



Social Impact Ireland Impact Report

2022-2023

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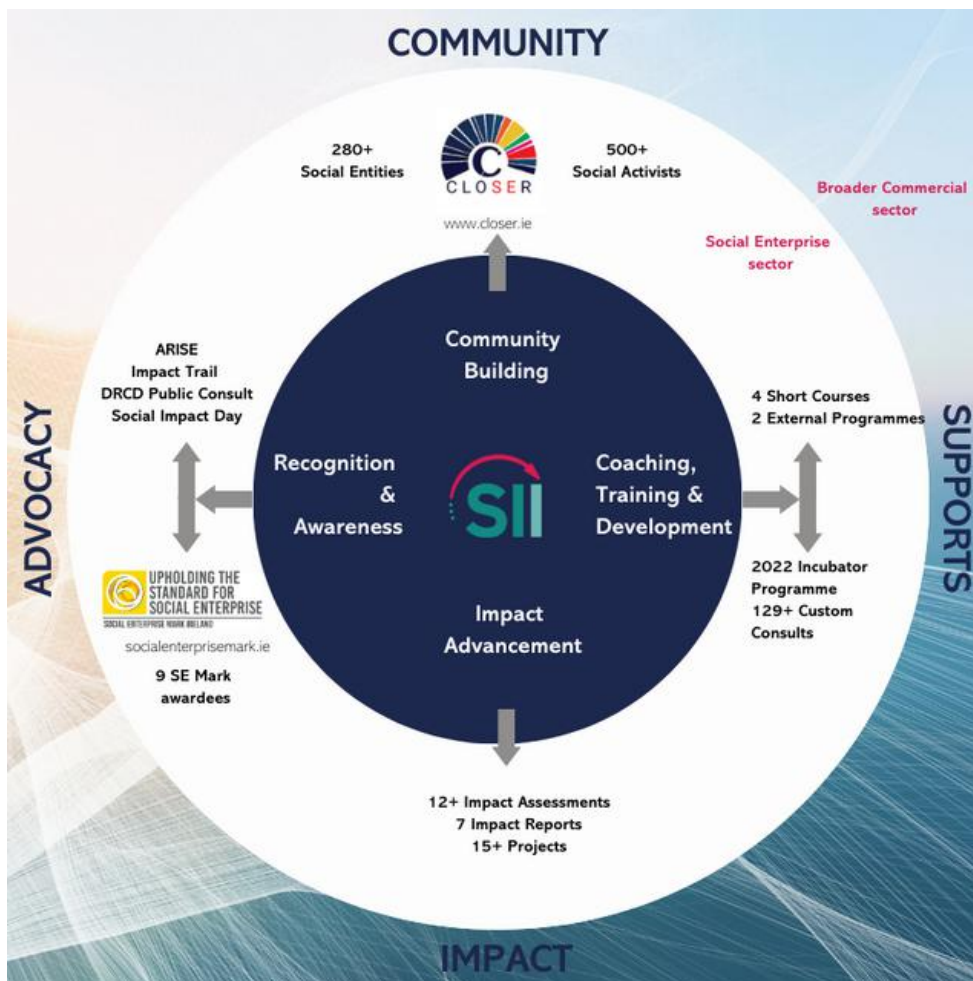
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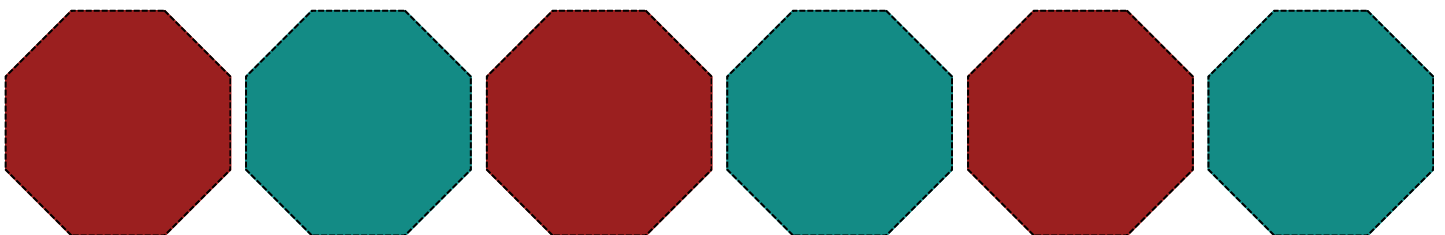


Our Impact at a Glance



To briefly outline, since 2022 we have:

