

INNOVATE COMMUNITIES

2021

Annual Report

A year of positive change



**INNOVATE  
COMMUNITIES**

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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Social Innovation Hub, Civic Centre

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# Company Information

Innovate Communities is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status.

## Trustees

Chair	Ed Flanagan
Vice Chair	Clyde Carroll
Company Secretary	Anne Keating
Director	Mick Creedon
Director	Liam Barry
Director	Janene Ware
Director	Mary Callaghan
Director	Paul McAuliffe

## Company

CRA Registered Charity No.20204650  
Registered No. 197878  
Revenue Registered Charity No. CHY 11441

Solicitors Amorys Solicitors  
Bankers Bank of Ireland



# Hello from our Chairperson

I am delighted that our work in social innovation has focused on delivering outcomes to tackle social demand and societal challenges in communities through designing and delivering our methodology for Community-Driven Innovation.

2021 was again very successful, and I am delighted with the collaboration with many organisations supporting our success. In addition, we have evolved our thought leadership to bring focus and understanding of societal issues' root causes and complexities. We need to integrate a different way of thinking across stakeholders and disciples to facilitate systemic change.

I thank the Board members for their continued support and considerable insights. Innovate Communities is now well positioned to lead and pioneer this work under the careful stewardship and substantial expertise of our CEO, Fiona Descoteaux. I would encourage you to read the attached and support her thought leadership to make Ireland a better place for all our communities.

## CHAIR

*Ed Hanagan*



# Hello from our CEO

Today there is a general recognition that dealing with civic complexities will require a more collaborative but also an adaptive approach to facilitate the creation of innovative solutions to the complex social economic and environmental challenges we face. I believe to achieve this requires a methodology that is adaptive and is based on the need of place. A methodology that is facilitated by teams with diverse skills in community development, research, behavioural science, complexity theory, system change and system innovation, to name a few, if we as a country are going to start to make actual change to achieve collective impact against our wicked and entrenched community problems.

Like many, 2021 provided us with the gift of time to review what this meant in practice for communities. Previously our work in social innovation focused on the delivery of outcomes to tackle social demand and societal challenges in communities through tools such as design thinking. However, to deepen our learning and impact we were aware that we had to focus more on understanding and solving the root cause of issues, with others, if we were to reduce or mitigate challenges for good. Therefore in 2021 we began to integrate a different way of thinking, with stakeholders across disciplines to begin to learn how to facilitate systemic change.

This review period resulted in our team learning to adopt a system thinking approach to our work and in turn our methods for delivery in this space. Our revised method focuses on nurturing and amplifying the capabilities of individuals in communities (citizens, business, local government, non-profits) to develop a collective understanding of the issue and together realise a collective ambition for change, and most importantly impact, this is community-driven innovation.

The requirement for this approach in Irish society to tackle challenges has never been greater. With existing and new partners across government, business, education, and non-profits we will share and embed this knowledge and together learn and adapt to a new way of working to benefit our citizens and the future of our communities, communities that are resilient, sustainable and equitable.

## CEO

*Fiona Descoteaux*

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# We are Innovate Communities

## ARE YOU READY TO REIMAGINE YOUR FUTURE?

We are Innovate Communities, and we are on a mission to enhance social infrastructure and create impactful projects in our communities! We help you to take action to create the communities of tomorrow. We work with citizens, government, business and academia to address key social, economic and environmental issues. We do this by supporting communities to implement their ideas for change and improve the social infrastructure, enhancing economic opportunities and social wellbeing in their area. Through inclusive and creative engagement we get to the heart of real issues by pulling together the ecosystem involved. It is only by having all of the relevant people and organisations working together that we can change our systems collectively, and the way we work, to impact the issues of today and tomorrow. We are rolling up our sleeves to ignite systemic change in our communities! We are excited for the future, and look forward to working together to create local initiatives, sustainable solutions, and thriving communities that improve the way we live, work and play.

At Innovate Communities we want to see a world where people and communities harness their potential to adapt and create systems which can evolve, learn and respond more effectively to complex challenges. Through our strategic plan 2021 – 25 our work is focused on serving the uniqueness of place, reconnecting with the potential of people in place to thrive individually and collectively to localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and bring the community identity and context to the fore, guiding citizens to realise the interrelated practical social, economic and environmental outcomes for their community.

It is our strategic imperative to develop the innovation capacity within our communities, with others, to positively impact the ecosystems where the challenge lies. We know that we won't arrive at long term solutions to challenges just by making incremental changes to our current programmes and approaches. So, our work achieves this by focusing on the delivery placed-base community innovation in order to impact our most pressing community challenges – tackling the root causes of the problems and not just tacking the symptoms, together to build more resilient, sustainable and equitable communities.

# Key supporters of 2021

We want to acknowledge the relationships and partnerships built over the last year with funders and friends of Innovate Communities. Your support, knowledge and funding has allowed us to progress our work in communities, creating impact for our target groups; youth, social entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs, community organisations and third level.



# Delivering our Strategic Goals

2021 was the first year we worked towards achieving our strategic goals set for 2021 – 2025, here is what we did:-

## DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INNOVATION

### THROUGH RESEARCH

#### Research Paper and Model Compiled on Community-Driven Innovation – sent to Government Departments

Our propositions are based on over twenty years of community development work in North Dublin and contact with best practitioners in this area. This learning and experience has helped crystallise our thoughts about the nature and practice of community-driven innovation and how it can be enabled in an Irish context. In 2021 we adopted a system thinking approach to our work, developing both our learning (through the MIT, Presencing Institute) and practice (through engaging community in a second test community, The Liberties, Dublin). This work led us to develop a model that nurtures and amplifies the capabilities of individuals and communities, facilitating them to determine their own arrangements for satisfying their issues, develop mutually beneficial goals to achieve this and demonstrate the benefit of these practices to all – this is community-driven innovation.

