

Roscommon County, Ireland



Cycleup



Keyword(s):

Disadvantaged Groups of Learners

Environmental Education

Health and Family Education

Labour Market and VET

Introduction

As part of Roscommon Women's Network's (RWN) Strategy the CycleUp group are reducing the unsold textiles that are generated by their Charity shop by upcycling these items into different products for sale. In doing so participants master new sewing, design, pattern making and cutting skills as well as learning about the impact that textile waste has on the environment with our expert trainers.

Roscommon County Council through Local Agenda 21 Partnership fund and Creative Ireland funded the pilot project March to July 2019 which was initiated by a few local women who wanted to learn how they could do something to reduce textile waste. GRETB provided funding for a tutor. The project has also developed a mentoring relationship with the Rediscovery Centre in Dublin and the support of global players like Patagonia to build this grassroots project into a regional hub for training, workshops, visitor centre and sales outlet. The Environmental Protection Agency have just recently got behind the project by providing funding for a full time project manager to bring the project to fruition in 2021.

Main challenge

Four of the participants (RWN charity shop volunteers) who attended the first textile upcycling training, came up with the

idea after a visit to the Rediscovery Centre in Dublin in 2018. Two of the four had no previous sewing experience, however were very passionate about protecting the environment, the other two had some experience with sewing but no understanding of the environment protections issue. GRETB didn't have a textile upcycling tutor on their panel of tutors therefore the women who signed up for the course helped RWN /GRETB source a person with these skills and who was already setting up upcycling workshop in their home as a cottage enterprise. The Rediscovery centre agreed to support the new tutor.

All the way from concept to delivery the participants led. They made it happen, set learning objectives and outcomes during training in 2019 and have kept motivated and enthusiastic all through Covid -19. It was their decision in March when lockdown started, to take home a sewing machine each and materials. They then practiced on various face mask designs. During April to July they created and donated over 1000 facemasks to organisations working with vulnerable people in the county and surrounding area.

Timing

See above.

Objective

The general objectives of the initiative were:

- To address the growing issue of textile waste from the RWN charity shop
- To raise awareness, grow understanding, educate and change attitudes on the impact of textile and other waste
- To use community development and of community education as an approach and a tool to start conversations and develop practical solutions locally while enabling collective action
- To support the most marginalised women and their families to contribute to the climate change conversation and to bring it back to basics

Target group

RWN work with women and their families in the county Roscommon and surrounding area, our focus is on the hardest to reach the most marginalised. We support engagement and participation through our volunteering program, our community education offerings and the other general supports we offer around the county determined by the needs the women express

The project was conceived by volunteers working in the RWN charity shop. Many of the volunteers are also service users and would experience marginalization and disadvantage. The project is now inclusive of all in the community while maintaining its community development ethos. We currently have two men engaged with the project and the group producing and learning age range is approx. 27 to 65.

Geographical range

Roscommon, Ireland and surrounding county border areas i.e Mayo, East Galway and Leitrim.

Stakeholders and partners

- Galway Roscommon Education & Training Board,
- Patagonia
- Rediscovery Center in Dublin
- Roscommon County Council Local Agenda 21 partnership funding
- CRNI (Community Resources Network Ireland)
- Local businesses including fabric shops e.g. The Curtain Centre in Roscommon town, Fordes of Ballyhaunis, Abbeylands
- Furniture (Scatterbox) Ltd
- Creative Ireland

Strategy / materials

Our strategy to launch the project comprised the following steps:

- Listening to the community
- Enlisting support and interest from local Environmental Education Officer with Roscommon County Council International clothing brand "Patagonia"
- Making a case to the Department of Environment and climate action for funding to pilot the idea
- Gaining the support and mentorship of The Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun

- Stakeholders coming on board i.e. agencies and other local community groups
- Using community education as the foundation for the projects growth and expansion

To promote our strategy, we used the RWN Website, Social media, local press and radio, parish newsletters etc.

In addition, Aontas arranged for professional videos of our training set up which included interviews with some of the participants. We secured funding through RTE Comic Relief fund to purchase photographic and recording equipment. Our project was featured frequently in local press and also in the Autumn 2021 edition of the national magazine Changing Ireland Magazine, our work is also included in CRNI (Community Resources Network Ireland) newsletters, and frequently also in the Rediscovery Centre newsletters. CycleUp also produces our own newsletter periodically.