- Ran a wide range of events involving over 480 social initiatives to showcase to others the reality and rich potential of the social sector.
- Delivered 7 short course programmes and one incubator programme involving 50+ participants.
- Provided over 130 customised substantive supportive interactions along with many more casual interactions.
- Executed 15+ sustained project based interactions.
- Developed and delivered two custom social business programmes on behalf of external partners.
- Developed supportive programmes for two external bodies to deploy to their audiences.
- Completed 7 Impact reports and performed 12+ impact methodology assessments.
- Successfully delivered the introduction of the SE Mark, the most recognised international accreditation, to Ireland with our initial 7 awardees.
- Throughout the year, we have seen a 2x growth in the CLOSER community with over 500 entities now present on the system.
- Began utilising CLOSER as our primary delivery path and and seen early stage indicators of potentially substantive collaborative projects developing.



480
social
initiatives

7
short
courses

30+
incubator
participants

150
supportive
interactions

15+
sustained
interactions

3
custom
programmes

2
external
bodies

7
impact
reports

9
SE Mark
awardees

Impact by Numbers



Translating Activity to Impact

We apply the methodologies that we develop internally to ourselves as a social enterprise. Our own theory of change is developed to that methodology, and we review our impact by that means. Our direct impact is a secondary one in that all our work is aimed at supporting the social sector we interact with, to grow their impact in terms of scope, depth and professionalism of execution.

Translating our direct activities into end Impact is difficult to do. For example we have made over 100 introductions between social sector participants in the past year but how do you judge the effectiveness of this?

To deal with this we have taken a research based approach drawing on what has been established on a global stage. Consequently we have aligned our assessment approach to the OECD recommended best practise approach on outcomes that align to a vibrant social sector.

Our Potential Outcomes

- ✓ **Relevant Practical Supportive Framework**
- ✓ **SE Sector Awareness & Recognition**
- ✓ **Enhanced Economic Viability Opportunities**
- ✓ **Enhanced Social Economic Opportunities**
- ✓ **Social Economy Community Growth**
- ✓ **Enhanced Individual Autonomy**

The Strategy that drives SII seeks to focus on work that contributes positively towards these outcomes and we have developed a set of indicators that we believe reflect the level of contribution to these outcomes.

These indicators are used as the basis of analysing our impact and are tracked through a combination of quantitative and qualitative measurements. Qualitative is particularly important for us in determining the quality and depth of our impact and the level of repeated engagements and referrals from post engagements is complementary to our work.



Theory of Change

Our Purpose

Supporting social enterprises in enhancing their impact and attaining beneficial recognition of their critical role in enabling a vibrant social economy.

The “Impact” we want from Our Mission

Vibrant, collaborative, connected community of socially motivated enterprises and individuals, delivering real growing impact engaged and recognised as a vital part of the social economy

The “Outcomes” that will show us we are delivering on our Mission

Sector Relevant Practical Supportive Framework

SE Sector Awareness & Recognition

Enhanced Economic Viability Opportunities

Enhanced Social Economy Participation

Social Economy Community Growth

Enhanced Individual Autonomy

The Activities we do



Relevant Indicators

Sector Promotional Metrics
SE Mark Advancement
Reports & Insights
CLOSER Community Metrics
SE Supports Work
Project Work
Impact Work
Collaborations & Connections



Impact Detail

Social Enterprise Mark



Through 2022 and 2023 , SII worked on customising the international accreditation mark SE Mark CIC for use in Ireland. The SE Mark CIC is the only international accreditation that identifies social enterprises and the motivation for its introduction to Ireland was to assist in overcoming the complexity in recognising social enterprises through specific legal formats while also offering a development path for initiatives in enhancing their activities.

Our approach to implementation was based on utilising the application process itself as part of a strategic self-assessment for the organisation allowing them a simple framework to evaluate.

1. Optimum governance approach
2. Understanding their core trading model
3. Checking the alignment of their strategic direction to their needs
4. Providing a means of assessing their progress towards the impact they strive to deliver.

This pilot phase concluded in November 2022 with an awards ceremony that showcased the initial 8 holders of the mark, and reflective of the wide spectrum of participants in the Irish social sector, included CLGs', DAC, LTD entities.

Utilising their experiences within this process we continue to build out the cohort of mark holders and target passing 25 by the end of 2023. For the mark holders we visualise the award as the beginning of the journey and are working to enhance the impact of the mark to its holders through 2023 and beyond.

Advocacy & Promotion of the Sector – ARISE Programme

The year just past saw the first national promotional initiative under the current social enterprise policy. The ARISE programme is an initiative created by the Department of Rural & Community Development (DRCD), supported through The Dormant Funds Account, and administered through Popal with a shared goal of supporting initiatives that will increase awareness of social enterprises and their potential across the island*. SII was a participant within this programme and aligned a significant number of events directly in support of this programme. Additional elements were also provided in partnership with Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick, through this programme.



