated that "the EMPOWER Programme helped massively through sharing, talking listening and meeting with people and realising how similar our struggles are no matter what sector you are in."

## LINKS



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



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



[joanne@superfolk.com](mailto:joanne@superfolk.com)



# LORRAINE CORCORAN

## COSMETIC CREATIONS

Lorraine Corcoran graduated as a Mechanical Engineer from the University of Limerick in the late 1990's having pretty much decided to become an engineer at the age of 13.

Lorraine was a co-founder of Team Horizon, a 2010 start-up, where her technical skills were utilised to consult with multiple pharmaceutical, moulding and medical device clients across Ireland and the UK.

In February 2017, Lorraine and her husband, Aiden Corcoran, successfully acquired Cosmetic Creations Ltd., the contract formulation and contract manufacturing business, in Claremorris, Co. Mayo. The product range extends from beauty skincare and bodycare to self-tanning products and wellness products in food supplements and medical devices. They are the technology and knowledge behind many leading and known brands in the marketplace.

They then acquired the former Yves Rocher manufacturing plant in Cork in

2018, the largest and most significant step in their strategic growth plan.

In November 2019, a €7.5million investment into Cosmetic Creations was announced, with the creation of 90 new jobs. They have since been successfully scaling the company to a high-volume large-scale operation having added an additional 10 new brands and 50 new products to the market

“We acquired Cosmetic Creations in 2017 with a manufacturing site in Claremorris and the support of the EMPOWER programme gave me the confidence to grow the operational function and to expand the business by setting up a second manufacturing unit in Cork.

This allowed us grow the team's depth of knowledge, reach new customers and expand product base and volumes. I really valued the peer-to-peer support as I engaged with like-minded female business owners.”

### LINKS



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



[Lorraine Corcoran](#)



[airmedicaireland](#)

# LOU BRENNAN

## LOU BRENNAN DESIGNS



Lou Brennan had an early love for fashion and had the privilege of graduating as the first ever MA student in Fashion and Textiles at NCAD, in Dublin, over 20 years ago. Having worked in numerous studios around the world from London, Dublin, where she was the textile manager for John Rocha, to New York and Lyon in France, she established her own studio in London in 1999, after acquiring Zandra Rhodes own print table.

Lou has sold her designs to well known names such as Donna Karan, Alberta Ferretti, Giorgio Armani and Dolce Gabbana to name a few, as well as seeing her work on the pages of Vogue and many other international titles.

As well as winning many awards, such as for 'Innovative Fabrics, with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), Lou has also produced fabrics for both Alexander McQueen and Hussein Chalayan that are now in the V&A archives.

Since returning to Ireland, Lou has continued to diversify and as well as printed textiles, she creates hand embroidered pieces for clients and from time to time runs workshops covering many textile disciplines. They are luxury items with a relatively high price point. Lou targets designer boutiques, museums, department stores such as liberty's in London.

"The EMPOWER Programme has been of huge benefit to both me and my business. I've grown in confidence and knowledge and have a great group of friends now from the group that are a fantastic support. The programme was very robust and thorough and I loved the element of bringing in past participants to tell us their stories and progression."

### LINKS



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



[Lou Brennan](#)



[@Lou Brennan](#)



[@Lou Brennan](#)



# LOUISE GIBBONS

## INSPIRE LEARNING

Based out of Westport, Co. Mayo, Inspire Learning provides educational and work experience programs for students and graduates throughout Ireland, UK, USA, Singapore and Europe.

Inspire Learning works directly with employers in Ireland and in the USA to develop internship/graduate program experiences. They have also developed a number of partnerships with several Universities throughout the United States; tailoring programs specific to their student's learning needs. Inspire Learning teams includes experts in immigration and relocation; assisting and supporting companies and graduates as needed.

Louise recognised just how unprepared students were for the world of work. She developed a company that could not only assist students in identifying their strengths, but would help develop and enhance their work skills.

With a BSc in Occupational Psychology, a CIPD qualification, and a PgDip in Psychotherapy, Louise puts

her skills to use every day. She understands, interprets, and analyzes what her clients hope to get out of their internship experience; connecting them with opportunities.

When asked how EMPOWER helped her, Louise responded:

"EMPOWER was a fantastic programme for me. I have been in business for the last 18 years; it can be lonely at times when you are the one dealing with problems. Participating in the Empower programme was a fantastic opportunity for me; meeting like-minded female entrepreneurs, sharing our stories and helping each other in any way possible.