The project's strategy is participatory, inclusive and gender sensitive. Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) is part of the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NCCWN), a national organisation that works directly with and represents the interests of women from communities in rural and urban settings throughout Ireland. As a community education provider, Roscommon Women's Network is also part of a national educational movement in Ireland that harnesses the power of education as a means of social change through a critical pedagogical approach to learning. The work of RWN's CycleUp group, in particular, challenges neoliberal consumer culture through feminist artistic expression, by refashioning used textiles from the group's charity shop into purposeful and decorative objects. Each object features a label with a call to action, which explains the importance of waste reduction and sustainability. The items created as part of the CycleUp process are therefore not only powerful representations of the feminist aesthetic, but also physical representations of the need for urgent discourse around how resources are used and reused. RWN work to include and support the participation of the most marginalized women and their families.

Learning outcomes of the project are:

The Circular Economy is an economy where we can buy products that last, that can be reused and repaired, and that eliminates waste. There are many job possibilities in the circular economy however establishing these jobs and enabling them to thrive will involve radical changes in our laws, government policies and to our culture of consumerism. The Cycle Up participants who have recently qualified as tutors to help spread the learning and build the capacity of individuals and communities are an example of new jobs created locally in the circular economy, as are the women designing, repairing, and making the CycleUp products for sale an

example of the how opportunities for flexible paid work for women are available in the circular economy.

Awareness and Education as one means of addressing climate change in our communities is critically important in building the capacity of individuals and communities to change habits and find practical responses. It is also critically important that everyone in our society is included and supported to contribute to the conversations and initiatives, and we must hear directly from all sections of our society on the impact of all climate change measures being proposed will have on their lives.

Resources

Initially we received some funds to run community education courses in textile upcycling from Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board. These were so popular that we managed to secure funding from Roscommon County Council and Patagonia to run a pilot "Textile upcycling training and social enterprise in 2018/19. On the back of the pilot success as outlined in the evaluation conducted by St Angela's College NUIG we secured funding from EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) in 2021 for a full time project manager for one year to implement a Social Environmental Enterprise. This project manager finishes up in January 2022 and we are currently in the process of seeking funding to sustain the project.

We have secured premises from Roscommon county council and funding to refurbish the premises, we have also secured commitment from the Department of Social Protection for an 8 participant community employment scheme dedicated to this project.

Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Upcycling is creation of a product from used materials. Upcycling increases material efficiency, reduces waste, energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, and creates employment opportunities. When scaled up to a meaningful level, it could contribute significantly to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To realise all the potential benefits, upcycling must be taught and be practiced in households, in schools, in projects and enterprises like CycleUP. The CycleUp project reaffirms the community development approach as a response to environmental protection in raising awareness and supporting communities to act collectively to change circumstances. This project supports all the 17 SDGs not least of all Goal 4: Quality Education, by responding to the grassroots, including and empowering the most marginalised and disadvantaged, supporting them to take collective action through the first steps of Quality Community Education which they

tailor and adapt as the needs develop. Two of the group have also completed facilitation skills courses. Pre Covid the plan was to visit Transition Year classes in local schools to "show & Tell" about their project, however due to Covid -19 Restrictions this has been postponed to spring 2021. However, the local school Transition Year students approached the CycleUP group in September requesting help with their enterprise idea using textile upcycling and that is underway at the moment. The members of the group are greatly enjoying sharing their learning with the younger generation. The CycleUp group visited women's groups and attended many sustainable fashion events in Autumn/Winter 2019 to demonstrate their practices and products and to raise awareness around Textile Waste and its effects. There are plans to continue this and to expand and extend regionally post Covid.

The women who joined to learn more about the creative process have learned so much about climate change and vice versa.

The participants report that they are converts and advocates for the why's and how's of environmental protection in their own families and in their local communities. Participants report they are more self reliant, focused and energised since starting this learning journey.

Innovation(s)

The project is an innovative response to a global crisis. It is a grassroots bottom up initiative thinking globally, acting local. Using and demonstrating community education as a catalyst for change. What started as ten women with sewing machines and a pair of good scissors, deconstructing unsold textiles from RWN charity shop in March 2019 went on to secure funding and support from global players like Patagonia, support in the form of mentoring, tutoring and finance locally from GRETB, Roscommon County Council and businesses. EPA have guaranteed funding for a full time worker in 2021 and Patagonia have agreed to continue mentoring the group with marketing and promotions. The encouragement, motivation and practical support the group have received from The Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun, Dublin and the CRNI has been such a huge boost for the women and a testimony to the belief and trust that major players in both training and the environment place in the grassroots community initiative. We are seeking out, learning from and collaborating locally, nationally and internationally.