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

The approach taken by SII for this project was one aiming to build awareness by actively involving social enterprises and their representative organisations in the design. This was delivered through a blended mix of online and offline events, emphasising two sides of the story – those creating Impact, those receiving the benefit of the impact.

* "Awareness Raising Initiative For Social Enterprises (ARISE) Scheme 2021", DRCD, www.gov.ie/en/news/4ddaf-awareness-raising-initiatives-for-social-enterprise-arise-scheme-2021/

Particularly strong features of the approach were the **Impact Trail** and **National Social Impact Day**.

The Impact Trail was a series of cross-country physical meeting where over 40 social enterprises were featured within their local communities so show what is happening and what be made happen by people willing to step forth on social causes.

To conclude the series of online events an online event was conducted which featured the first National Social Impact Day along with integrating at a later date the initial awards ceremony for the Social Enterprise Mark.



All of this work led with the participant social enterprises to the fore, allowing people to more intimately relate to the reality of social enterprise participation.

Through each of these events we connected with 487 social entities, created 822 supportive items of media content and achieved an online reach of over 133k. The materials developed within this work have been added to our rich library of social enterprise relevant content with direct benefits for individual social enterprises by providing them with custom professional led business level marketing content.



487

Engaged Social Entities



822

Items of Media content



133k

Online Reach

Advocacy & Promotion of the Sector – Additional Activities



The DRCD [Department of Rural Community Development] is currently redrafting the social enterprise policy for Ireland and have conducted a series of public consultation events. At their request we supported the event targeting the Mid-West and South West regions. Held on December 15th at Thomond Park stadium, we actively worked to bring as broad a cross section of the social enterprise space together with representatives of over 80 social entities in attendance. Within the event a mini exhibition was held to showcase some of that work, and where possible on the day, supportive services were delivered from social entities. A formal report of the findings was submitted to the DRCD post the event.



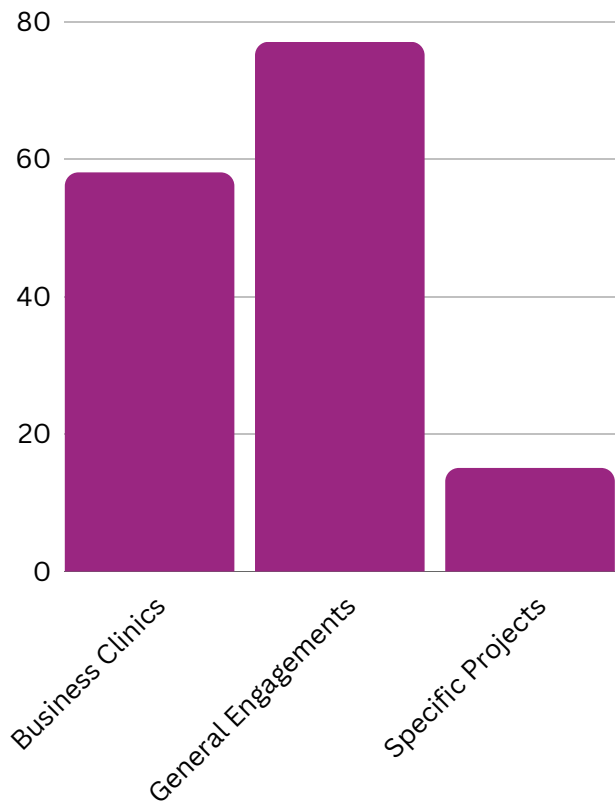
Business Supports

Custom Engagements

Direct custom business supports continued to expand from their transition on-line from Covid. Qualitative data and repeated engagements reflects well on the value place on it.

SE Individual Supports Work – Last 12 months

Direct one-to-one custom engagements



Business Clinics

Customised two hour session specific to business owner's needs

General Engagements

Range of issues: advice re funding applications, objective input, accountability follow ons, etc

Project Level Engagements*

Strategy sessions, Impact, Collaborations, Business model, etc
*10+ sessions on a specific subject

180+

Custom Consultations

500+

Consultancy Hours

100+

Introductions

SII

Short Course work

This work has also influenced the development of our short course portfolio with the short courses developed been designed to address key problem areas. In addition a number of public events were created to cover common areas that regularly feature in the problem zone. Some of the most common of these are enterprise structures, grant application & pitching. We continue to re-assess the short course offerings to reflect the needs observed

