

CASE STUDY - BALLYHOURA RURAL ENTERPRISE SERVICE

Introduction

This service aims to support long term unemployed people to progress to self employment and viable businesses.

Delivering the service, Ballyhoura Development seek to proactively facilitate the change of economic outlook for long term unemployed clients, by building their capacity and including them in the entrepreneurial opportunities of their local economy. Of the 8,200 people unemployed across the Ballyhoura Development area an estimated 220 people made the transition to the BTWEA in 2010.

Ballyhoura Development deliver the service in five complementary ways:

1. Provide long term unemployed people with advice, training, mentoring, finance and continued support to start up and grow a business.
2. Develop the capacity of socio economic partnerships in the key market towns to create opportunities for enterprise, appropriate enterprise infrastructure and local support networks for those entering self employment.
3. Create enterprise growth strategies in four key sectors tourism, energy, food and community services to develop potential for future enterprise start up opportunities.
4. Support the social economy sector to provide enterprise experience and activation options in target areas and dispersed rural communities.
5. Work with local employers to assess where long term unemployed and under employed clients could provide outsourced support services.

The focus on the individual, their community and the wider economy ensure a multi faceted approach to supporting long term unemployed to successfully transit to self employment.

Delivery mechanisms are reviewed regularly and adapted to the client's needs and changes such as the economic climate, opportunities and programme frameworks.

Activities

This example demonstrates how the Rural Enterprise Service is linked to other services, the socio - economic data, consultations, the delivery approach, and target clients.

In Doneraile an integrated package of interventions including a focus on enterprise is required to overcome the negative consequences for the area given the current economic situation.

Doneraile and its surrounds have high levels of disadvantage across a number of variables including unemployment, deprivation, lone parents, housing, age dependency and low education levels. Data highlights the historical high prevalence of local unemployment, the three fold increase of both males and females under 35 on the live register, a decreasing population and high outmigration of people in their 20's.

Community socio economic planning facilitated by Ballyhoura Development in 2008 was followed by sustained support to develop the capacity of a number of local groups and implementation of a variety of community projects. The Doneraile Development Association formed in February 2011 as a representative group for all groups in the village. A key focus of the group is to optimise the historical asset of Doneraile Court and Demesne to benefit a range of social and economic projects across the village.

Ballyhoura Development are working with the Doneraile Development Association intensively since February identifying needs, devising strategies and brokering resources on a number of projects to overcome the barriers to the areas long term unemployed progressing into education, training, employment and enterprise.

Lessons Learned

Consultations with unemployed people in Doneraile highlighted the limited availability of:

- Access to supports and information.
- Adult education and skills courses.
- Facilitated linkage to quality training and employment progression opportunities.
- Available space for meeting, training courses and enterprise start up.
- Transport services to access jobs in nearby towns.
- Opportunities for those with construction and farming skills.

Ballyhoura Development undertook an audit of local businesses. The audit and consultations identified that a key economic sector in Doneraile was antiques. The antique dealers collectively operate 16,000 sq ft of antique showroom and auction space making it the second largest grouping of such businesses in Ireland. Consultations with the antique business owners identified the unfulfilled opportunity for antique restorers with demand arising from the existing businesses should the right skills be available.

An opportunity to create a dedicated "Centre of Excellence" in antiques was agreed as achievable over the medium term. A steering group of local business and community people was formed to develop a proposal for training courses that would enable unemployed people to develop appropriate skills to enter the antiques sector.

Past experience was that locally based training initiatives are a successful way of supporting and progressing marginalized individuals into further education, recognised qualifications and employment.

A plan was prepared for a Furniture and Antiques Restoration Local Training Initiative and submitted to FAS.

Simultaneously a plan was developed to create a furniture and antiques restoration social economy business. The social economy enterprise will enable long term unemployed people, unemployed young people, low income underemployed farmers and lone parents to become involved in employment, enterprise and develop skills. The social economy enterprise will also allow for progression of individuals from the Local Training Initiative into an enterprise environment.

The creation of the social economy enterprise is important to enable people gain skills in preparation for progression to self employment.

To further encourage enterprise creation a submission has been made to Cork County Council to examine a rates reduction as a stimulant for entrants to the antiques and restoration trade on the main street in Doneraile. It is planned that the potential utilisation of Doneraile Court and Demesne for antique restoration uses would provide increased economic and cultural synergy between the Court and the village, creating a culturally rich working environment, attractive to all.

Conclusions

Although the plan is in its infancy the following has been achieved.

1. A local training initiative is starting in October for 20 long term unemployed people.
2. Funding is being sought to create an antiques social enterprise.
3. An old convent church has been leased by the community as a training facility.
4. A multi agency plan has been developed for the future of the Court and Demense with employment and enterprise opportunities at its core.
5. The Doneraile Development Association is seeking a graduate internship to lead change.
5. Tus and RSS participants are being employed within the town on a number of projects.
6. A rates based proposal to stimulate new enterprise start ups on the main street has been developed.