

## Social Enterprise Case Study

### Creggan Enterprises Limited

(Incorporating the Rath Mór Business & Community Enterprise Centre)



Set up in 1991 as a social economy initiative based on co-operative principals and values in Creggan Estate – a part of Derry recognised to be one of the most deprived parts of Northern Ireland – Creggan Enterprises Limited (CEL) is a shining example of community self-help.

The organisation emerged from Naiscoil Na Rinne, a self-help community organisation that advocates and promotes the Irish language focusing on children across all sections of the community. It invited Derry Unemployed Workers Group and the Northern Ireland Co-operative Development Agency (NICDA - now the Social Economy Agency for Northern Ireland) to research and put in place structures on how the community could focus on its own economic and social wellbeing. The result was the setting up of CEL and a plan for the Rath Mór Centre, which today dominates the site with its impressive domed glass roof.



Rath Mór Shopping Centre was opened in 1995 and accommodates retail and community enterprises.

Conal McFeely has been involved from the very beginning, first as a development worker with NICDA before moving to CEL in May 2003 where he is employed as development executive. “We wanted to initiate a community enterprise that the whole community could take pride and possession of,” McFeely recalls. “So we

took over a piece of land formerly owned by The Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland that had been left vacant due to the transit nature of multi-national corporations and set up a regeneration company with a voluntary board of unpaid directors. The mission was simple - to bring about the social and economic improvement of the area.”

Key to the success of the project was the balance between commercial and community aims, McFeely says, and the make up of the board - doing it out of voluntary commitment rather than the desire for remuneration, was crucial to that balance. The economic devastation inflicted on the area by multi-nationals moving away is hard to overstate. When Birmingham Sound Recorders closed down in the late 1960s, they laid off 2,000 men. Twenty years later United Technologies Automotive (UTA) and Coates Viyella abandoned the area - the latter with major

consequences for women workers, and in between times the Troubles had a chilling effect on inward investment.

It was the departure of so many big companies and the sense of powerlessness that resulted for local people, that made the local community decide to take control of its own destiny and utilise the economic model of social enterprise to regenerate the area. With the dogma of Thatcherism still largely unchallenged in 1991, CEL was embarking on a radical course: “People say that only private sector enterprise will regenerate an area, but that same private sector was abandoning us,” McFeely says. “It is important that community development is not sacrificed on the altar of commercial viability. The best way in my mind is to encourage social enterprise models that can help build a mixed and balanced economy at both the neighbourhood level and the economy as a whole.”

Start up grants from the Northern Ireland Co-operative Development Agency, the International Fund for Ireland and the Department of the Environment went into creating the Ráth Mór Centre and Business Park. This partnership with CEL has contributed to the process of a revival and renewal of the local neighbourhood devastated by the actions of multi-national corporations withdrawing from the area.



The Community Service Units were opened in 1998 and consist of six units, varying from 550 to 1200 square feet, providing business space for local and community enterprises.

The Ráth Mór Centre was officially opened in 1995 and accommodates retail and community enterprises servicing the local area including a chemist and post office. The Centre also provides office space and, together with administration and conference facilities, sets out to meet any local business needs.

CEL supports an Intermediary Labour Market programme for the long-term unemployed. When businesses at the Centre want to grow, CEL finds out what their needs are and finds someone suited to the job. The candidate must undergo a proper interview and receives proper pay and conditions in return for real work.

Creggan Early Years Network is also situated at Ráth Mór providing childcare and after school provision.

The short-term reward for Creggan Enterprises Limited was as one of five winners in the DTI Social Enterprise Units Enterprising Solutions award 2003. Its legacy is likely to be far greater. In a predominantly Catholic working class area, CEL has reached out to Protestant neighbourhoods and is viewed as beacon that transcends the sectarian divide and has demonstrated the wider benefits of social economy activity.

**Key Achievements & Community Impacts:**

- CEL now provides 100,000 square feet of retail, business and community service space;
- CEL is directly responsible for the employment of its own staff without any state assistance;
- 192 jobs have been created to date within Creggan as a direct result of the various enterprises and projects located at Ráth Mór, with an estimated £2million per annum in wages being earned, spent and circulated within the local community;
- CEL has successfully provided a wide range of services and facilities for the local community, such as a supermarket, post office, chemist, bakery, family opticians and community offices;
- Annual revenue from CEL services – £373,000;
- An outreach programme with local schools;
- Training and conference facilities used by private, public, community and voluntary sectors;
- CEL has distributed £90,000 of its surplus to assist community based initiatives within the area;
- Assisting and development of locally based enterprise developments;
- Secured funding package of £330,000 from EU (DHSS), DoE, Derry City Council and used its own resources as matching funding to set up a community partnership promoting local solutions to meet local needs;
- Networking with others to promote best practice;
- Assisting with the provision of a community-based taxi network;
- Working in partnership with North and West Housing, a self-help Housing Association, to secure a £3 million development package for the area to address accommodation shortage within the locality;
- The community, through CEL, owns and manages the Ráth Mór Centre.