SE Supports work - Short Courses

100%

recommend
course to
others

100%

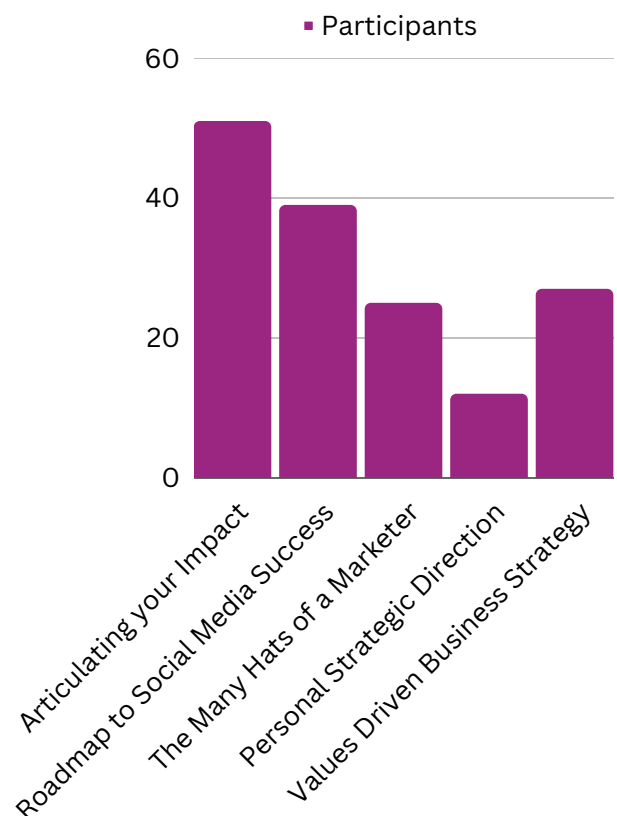
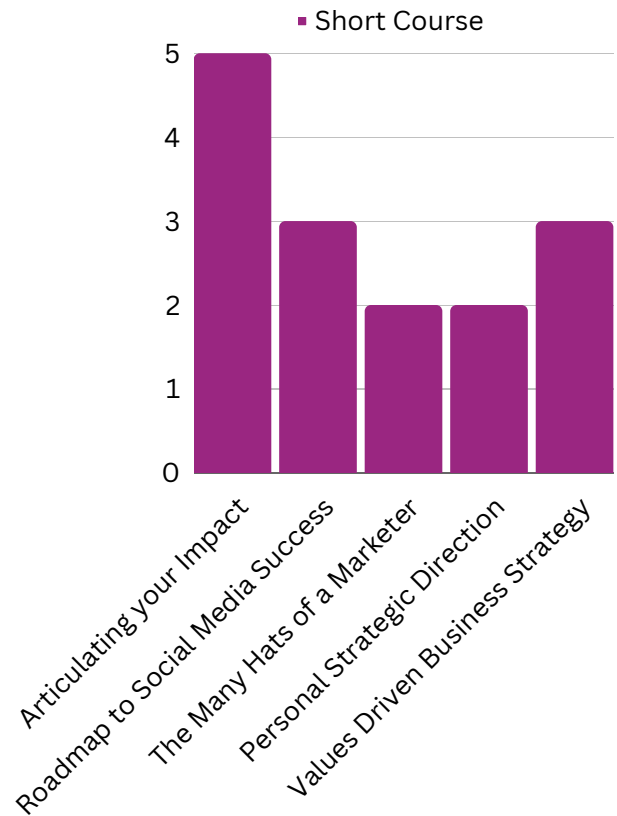
Rate courses
"Excellent /
Very Good"

100%

Area knowledge
& relevance
rated



***A number of one off sessions have also been delivered covering governance, legal structures, funding**



Some participant comments across various courses;

“The course has given me frameworks and tools that enable me to make this simpler and a clear understanding of why and where this can help develop the social enterprise and make more impact as a consequence.”

“What a positive, helpful, resourceful group! The "Articulating your Impact" course is a masterclass for refining how social entrepreneurs must demonstrate their value. The expertise, from the 'teacher' and the other participants, was so very gratifying.”

“Knowledge and information shared in clear concise manner - very enjoyable course. well presented and great information. Thank you so much.”

