

# Inner City Enterprise

Work Hard.  
Dream Big.

Inner City Enterprise (ICE) is a not-for-profit charity established to advise and assist unemployed people in Dublin's inner city to set up their own businesses or create their own self-employment. ICE provides individual business advice and supports, as well as access to a panel of voluntary Business Advisors. ICE also provides access to micro-finance loans. Over the last 5 years, ICE has registered 1811 new clients, established 706 new businesses and created around 730 new businesses.





## Melissa

Owner of Social Bee mobile tea service

**“The support first gave me the confidence to go forward. Now it is about exposure and contacts and connections. I was in a room full of people a couple weeks ago and I never would have been there without the support of ICE.”**

## It was a spark of an idea in CEO Evanne Kilmurray's mind that brought life to ICE.

At the time, Ireland had plenty of employment centers, but no centers that focused on enterprise.

"I have master's degree in politics and I worked as a researcher in RTE for a couple of years, but I've always been interested in the community and voluntary sector," explains Evanne. "In the late 80s, I was an officer in an unemployment center here in Ireland. People were coming in and asking 'how do we get a business off the ground?' I said 'look, the banks aren't lending. I don't know.' So I got interested in enterprise and started doing a lot of research around the Scottish and Welsh experience in this area. They had things called local enterprise agencies and there was nothing in Ireland like that at the time. My friend Kieran was working in the same sector and I went out on a limb. I said, 'Let's do it. Let's get our own enterprise agency off the ground.'"

Helping entrepreneurs get off the ground is important, but ICE also continues to support and maintain the businesses it fosters. ICE has recently initiated a client-tracking system to track clients over two years in business, and 60 percent of those clients are still operational with a further 15 percent having secured full-time employment.

### THE RIGHT MATCH

A hallmark of ICE is its pragmatic delivery of individualized business advice through its Enterprise Development Officers and volunteer Business Advisors. The Enterprise Development Officers help clients navigate the nuts and bolts of starting a business: from tax registrations to loan applications and business plan development. The Business Advisors come from top companies such as Tesco, Accenture, A & L Goodbody Solicitors, Irish Distillers, Bank of Ireland, Grant Thornton and the Ulster Bank, and provide clients with extraordinary pro-bono access to business intelligence. So a start-up company making baked goods can work with a top packaging expert and a new clothing business can get marketing advice from a Business Advisor with decades of experience.

Eoin Kernan owns Slick, a successful video production company. When he first came to ICE

he had more questions than answers.

"I had a bit of an idea. I had started to work freelance and was developing a production model in my head," says Eoin. "I was connected with ICE through the local unemployment office. I didn't know a huge amount about ICE but the minute I discovered a wealth of knowledge and information that I could garner there, it was just fantastic."

ICE paired Eoin with Business Advisor Tony Kelly of Anton Motors. While video production and the automotive industry may have appeared at first to be an incongruent match, it proved to be ideal.

"I explained to Evanne that I possessed basic business skills, yet there were certain things I didn't know," explains Eoin.

Tony has provided advice to Eoin as someone who had also started his own business from the ground up. "Evanne took time to find Tony whose experience and style suited me. Having someone who I can explore ideas with has been key. If I hadn't had access to ICE, I'd probably be floundering away with some ideas wondering why they were working or not working. Any time I've asked for it, advice has been there in spades. It has opened up opportunities for me that I would never have had otherwise. There are times when you've made mistakes or you lose that client that you really wanted. Every business is going to have that but not every business has someone on the end of the phone to talk it through. It's like having a business partner without having a business partner, that's the best way to describe it."

### RELATIONSHIPS WITHOUT LIFESPANS

Robert Giffney is a small business owner in Dublin. His barbershop HIM is another ICE success story.

"I was working only three days a week as a barber and it seemed like I couldn't get anywhere," says Robert. "I wanted so much more. Then I lost my job so I met with the social welfare department and they introduced me ICE. From the first meeting I had with them I felt someone was behind me and wanted to guide me in the right direction."

"I left school at 16," says Robert. "I was never academic. I was more creative. I am an idea person and there's always things going on in my head. ICE understood that I didn't want to just

create a shop, I wanted to create a brand. They steered me and sometimes even pulled me back a bit. Dublin is a cut-throat town with a competitive barbershop scene, but it's three years on now and we're growing and getting stronger. I still pick up the phone for advice. Without them I genuinely would not be where I am today."

Another aspect of ICE is its informality and ongoing relationships with launched businesses. "We don't have a lifespan for our relationships," explains Evanne. "Part of what makes ICE work is the informality. We offer sound business advice and support, but people can just pick up the phone to say, 'May I run something by you?' We hold networking events so established businesses help those starting out. What I really love is that we're building up a community in ICE."

### INNOVATIVE IDEAS DESERVE PRACTICAL ADVICE

Melissa Curley was a secondary school teacher with a passion for tea. Her business Social Bee is a mobile afternoon tea service. "We do bespoke events that are based around the setting of a vintage-style afternoon tea-party. I had a business idea of going into people's homes and turning the idea of afternoon tea on its head."

Melissa came to ICE with two challenges: an unusual business idea and no business background. "The business I was starting was clearly a bit quirky. I like to call it niche. Other people humored me but they thought I was mad. All I heard was 'You can't make money out of a mobile tea business, are you crazy?'"

ICE not only saw value in her ideas, it provided the structured advice around marketing, social media, and a plan for eventual expansion that Melissa needed to succeed. "I would have known nothing about the practical things I needed at the beginning, says Melissa. "The advice is delivered in such a friendly manner that you don't feel silly asking things. When you're self-employed and trying to build a business on your own, you don't have partners to bounce ideas off or troubleshoot things with. It can be very lonely in your own head. This is where the main support has been for me. Knowing you have an organization like ICE that will help me in any way they can, gave me the confidence to go on."

PHONE  
WATCH

# HIM Barber Shop



## Robert

Owner of HIM Barbershop

**"I went from working three days a week for someone else to having my own business. We have two staff members and we're hiring more. I'm 100% thankful to ICE. I'm now waking up every day doing something that I absolutely love."**



# Shane

Owner of The Stylish Guy men's clothing

**"ICE is my support service. If I have a question about taxes, human resources or law issues, they are always on-hand to help me out. They are like my parents in the business world."**



## SUPPORTING THE SUPPORTERS

The Ireland Funds saw the value in the tightly-run and impactful model presented by ICE. Funding has helped ICE produce its own marketing materials as grow and expand their offerings. "This year we've started doing specialized training, around book-keeping, social media, and communications. We also have client networking events. "The Ireland Funds were incredibly supportive and showed faith in us," says Evanne. "We are building something here that is exciting, innovative and entrepreneurial and that faith makes all the difference."