I have made fantastic connections with other ladies on the programme, which has allowed my business to develop into new markets. I am really grateful for this opportunity and would highly recommend it for anyone else who is interested."

### LINKS



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



[Louise Gibbons](#)



[@inspirelearningireland](#)



[@inspirelearningireland](#)

# LOUISE LOUGHLIN

## FAB PROJECT



Louise Loughlin, owner of her company THE FAB PROJECT qualified in business, IT and French. She then went on to study Personal Training, Neuromuscular Therapy, Pilates and Specific Sports and Exercise Programmes. She is currently studying to be a high level nutritionist.

Louise always had a passion to help women realise their potential, to promote healthy and vibrant living. 'While all of us would like to have more time, energy and motivation to keep our bodies in check we often just don't and we are too bamboozled by the information out there.'

The FAB PROJECT is created to bring more awareness to our sisters, our daughters, mothers, to all females, that you can build a strong, functioning body, boosting your health and confidence. Its for females looking for a healthy life. 'You do not need your self esteem to be driven by magazines, insta likes and plastic surgery. You have your own unique and personal journey in this lifetime, so why try to be like anyone else.'

Depending on where your fitness journey is starting from, Louise will tailor your FAB Program to suit your needs.

The EMPOWER Programme helped Louise to think bigger and achieve more:

"Empower really helped me to focus on the vision I want to create, with expert speakers, business advice and a very empowering group of women, led by Maria, who motivated and inspired me to another level. I think I would be stuck if I didnt have the opportunities I had with Empower and I really appreciate the opportunity to grow with confidence."

## LINKS

@ [Louiseloughlin@gmail.com](mailto:Louiseloughlin@gmail.com)

in [Louise Loughlin](#)





# MICHELLE MALONE

## THE HEALTH HUB

Michelle Malone founded the Health Hub in Swinford in April 2019. Michelle has spent a lifetime involved in health and fitness from playing sport to working in fitness which inspired her to work in this industry.

Michelle was part of the Westmeath Intermediate All Ireland Winning team in 2011. She has numerous qualifications including a Diploma in Personal Training & Nutrition, 200 Hour Yoga Alliance Teacher, 3 International Group Fitness Qualifications, Pre and Post Natal Coach and various other teaching qualifications in the fitness field including boxercise, step aerobics and circuit training to name a few.

The Health Hub is a fully equipped Gym and Fitness Class Studio including personal training and fitness classes. The main target market is 25-40 year old women and also a Programme aimed at teen fitness something needed in todays age.

When asked how the EMPOWER Programme helped with the process of starting a company, Michelle responded:

“The EMPOWER Programme helped give me the support I needed to take the steps necessary, it was a platform to connect with others and seek the advice that you would not have otherwise realised was available to you. It has opened doors to people who can and want to help you and at it's basic level it was a place to ask questions that starting out you needed answered but for me has always been a support long after finishing the programme.”

Michelle won the Best Coach in Ireland at the Irish Fitness Industry Awards.

### LINKS



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



[Michelle Malone](#)



[Health Hub](#)



[Health Hub](#)

# NANCY O'REILLY

## HERBAL EARTH



Nancy O'Reilly set up Herbal Earth Skincare in Tooreen Co Mayo in 2018. Herbal Earth Skincare is a range of skincare products that are 100% natural, versatile and highly effective, formulated for sensitive skin. Nancy obtained a Diploma in Organic Skincare Formulation back in 2018.

Her range addresses the frustration women with sensitive skin have in finding high quality, high efficacy products that genuinely will not irritate already sensitised skin. Her motto is: 'Natural. Gentle. Honest.'

Products include: Unwind Deep Cleansing Oil, Multi-fruit Elixir (spray), Sunrise Antioxidant Serum, Sunset Rejuvenating Serum, and Go-To Mask.

The brand is targeted at women aged between 35-55 who have sensitive skin and are into wellness and natural products.

Nancy says that the EMPOWER Programme "helped me to define my customer better and provided good moral support from all the women on the same journey."

The future plans for Herbal Earth Skincare are to continue to learn and work on exporting to the UK and Chinese Market.

## LINKS



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



[Nancy O'Reilly](#)



[herbalearth](#)



# NIAMH RYLE

## HOMECHECK

Homecheck, a civil engineering consultancy specialising in services for home buyers and sellers in Counties Galway/Clare, and is the brainchild of Niamh Ryle.