“Loved connecting with and learning from other social entrepreneurs, easy to use format for inputting information about our own work and learning from it”

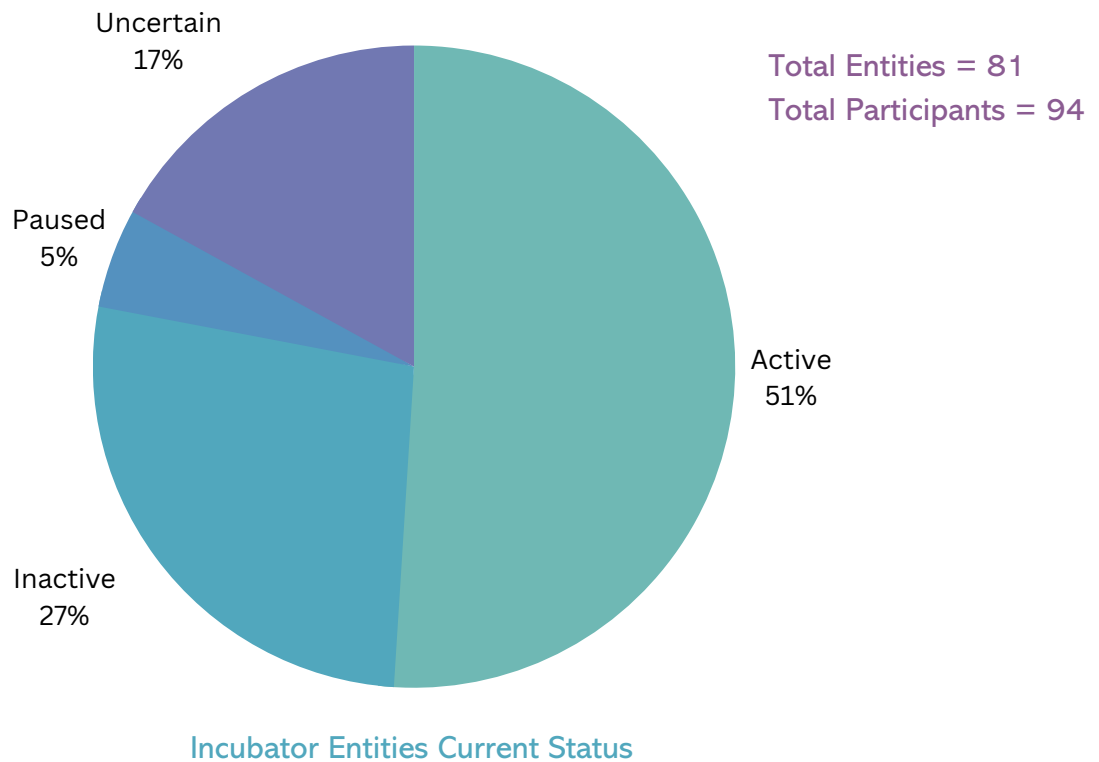
“Yes definitely would recommend this course to others, a great way to get an overall understanding of the most popular social media platforms, Thanks to all the team at SII for your wonderful support to social enterprises”

“It was a lovely way to spend a Thursday morning. It was a very friendly, informal but very informative way of learning. Thank you very much for your time. ”



Incubator Engagement

2022 saw the 8th running of our Incubator programme. To assess the incubator impact, we review it over a number of years as the ultimate impact is the sustained social impact they deliver.



Over the various iterations of our incubator, we have supported 81 entities and 94 participants. Fractionally over 50% would be active. This profile may be slightly stronger than a commercial incubator, but this may not be necessarily a positive feature. The social entrepreneur is nearly always hugely heavily personally invested in the social cause and will persist longer than a commercial entrepreneur even when the prospect of sustained success is diminishing.

In reviewing those active, the collective social impact is very significant. However, that impact is from their work and, while we can claim to have contributed to their efforts, it would be incorrect on our behalf to attribute their impact to us in a significant way.

A feature of our approach is that success is to be assessed by the entrepreneur, not us. We believe all of the participants that we have encountered, to us are a success if they have achieved, through their personal autonomy the correct end state for themselves. We remain as always in complete awe and admiration for the courage, tenacity, invention, and resilience that they show in pursuit of deep rewarding impact.

In terms of the learnings we have taken from this, that have help us to evolved not only our incubator but our entire approach as well, are:

- The starting point for social endeavours is in understanding and exploring the path from **'Purpose to Impact'**.
- Engagement with the community not designing 'for' your community is essential.
- Markets and marketing are terms social entities struggle with but are essential to master for success.
- Sustainable business models can be complicated and multifaceted which are made more difficult by a fear of applying financial measures to help develop the model.
- Resilience is critical and the personal journey of the innovator needs to be supported as much as the business journey.
- The funding infrastructure to support innovators still has many challenges to overcome.

Our incubator approach has evolved through each of its interactions. With Covid we swiftly and successfully transferred to into an online model, seeking innovative ways to maintain the human connections. We have also adapted the balance of the experience to reflect all that we learn. Our approach will continue to adapt in the future but will maintain the basic premise at its heart – to see an incubator as a help to explore what 'enterprise' may be, built from the desired 'purpose', and doing so in a way that respects the individual innovator's personal autonomy to decide what shape that journey should take.



