

# ACORNS

Accelerating the Creation Of  
Rural Nascent Start-ups



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



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



**CEDRA**



*“Early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, are invited to apply for a fully funded place on a new pilot initiative, ACORNS.”*

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**E**arly stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, are invited to apply for a fully funded place on a new pilot initiative, ACORNS.

The intention is to provide up to 48 entrepreneurs with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their current aspirations.

The programme will run from September 2015 until March 2016. Selected participants will be those who, on a competitive basis, best demonstrate their potential to advance their businesses and their commitment to fully engage in the initiative.

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

This innovative programme is funded under the CEDRA 2015 Rural Innovation and Development Fund through the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

There will be no charge for those selected to participate in ACORNS and their accommodation costs associated with the residential elements of the initiative will be covered.

## WHO QUALIFIES FOR THE PROGRAMME?

ACORNS is designed for nascent female rural entrepreneurs. To qualify for consideration, a woman must have recently set up a new business (no earlier than 9th July 2013) which she owns or part owns, or must be actively planning a new venture and have a clear idea of what she wants to achieve. If she is not already trading, activities such as organising the start-up team, looking for equipment/facilities, saving money for the start-up, or writing a business plan would all be considered as active commitments to starting a business.

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

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

**If selected, applicants must be available to attend the first residential session on 30th September /1st October 2015 in Portlaoise.**

## HOW TO APPLY

Please register your interest on the website [www.acorns.ie](http://www.acorns.ie) in the first instance and you will be sent an application form by email. Complete the application on your system and return it to us either by email attachment or by post to 6 James's Terrace, Malahide, Co Dublin.

Application Forms can also be sent and received by post. Please contact us on 01 845 0770, if you would like a form posted to you or if you have any difficulties in registering online.

**Closing dates for receipt of completed applications is the 11th September 2015.**

## SELECTION PROCESS

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

There are up to 48 places available for suitable candidates. The Lead Entrepreneurs will meet on 16th September to assess the applications received. Successful candidates will be notified in the following days.

## WHAT'S INVOLVED?

The ACORNS cycle will run from 30th September 2015 until March 2016. Based on a belief that entrepreneurs learn best from each other, the ACORNS initiative is focused on interactive round table sessions that are facilitated, not by consultants, academics or professional trainers, but by female entrepreneurs who have started and successfully grown businesses in rural Ireland.

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

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

The cycle will start with a residential Developmental Forum, which will get underway in Portlaoise on the **30th September / 1st October 2015**. An overnight stay is incorporated into the event. Successful participants will then meet with their Lead Entrepreneur and groups in separate round tables in October, November, January, and March. The programme will run until March 2016. A second Development Forum will be held in February 2016 (date to be confirmed).

# LEAD ENTREPRENEURS



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

## ALISON RITCHIE - Polar Ice, Laois

Alison Ritchie joined the family business Polar Ice in 2002 and was centrally involved in changing the strategic direction of the company to concentrate exclusively on dry ice manufacturing. By 2004, Polar Ice's new state-of-the-art manufacturing facility was operational. Polar Ice is now to the fore of dry ice suppliers, supplying 70% of the market on the island of Ireland. In 2006, Alison joined with her brother, father and a friend to set up Polar IceTech Ltd. A sister company to Polar Ice, the new venture focused on 'Dry Ice Blasting', an environmentally friendly alternative to other high pressure abrasive cleaning methods. Looking to the future, a commitment to growth remains high on Alison's agenda. Polar Ice employs 17 people and is based in Portarlington in Co. Laois, Dublin, Cork and Portadown, Northern Ireland.

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



## ANNE CUSACK - Critical Healthcare, Westmeath

Anne Cusack set up Critical Healthcare in 1999. The company manufactures and distributes more than 2,000 emergency medical products to ambulance providers, fire services and the pre-hospital market in Ireland and the UK. Their brands including MediQuilt, a range of disposable linen products; Duramedic, a medical equipment and first aid product range, and Medlogistix, a bespoke procurement SaaS designed around a client's requirements and specifications. Most recently, Critical Healthcare secured major contracts with Medlogistix from the HSE, Dublin Fire Brigade and the Irish Coast Guard. Anne and her team have won numerous Awards including the SFA Innovation Award 2013 and the IMSTA (Irish Medical and Surgical Trade Association) Best Services Company Award 2014. The business is continuing to grow at over 30% annually. Anne currently employs 18 people in Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath.

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



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## ANNE REILLY - Paycheck Plus, Louth

Anne Reilly set up Paycheck Plus in 2005 in Dunleer, Co. Louth, providing payroll outsource services to save clients time and money by streamlining their payroll process and ensures compliance with ever changing legislation. The company works with Irish, UK and international clients operating across a range of sectors and locations with staff numbers ranging from one employee to several thousand.

Paycheck Plus have been the recipients of many awards over the years, including Best Business Practice Excellence Award 2014 from the Fingal Chamber of Commerce and Winner of Professional Services Excellence 2014 from the Drogheda Chamber. Anne currently employs 11 people. In 2014, Paycheck Plus opened an office in Manchester to meet the demand for payroll services for companies who have operations on both sides of the Irish Sea.