With a passion for identifying gaps between the expectations of home buyers and the type/quality of the service and reports which were available, Homecheck helps buyers/sellers by leveraging new technologies to drive down costs for her customers.

Graduating with a Civil Engineering degree from UCD, Ryle has a concrete foundation of understanding the concepts and resources required when it comes to home buying or selling.

Armed with this knowledge, Homecheck is best able to accommodate their growing audience of home buyers:

- First-time buyers
- Investors
- Holiday home buyers
- Trader-uppers
- Property sellers

The growth plan is to extend their service-based business beyond Galway and to expand on the services currently offered. Niamh participated in the EMPOWER Growth Programme Cycle 1. We asked how EMPOWER influenced Homecheck and Niamh said: "The Empower programme highlighted the need for good planning. I was inspired, motivated and comforted when facing difficult decisions."

## LINKS



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



[Niamh Ryle](#)



[Homecheck](#)

# MARINA MURPHY

## BABYBOSS



Marina Murphy is a serial entrepreneur having founded two previous businesses and establishing her own restaurant at the youthful age of 24. After the birth of her baby daughter she had an idea when struggling to change her little baby outdoors without removing all clothing from her baby. The idea for a twopart baby vest was founded. This means you have to just take off the bottom part of the vest (detachable snap buttons) whilst leaving the top part of the vest in place thus keeping your baby nice and warm. She couldn't get the idea out of her head and found it hard to understand how it wasn't on the market currently so she started researching it and decided she would bring it to the market. After lots of hard work the Twosie was launched in July 2019.

When asked how EMPOWER helped her, Marina responded "It influenced me greatly, it gave me confidence, support, helped me believe in my business, by believing in me. But most of all - or the most powerful piece I have learned is that everyone has a bad day/week/or month, but we always bounce back, and you notice this every

month with a different lady and business, and we all help each other out. I always look forward to each monthly session."

Marina has lots of more plans in the future with Babyboss and plans to expand slowly into other baby product ranges making parents lives easier.

## LINKS



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



[Marina Murphy Healy](#)



[@babyboss127](#)



# MARY CORRIGAN

**NOO CHOCOLATES**

Mary Corrigan, founder of Noo Chocolates, has always been intrigued by food and more specifically, food production.

Starting a food production business was never part of the plan for Mary. Business Studies was not her favourite subject in school and having the time to commit to something so massive, was not on the cards.

In 2010, her three sisters bought her a gift voucher to attend a chocolate making workshop. Mary learned the basics of chocolate making; how to temper chocolate, make truffles, and the best ways to pair flavours.

In 2017 Mary was offered redundancy and took the opportunity to follow her dream. Noo Chocolates was born.

Noo Chocolates is located in Ballina in County Mayo. They use locally produced ingredients to create unique and exciting chocolates. The name comes from her family nickname, Noo. This is a term of endearment used for small children in South Africa, where

her parents lived for a few years before Mary was born.

Mary has participated in both EMPOWER Start in 2018 and EMPOWER Growth in 2019

“The Empower Programme gave me the knowledge and skills to put a structure in place for my fledgling company. I had no knowledge of how to run a business. The programme covers all the aspects of setting up your own business. This encouraged me to proceed with a level of confidence I wouldn’t have otherwise had. In addition, the networking and support from within the group has been excellent. There is always someone on hand to offer a bit of advice or help, which is really important for anyone like me who mainly works alone.”

## LINKS

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

 [Mary Corrigan](#)

 [Noo Chocolates](#)

# MARY FINN

## CONNECT4WORK



‘Creating a culture with ability at the core.’

Mary Finn has worked in the disability sector for 17 years in a variety of roles and understands the challenges posed to employers and employees when faced with the uncertainty of illness or injury.

Connect4Work supports organisations to create a culture of well-being, openness and inclusion for all employees by being proactive towards positive mental health, diversity and disability.

When the culture of a workplace is open and accepting of people with a diverse range of needs, abilities and who have positive contributions to make, it results in achieving a highly motivated staff. This then leads to increased productivity which further promotes an inclusive culture and a positive corporate identity as a place where people want to work.

Connect4Work focuses on the positive outcome of a return to work.

One of the goals of Connect4Work is to support organizations incorporate activities regarding diversity and disability into their overall strategy. Mary offers a service that is objective, evaluative, reflective and forward-thinking in a way that helps business cultivate a culture with ability at its core.