Evaluation

An Evaluation of Textile Upcycling Training Pilot in 2019 project was undertaken by St Angela's College, NUIG.

Inclusion, flexible paid employment, accessibility, participation from concept to delivery, solidarity, for individuals and communities to become low carbon in an inclusive manner

All stakeholders are members of an active project steering committee.

Success parameters

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Impact

Impacts were created in the following areas:

- A sense of purpose and belonging in a social creative space where participants meet together to train, develop and grow personally and professionally, in addition to the optional tutoring qualification and soft skills training offered to further their own personal development.
- The participants are met where they are at, to progress at their own pace in production, sales/marketing, training or admin within the project.
- The new CycleUp sales outlet will provide space for other self-employed or community reuse enterprises in the region to sell their products and inform the public of their work
- Improved quality of life and mental and physical well-being for the participants on this project, which extends into their families and community.
- Childcare is not an issue for the women working on the project as most of their creative work is done at home at a time convenient to them.

Outcomes of the project are:

- Evaluation of Textile Upcycling Training Pilot project by St Angela's College, NUIG completed.
- 12 women completed beginners and advanced Textile Upcycling
- 7 of the above 12 participants qualified as Upcycling Textiles Tutors on completing the QQI Level 6 'Training, Delivery and Evaluation' Course (April - June 2021).

- 8 participants trained in additional advanced textile upcycling techniques through workshop delivered by the Rediscovery Fashion Programme Manager, Rediscovery Centre (May 2021)
- 22 additional participants currently attending a 10-week beginners Upcycling Textiles Training in Monksland and Roscommon Town (December 2021).
- Upcycling Textiles training Module designed and developed.
- 5 of the newly qualified CycleUp trainers shadowed the Textile Upcycling Tutor delivering the November courses in order to gain tutoring experience (November 2021).
- Advanced Upcycling Textiles Training organised for February – April 2022.
- Premises for CycleUp Social Enterprise identified in Athleague, currently under lease negotiation with Roscommon County Council.
- Social Enterprise Capital grant application submitted to Roscommon County Council for refit of premises and provision of equipment (November 2021).
- Dept. Social Protection approved an 8 participant Community Employment Scheme for CycleUp Social Enterprise based in Athleague. Recruitment planned for February 2022
- CycleUp Group creating high-quality products for sale. See Appendix 1
- Community Workshop for the PACE programme July 2021, 12 people.
- Organised the County Roscommon Reuse Event October 2021, 53 people attended.
- Textile Upcycling Workshops for Transition Year Groups in Castlerea Community School, Co. Roscommon and Coláiste Mhuire Ballygar, Co. Galway.
- Textile Upcycling Training for Women's Syrian Refugee Group November 2021, 8 women
- 1074 people informed and making changes in their own lives and communities.
- RWN CycleUp announced as the **winner of the National AONTAS STAR Award** in the category of Sustainable Development at this year's Adult Learners' Festival.
- 780 upcycled facemasks donated to nursing homes, Domestic Violence Refuges and Direct Provision centres in 2021.
- CycleUp was one of the very first members of the Rediscovery Centre Circular Economy Academy.

Impediments

Covid19: Eight members of the CycleUp group took a sewing machine and some materials home, bought some elastic and created a WhatsApp group. They shared ideas and patterns through the whatsapp & three facemasks designs were agreed. RWN posted their work on social media and supported the women to set up a CycleUP facebook page. Local businesses donated end of fabric rolls and elastic. The group made over 1200 facemasks and donated them to the agencies working with the most vulnerable in the county and beyond. They continued to make facemasks for sale to raise much needed funds. By end of September, the advanced learners had planned to reconvene their training and a new group of learners began the basic training in Roscommon Town in October (two classes of 4 learners) however all had yet again be postponed due to the second lockdown in November. However, not ones to be easily discouraged the women began to make gnomes and decorations for Christmas from home. they also enlisted a volunteer to create a click and collect basic online shop on www.rwn.ie

Replicability

It is very possible to replicate main elements of the project with a community development approach, community led and support from partnership agencies.

The project idea can also be linked to practical climate actions through awareness and understanding and in an inclusive manner, that ensures all sections of society are involved.

Conditions that should be met by any other organization to adapt/replicate such a strategy are:

- Listen to the grassroots community,
- support them to mobilise and into collective action and
- to source funding to develop the idea and sustain the project.

Concluding remarks

It is an innovative response to a global crisis. it is a grassroots bottom up inclusive initiative thinking globally, acting local. Using and demonstrating community education as a catalyst for change.

Website/Social Media profile(s) of the initiative

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