Impact Supports

Impact Reports and Impact Assessment work



7 Impact Reports
12 Impact Assessments



A major development in our work over the last year has been the creation of an Impact methodology stream. This methodology has been used both in terms of assisting people in evolving their impact approach as well as forming the basis for an impact report if desired.

This same methodology has had elements built into the SE mark application process. The methodology focuses not just on an approach but a holistic view of how to approach Impact, - a consistent methodology but one that scales implementation aligned with an enterprise's capabilities.



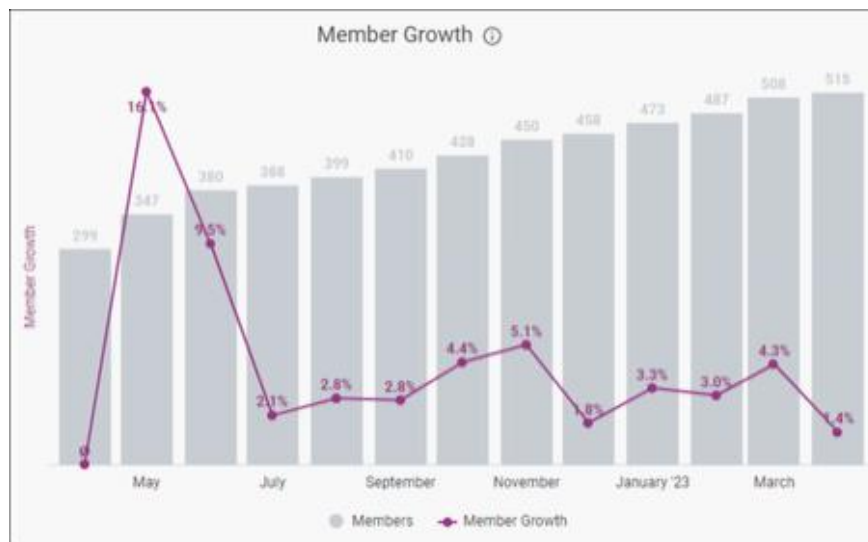
CLOSER

CLOSER at a glance - Membership

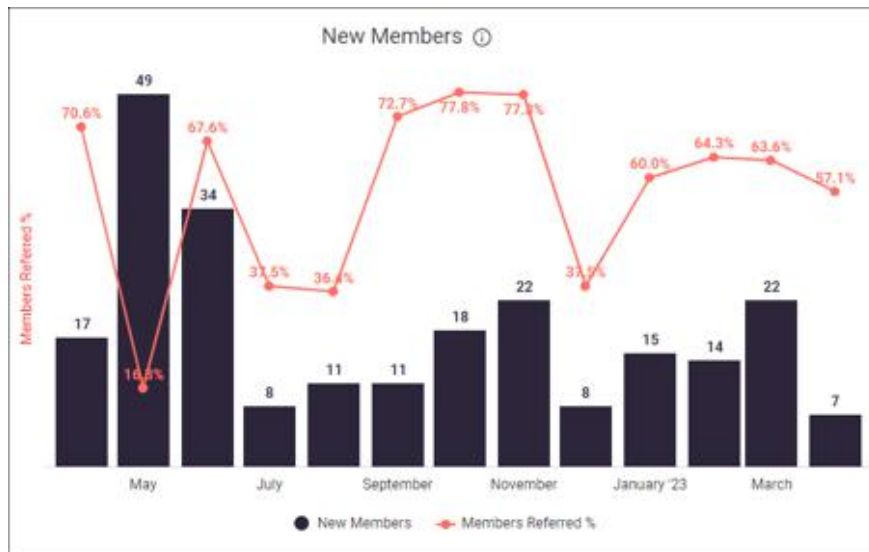
Member growth is at 516 Members which has grown by over 200 members in a 1-year time period. In the last year we have had over 300 active members and over 117 members returning to the platform.



Over the last year our members have grown by 228 members with a member growth of 77.6%.



Our growth strategy has been working well over the past year with approx. 60% of members being referred to closer by somebody else and around 40% of members finding the closer platform on their own.