Navigating the return to work processes can be difficult with a lot of unknowns. By partnering with Connect4Work, Mary provides an audit trail. This ensures organisations can identify the risk posed by the absence, then address the barriers and plan for reasonable accommodations whilst meeting obligations under equality employment legislation, organisational corporate social responsibility and also helps reduce costs.

## LINKS



[www.connect4work.ie](http://www.connect4work.ie)



[Mary Finn](#)



# MARY McHUGH

## IRISH ONLINE COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY (IOCPS)

Mary McHugh qualified with a post graduate degree in Psychotherapy and hold a Masters in Mindfulness Based Interventions. Mary set up Irish Online Counselling and Psychotherapy (IOCPS) in 2011 when she saw a real need and gap in the way counselling was offered. From working in setting up an online medium for people who were struggling with depression and anxiety, she quickly came to see that there were lots of people who were unable to access face to face therapy for whatever their reasons (some included severe social anxiety, disability, family/work commitments, geographic location etc)

Since its conception, IOCPS has grown beyond the domestic need in Ireland and they have become increasingly aware of the need for a home based support for the Irish diaspora/expat. "Over 50% of our clients are Irish people living and working abroad. Our service allows them to access a home from home counselling service with flexible times (office hours are 6am - 10pm GMT) and convenient medium choices (instant chat, telephone call or video call)." In early 2020 when

Covid-19 came to Ireland and Lockdown occurred Mary saw a huge increase for online counselling.

Mary is looking at future plans and says "we are looking to expand our team and get our name more recognised worldwide'. Mary enjoyed participating on EMPOWER Growth as it helped me realise own my passion for what I am doing and has supported me and given me structure going forward. I have taken on their expertise and opinions. I loved the interaction of the other women and the real strength we all had to push though when at times it can be the most difficult part."

### LINKS



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



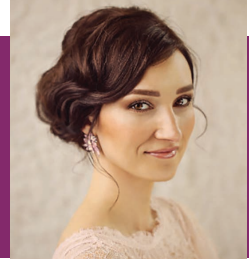
[Mary McHugh](#)



[@CounsellingOnline.ie](#)

# OLGA KLOFAC

## FAIRYSPECS



With a Master's degree in Financial management, Olga moved to Ireland 15 years ago and worked at different jobs until she had children and realised she needed to be at home with them. That's when she set-up her first business (Photography Business) which became very successful and gave her valuable experience and skills that were helpful in setting up and running her eyewear company'. A few years ago Olga Klofac's youngest daughter was diagnosed with farsightedness. She searched everywhere for glasses that wouldn't look overpowering on her face but everything they found was too strong, too dark or just plain tacky.

Fairy specs are dedicated to girls who dream of fairy wings, and magic dust; providing them with glasses that accentuate their features instead of overpowering them. Glasses so soft and delicate you barely notice them on.

They are currently selling online.

"The EMPOWER Programme has done wonders in terms of pushing me out of my comfort zone. The motivation I've gained from it has been amazing. I've been in business for 6 years but still learnt many new practical skills during this program that are going to help me on my journey. The selection of speakers and mentors was fantastic and it's been a privilege to learn from some of the best experts in their fields. I enjoyed it so much I never missed a session and was always looking forward to what we were going to learn next. And last but not least thanks to this great program I now have a network of amazing people that I wouldn't have met otherwise."

## LINKS



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



[Olga Klofac](#)



[Fairyspecs](#)





# PAULINE ROHDICH

## JUST PAUSE

PAULINE ROHDICH, is a Rapid Transformational Hypnotherapist, Happiness Trainer, Yoga & Meditation Teacher & Life Coach. She combines her skills in helping people find personal freedom from pain and suffering, often at the hands of old out-dated beliefs and habits.

Pauline uses her skills of leadership that she developed in the 20 years she served as a police woman, flight attendant and business owner. She has no third level formal education but is trained as a yoga and mediation teacher through Deepark Chopra. A Life Coach, hypnotherapist, nlp practitioner, happiness trainer, spiritual mentor and speaker. Before she gave birth to her son, Finn, Pauline experienced four incredibly painful miscarriages. The deep inner healing work she did at that time gives her the clarity and compassion to meet her clients wherever they are in their own life journey.

When asking her about her future plans for her company, Pauline says "I'm starting a podcast, developing an online live training course, which will become an evergreen course. I'm considering creating a leisure clothing line to reflect the Just Pause ethos. My book will be at the publishers next spring so exciting times ahead." Pauline is passionate about awakening her clients to their higher power so that they can choose consciously the life they want and realise they are more than what they see in the mirror.