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



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## CAROLINE MCENERY - The HR Suite, Kerry

Caroline McEnery set up The HR Suite in response to the demand for an outsourced expert HR department being necessary and accessible for all companies who employ people. The HR Suite offer specialist tailored and effective human resources and business solutions to clients throughout Ireland. Based in Tralee, Co. Kerry, with a nationwide client base, The HR Suite has been growing steadily over the last 6 years. The company now has over 200 clients throughout Ireland and employs 8 full time staff including an employment law barrister.

Caroline is a member of the Low Pay Commission and is also an adjudicator in the new Work Place Commission. She has also completed a Masters in Human Resources in the University of Limerick, and is a trained mediator.

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



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## DEIRDRE MCGLONE - Harveys Point, Donegal

Deirdre McGlone has run Harvey's Point Hotel located on Lough Eske, Co. Donegal for the last 19 years. Opening with 20 bedrooms, a restaurant and a small team, the hotel has seen phenomenal growth over the years. Today, the hotel boasts 64 suites and has recently launched 'The Lodge @ Harvey's Point', located on the grounds of the hotel for special interest groups. In January 2015, Harvey's Point was voted Number One Hotel in Ireland in the TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice awards for the third successive year. The multi award winning hotel was also ranked No. 8 in Europe and No. 23 in the world. With 120 people employed in Harvey's Point, Deirdre and her team continue to push the boundaries as an industry leader, keeping hotel standards at the highest level.

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



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## MARY B WALSH - Ire Wel Pallets, Wexford

Mary B. Walsh is the owner and Managing Director of Ire Wel Pallets Ltd. Established in May 1990, Ire Wel Pallets is a pallet and packaging manufacturer, supplying pallets, boxes and crates to specifications for their customers. The company's customer base includes organisations in the medical devices, pharmaceutical and food and drinks industries.

Based near Gorey, Co. Wexford, Ire Wel Pallets operate from the first purpose-built pallet manufacturing facility in Ireland. They have a 60,000 sq. ft. ventilated store for kiln dried timber and pallets. New technology on site has given the company more control of their production quality and stock. With customers nationwide throughout the island of Ireland, the company is now exploring export markets including the UK. Ire Wel Pallets currently employs 34 staff in Gorey and plans to expand further.

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



# SPONSORS

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This innovative programme is funded under the **CEDRA 2015 Rural Innovation and Development Fund** (CEDRA - Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas). Its objective is to encourage a stronger level of enterprise development in rural areas by seeking out and assisting up to 48 start-up female entrepreneurs living in rural areas to grow and develop their businesses.

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

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## SIMON COVENEY TD

Minister Coveney said ***“I am delighted that this initiative is getting underway. Job creation is a huge focus for this Government and I hope that by targeting female entrepreneurs, who are currently under represented in start-up enterprises, that we can increase the level of business and employment generation in rural areas”***



## ANN PHELAN TD

Minister Phelan, who is responsible for the implementation of the CEDRA Report said ***“Rural women’s entrepreneurship clearly represents an untapped potential and can contribute significantly to our economic growth. For many rural women, entrepreneurship is part of a broader livelihood strategy, often undertaken initially on a part-time basis. Emerging businesses need support to flourish. I am a strong believer in the value of mentors and in the importance being able to turn to experienced and trusted advisors from a variety of industries for advice and support”***



# WHO WE ARE

## FITZSIMONS CONSULTING

Paula Fitzsimons is the founder and managing director of Fitzsimons Consulting, which specialises in areas related to entrepreneurship and growth.

A recognised expert on entrepreneurship, Paula and her team are very experienced in designing and developing initiatives to support entrepreneurs. For example, recognising that fewer women start new businesses and of those that start fewer have significant growth ambitions than do men, Paula designed and developed *Going for Growth*. *Going for Growth* is focused on peer support as a means of assisting women entrepreneurs who wish to grow their businesses. The *Going for Growth* initiative is funded by Enterprise Ireland, KPMG and the Equality for Women Measure. The Equality for Women Measure is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) through the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme and the Department of Justice and Equality. ([www.goingforgrowth.com](http://www.goingforgrowth.com))

Having just completed a 7th cycle, *Going for Growth* has supported over 400 women entrepreneurs to achieve their growth ambitions and measures its success in terms of the participants' increased turnover, additional employment created and the number of new exporters.

*Going for Growth* was included in the 2009 *Good Practice* initiatives by the European Commission and voted into the Top 10 *most beneficial to implement* of those initiatives. The initiative has been described as an *"inspiring practice"* by the OECD and EU in a joint report on entrepreneurship among under-represented groups; has been selected as a Good Practice by the European Institute of Gender Equality following a competitive process; and has been selected to represent Ireland in the European Enterprise Awards 2015, investing in entrepreneurial skills category. In recognition of her work in the area of female entrepreneurship, Paula received the WMB Boots Empowering Women Award 2014.

Paula and her team in Fitzsimons Consulting are very enthusiastic about implementing ACORNS.

***"I believe that significant untapped entrepreneurial potential exists among women in rural Ireland. Working with the team of volunteer Lead Entrepreneurs and with the support of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and CEDRA, I am convinced that we can harness that potential for the good of the individuals concerned, their local communities and the wider economy."***



## CONTACT US

For more information or to contact us please email [info@acorns.ie](mailto:info@acorns.ie) or phone: (+353) 1 845 0770  
Address: Fitzsimons Consulting, 6 James Terrace, Malahide, Co. Dublin, K36 Y972 Ireland

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