CLOSER at a glance - Content

- Over the last 12 months the platform saw 672 posts which is an increase of over 400% on the previous year with member posts increasing by 7% meaning that 30% of the posts made on the platform were by members and not hosts.
- 30 events were run through the closer platform.
- 26 Livestreams through closer.
- Post click: 8,228 – increase of 700%
- Comment: 1,035- Increase of 309%
- Cheers : 3,595 – Increase 553 %



Our Impact in Quality and Depth

The individual journey

Our ethos is one that perceives the start up journey as a journey of discovery for both Enterprise and individual – intertwined but different journeys. Our impact similarly is as much towards the impact on the individual as much as the enterprise.

We continuously try to ascertain how our participants benefit from our programmes. The feedback gathered in this way has been overwhelmingly positive for which we are hugely appreciative. The testimonials shown above give some sense of this.

One of our key motivations is to stay relevant in what we do and utilise all our work to test the reality of the real experience of people within the social sector.

To give a sense of this within this report we have asked people and enterprises whom we have worked with to talk on some of the key challenges that they are faced with and where we seek to support them.



The journey from concept to Action – The Ability Board

“ Each start-up has its own unique circumstances so there is a need to find a way that works for your setting. In our case with the Ability Board, the central principle guiding it was ‘autonomy’ – the community creating this by themselves for themselves.

This meant it needed the timeline and approach matched to this. What I liked about the Incubator programme was that while dealing with the essentials it helped us to shape our unique path.

As valuable as the formal training was, almost more important was the connectivity that it created for us – with people sharing similar challenges, connections that could contribute to us with understanding of our aims. At the beginning you are full of doubts – is this a crazy idea? Are we mad? etc. Just talking with SII about our idea at the start gave us encouragement and motivation – reassurance that it was not mad and had real merit if we could achieve what we wanted.

One of the hardest challenges in setting up is that it was being done as a part-time effort while still doing full time jobs. It would be hugely helpful to get to at least one full time person as quickly as possible but this is not easily fundable. It requires great courage to give up on a full time living wage to try so early on with something that you believe with passion in but have not proved will work. Getting an advisory board with people that complement your own skills helps greatly but eventually that time to cut away other demands comes and is a very difficult step.

The idea is the easy part, the work the commitment and the time that has to go into bringing that to life is the hard piece and connecting with people who understand that experience not only helps hugely but gives you encouragement for the tough moments.

”



*Daragh, Jamie & Craig
The Ability Board*



The Challenge of Sustainability – Connections Art Centre

“ The challenge of starting up was huge and the sense of satisfaction when we got validation of our services with customers was great but also the start of much frustration. To survive and thrive Connections had to evolve beyond a solo individual into a proper ‘business’ but at the point this became possible our resource restraints hit the hardest.

The stress of trying to manage your own livelihood while at the same time trying to find and attract the skilled resources needed to step on what you have now proven works and delivers impact is tough to handle. In the social space, funding options that allow you to kick start this growth cycle are difficult to find.

Another lesson we have learnt is that while impact is our clear aim, we need to think like a ‘business’. It took longer for us to learn the importance of marketing ourselves as a business, that we have a brand and we need to go out and promote that. These were skills we did not have initially but it has been critical for us to start mastering and to engage with people who have that expertise to help us on our path.

This drive for sustainability is harder than the start-up phase. It comes with a lot of stress and indeed ‘guilt’ – knowing that with what you now know to work, if it fails to sustain, you take away hope that you have given to those who motivated you to start. ”



*Miriam Spollen,
Founder*

**Connections
Arts Centre**

www.connectionsartcentre.ie

Evolving our Mission – *Spraioi agus Spóirt*

“ When we first started our mission was about providing opportunity for young families to connect. While this gave us an initial sense of direction, really there was a large part of continuously learning and adapting – very much a form of continuous change driven by the needs that emerged. While we had a sense of what it might be in time we never would have visualised it in the shape it has developed into.

The purpose is still consistent but the mission has evolved over time to one where it is now about “Providing the ability for every individual and family to thrive in their local area”. Because of our intimate connection with our community our activities now span the spectrum of the challenges our community faces. We now have digital hubs as part of our economic enablers, are active promoters of the circular economy and become integral to rural regeneration within our community.

One of the challenges we face is what not to do as we are a key connection for other groups seeking to engage with the community. As this all developed we ourselves were evolving from a voluntary to part time to a full organisation. At the onset this was us almost working in an isolated way only realising as our journey developed the importance of building a supportive network to help us learn and develop as an organisation.

One of the important benefits of the recent ARISE campaign was to raise awareness of organisations like ourselves with a broader set of people. People now can conceive of working in this space but staffing remains a huge challenge. With our geo-location this was already a difficult starting point, but we are further hampered by our limited ability to compete. Competing for people with the private sector and also the local dimensions of the public sector is very difficult – difficult in terms of being competitive on salaries and benefits and the credibility of the SE sector as a viable longer term career path. As an example the holiday limits on a CSP scheme employ makes retention difficult.