"The EMPOWER Programme helped me to take my business and skills seriously. It was wonderful interacting with other women and mentors."

### LINKS



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



[Pauline Rohdich](#)



[@paulinerohdichcoach](#)

# RACHEL DUBBER

## RACHEL DUBBER ART, DESIGN AND PHOTOGRAPHY



Established in 2015, Rachel Dubber Art, Design and Photography, creates and sells original art mostly consisting of animal portraits, cards, and prints.

Rachel says 'I realised my art career had arrived at a fork in the road when it was costing me more than it was making. Commissions were still coming in but they were not generating enough money to cover exhibition and show costs, never mind take a wage. Even though I was happy in my creative zone it was not a business. I had to make a decision, either I continued to run at a loss, give it all up or find something else in order to obtain financial freedom.

The last couple of years had seen her producing a range of blank greeting cards that her customers loved. People loved the artworks but could not always afford an original piece.

Then purely by chance, a friend sent her an email which changed the course of her artistic life. The email was for a European Funded programme called EmpowerHer. "This was just what I

needed as I had no knowledge of how to be a businessperson. I was in serious need of guidance.

"The EmpowerHer course covered business problems, solutions, opportunities, customer relationships and revenue streams, all key to running a business; this is unfortunately not taught in Art College. The programme boosted confidence and leadership skills, and trust me, for someone who would rather talk to the animals this was an essential change for me. Through EmpowerHer's wonderful facilitator Maria Staunton, lifelong friendships were formed with other female entrepreneurs and mentors."

### LINKS



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



[Rachel Dubber](#)



[Rachel Dubber](#)



# SARAH MCGUIRE

## THE READING ACADEMY

The Reading Academy is an educational platform which provides services to schools, teachers, organisations, parents and potential Reading Academy tutors set up by Sarah McGuire and Sarah Watchorn. Sarah McGuire participated in EMPOWER Growth. Born and raised in the USA, she attended Western Michigan University, earning her bachelor degree in Science, specialising in teaching reading, maths and science. She went on to earn an honours Masters degree in Teaching, Special Education at the University of Charleston, S.C. Sarah has been teaching students with dyslexia for twenty-two years, in the USA and in Ireland. Sarah has completed the Wilson Reading System Advanced Diploma and the Orton-Gillingham practitioner's course. This company is located in Belmullet, Co Mayo.

The Reading Academy is a solution based programme that enables people to successfully teach struggling readers and individuals with dyslexia how to read. This is an independent, self-paced course that includes lesson plans, word lists, quizzes, video

instruction, whiteboard animations, worksheets and more. The Reading Academy also offers small group, face-to-face, specialised tuition.

The Reading Academy provides a course that is unique and different from any other:

“The Empower programme highlighted the need for good planning and to see the company on a larger scale. It encourages you to take the leap and be a little more inclined to push yourself forward and see where the business can go. The women in the group help with this and they are pushing themselves on also so it encourages you to do the same.”

### LINKS



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



[@thereadingacademy.ie](https://www.facebook.com/thereadingacademy.ie)



[Sarah McGuire](#)

# SUZANNE CARNEY

## ANATOMY PHYSIOTHERAPY



Suzanne Carney is a physiotherapist with over 10 years' experience. She graduated from Manchester Metropolitan University and worked in Manchester for two years before moving to Perth, Australia for seven years. Whilst in Australia she obtained a Master's Degree in Continence and Women's Health and has specialised in this area of physiotherapy. Suzanne along with her husband and little girl moved back to Ireland in December 2017. After having a little boy she participated on the EMPOWER Start Programme and set up Anatomy Physiotherapy in Claremorris in 2018.

Her target clients are primarily men, women and children with pelvic and continence issues. 'These are very debilitating conditions and many suffer in silence, unaware that there is physiotherapy treatments that will help. For a lot of women and men the embarrassment can stop them enjoying physical activities and exercise. It can also cause emotional distress.'

Currently Suzanne splits her time between Mayo University Hospital, and Anatomy Physiotherapy, where she sees patients privately one to one and runs her own hydrotherapy classes.

"I really enjoyed the EMPOWER Programme. It gave me the confidence to believe that I can be a successful business woman; EMPOWER provided me with the tools to do so. The Programme also introduced me to the nicest group of women who are super supportive of each other and our respective businesses."

### LINKS



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



[Suzanne Carney](#)



[@anatomyphysiotherapy1](#)



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