This then is the challenge that comes with success- the service we provide becomes more valued but the ability to evolve the organisation to sustain this level of service becomes more challenging. Our good people are essential to meeting this challenge and their needs are themselves a key part of the community we serve. ”



*Helen Nolan,
CEO and Founder*



Balancing Commercial needs with Social Purpose – Kuulplay

“ We live in a time where consumers are looking to support those organisations that stand for social goals greater than themselves. They want businesses to develop a more sustainable relationship with society and offer them the opportunity for purpose and meaningful work.

The public is now asking for more from companies than a commitment to short-term profitability. Customers are increasingly wanting to spend their money on products or services that contribute to the good of their community such as kids health or environment. All things being equal businesses are rewarded for making a decent profit – decently.

Yet lack of access to capital remains the most significant challenge in making this a reality. The financialisation of start-ups that are prioritising social goals, like Kuul Play, has a higher bar to overcome. Many traditional investors are hesitant to invest in companies with a strong social purpose because they are perceived as high risk in their potential for return. It requires working harder to de-risk, prove value and scalability and leaning into the business not impact in conversations.

Yes, raising capital is a time consuming process but for social purpose companies this is even more so and it's a costly process. Accelerating the transition to more capital availability for impacting investing will be game-changing for companies contributing to an equitable world. ”



*Clare McSweeney,
CEO and Founder*



Striving to Scale – Books at One

“As we have scaled from one location to three and aspire for more, it has both aggravated pre-existing challenges as well as placed a new demand on additional skills. The major challenge in scaling the operation as we have done, is that it needs to be supported by a proper organisational structure which adds to core costs. The need to pre-empt the development of some of these resources is much more challenging than the commercial world. Funders tend to visualise their ‘return’ in terms of the direct visible Impact and gaining funding for core costs is much harder. My own role now has a much more financial focus than it ever had before.

There is also a greater risk of mission creep in the social sector as you scale. Funders might like your area of focus but have a specific view on how they would like it achieved. Gaining funding for new related programmes can actually add to the pressure around core costs. It is best to be clear with a funder on what your strategy is as against letting the funding influence how that strategy develops. But that means sometimes saying no to funding which is sensible but hard.

Internally, preserving the business expertise through a scaling effort is particularly challenging. Organisational growth is critical in scaling but also presents challenges around retention and recruitment. People need to see social enterprise as a long term career choice and that as our life’s needs change they believe there is a suitably rewarding career path there that matches. Making this a reality though, aggravated as it is by the core cost challenge, is a significant barrier to sustained participation.

This challenge is also true at the CEO level. Passion is always the driver behind what we do but to scale my role needed to alter, –greater business focus less frontline work. But the frontline work is what sustains the passion. So now I actively make time to let myself experience some of that direct passion in a limited way so that my attachment to the purpose behind Books at One holds. Support on developing our business strategy, and relating that business strategy to our impact has been crucial in this. Support also in terms of some of the new critical skills we now need is equally important. But vital in that has been business support that understands the reality of the social enterprise space.”



*Joanne Hunter,
General Manager*



Striving to be viable – Siul Eile

“ Growing Siul Eile has required a double focus – growing a viable business model that will sustain over time but also growing a voluntary community element that is core to the model. Both are critical and both are challenging. In establishing a viable business model there is a higher level of risk than in a normal commercial start-up. In a commercial start-up you have the prospect, indeed the expectation of getting a financial return on your own investment. In the social case the return is in the impact and the desire is to make it viable.

That means that your own financial investment into it is a one way street – an investment that is permanently locked in. The personal risk then is higher, and unlike a commercial start-up where proving viability makes getting investment easier, proving viability on a social purpose can put you under more personal pressure to personally fund it further to achieve viability.

At the same time you are also trying to scale in breath and depth your impact. Siul Eile is a community based entity and the focus is rightly on the impact on each individual local community. As more communities get involved, each does so buying into the purpose behind Siul Eile but invariably has a degree of customising reflective of their specific community's interests. This can make the overall Siul Eile business model a lesser focus in the development of any one group.

Siul Eile started from our own local community, focused on our immediate needs. This in turn developed the scalable Siul Eile model but in scaling striking the right balance between what works best for that model and what works best for each additional participating community makes scaling much more complex.

Finding a working balance between what makes things viable and what stays true to the purpose is not an easy job as the direct path a simple financial view might dictate may not be desirable. The price this can cause is one of time and personal exposure. Anything that would assist in this would be of great benefit.”



*Liam Fleming,
Founder*



Thank You