*Community-driven innovation is change that is initiated by community members that brings meaningful benefits to the community and can serve as an exemplar or stimulus for wider social change in the longer term[i]*



\* Relevance of our work to the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030

#### Digitising Community-Driven Innovation (Enterprise Ireland, Western Development Commission, NUIG, Zano Collective)

We received financial support from Enterprise Ireland, Western Development Commission and NUIG to launch a feasibility study to envision what might be possible based on current international best practice in community-based innovation, and the potential of existing or emerging digital technologies to support it. Our initial idea was to deliver an online space that would serve as a locus for local community activity where people in communities can creatively engage with each other and with local government, relevant public bodies, public officials, business, CSOs and academics. Its purpose would be to advance that vision of creating a more open and innovative public sector and more vibrant, self-determining, sustainable, equitable and regenerative communities. Ideally such a space would support each stage of the social innovation process described above. It would be a quality virtual experience, an online agora or forum where all people could be fully informed on what matters to them, a place to build individual and collective capacity to face into change situations using novel participative methods, to connect productively with people in the community and government to find solutions[ii]. It would help people coordinate local and community led efforts to effect system change and to network with other communities who are facing the same issues – the creation of a ‘digital commons’ where solutions to problems or ‘scripts’ for dealing with them can be shared and built on[iii]. The feasibility will be completed in 2022.



[i] For studies on community driven innovation in an urban context see (Moulaert & Regional Studies Association, 2013; Stijn & Andreas, 2019) and for rural areas (Copus, 2017; Neumeier, 2017). [ii] See early attempts to create such a platform as part of the EU research programme CAPS (Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation) in Dinant, Ines, Jacqueline Floch, Thomas Vilarinho, and Manuel Oliveira. ‘Designing a Digital Social Innovation Platform: From Case Studies to Concepts’, 101–18. Lecture Notes in Computer Science. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70284-1\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70284-1_9). [iii] Calhoun, Annaliese, Peter Hovmand, David Andersen, George Richardson, Timothy Hower, and Etienne Rouwette. ‘Scriptapedia: A Digital Commons for Documenting and Sharing Group Model Building Scripts’. Computational Statistics - COMPUTATION STAT, 1 January 2010.



### Future from urban to human (Erasmus+)

This project is designing and testing, with four European partners, both a new curriculum for students (architecture, geography, planning, economic development, climate, sustainability) and professionals (local government, central government, social enterprises, non-profits, charities etc), that will lead to the creation of new knowledge, skills and pedagogy for architecture education. The objective is for each partner to develop and test a localised programme that will support students and professionals to acquire a set of competences making them capable of implementing urban regeneration processes by reducing distances between stakeholders and creating opportunities for co-design, local sustainable development and enhancement of the identity of a territory. This is an opportune time for Ireland to start to facilitate the training and development of 'urban activators' (note pilot is urban focused only), developing the skills of students and professionals working to achieve co-design in urban social, economic and environmental initiatives for the benefit of our communities, but most importantly, our citizens.



### THROUGH SPACE

#### Ballymun Test Community - Social Innovation Hub (Enterprise Ireland, Dublin City Council, IKEA)

This living lab model was set-up managed and maintained to explore practical ways that space could facilitate social innovation and collaborative services in a community, this space has become a vehicle to launch programmes through co-design with and for communities. Projects therefore have spun-out from the hub model designed. In 2021 we supported a wide variety of businesses in our Hub in Ballymun, including entrepreneurs, social enterprises, charities and local start ups.

#### The Liberties Test Community – the social innovation hub model (Enterprise Ireland, Dublin City Council (DCC))

Part of our organisational strategy was to develop social innovation hubs to drive community-driven innovation, and this was initially made possible through DCC and their interest to scale what had been delivered in Ballymun. Social innovation hubs in local communities are not just a co-working space or community enterprise centre. They are a test bed to merge disparate stakeholders to work collectively to initiate positive system change in our communities, and to address our community challenges. The design and cost stage of the project are now completed and planning permission has been obtained.



### THROUGH PROGRAMMES

#### Facing into Change (Community Foundation Ireland) - testing an engagement component of CDI

This programme has been funded by the Older Persons Fund of Community Foundation Ireland. It is set in the context of reframing the challenges and opportunities facing older people as set out in the National Strategy for Positive ageing. Once a time of declining options, the so-called retirement age is now becoming a time of possibilities, a chance to pursue personal goals that may have been limited previously by family and work commitments. It is also a chance for older people to engage with the community in a way that best serves their own sense of purpose. Participants discover that sense of purpose by exploring ideas of personal change and development and applying them to the choices they want to make at this stage of life. The programme will be launched in May 2022 in partnership with the Age Friendly University unit at DCU.

## Social Presencing Theatre (RADE and The Abbey Theatre) - testing an engagement component of CDI

We have been working with community organisations in Dublin city, Ballymun and the Liberties, using Social Presencing Theatre (SPT), a tool that can create the optimum conditions for social innovation to occur within groups or communities. In brief, the project, funded by the Community Foundation Ireland allows people to play out using physical movement and gesture how they experience the system as it is and as it might evolve. The tool was developed by the Presencing Institute at MIT over a decade ago and has been used to guide change efforts in wide range of organisational and social settings. We plan to launch in mid 2022.



## EXTENDING THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INNOVATION

This action will be realised as we progress the strategic plan in years 2022, 2023 and 2024, as it builds on our work from developing community based innovation.

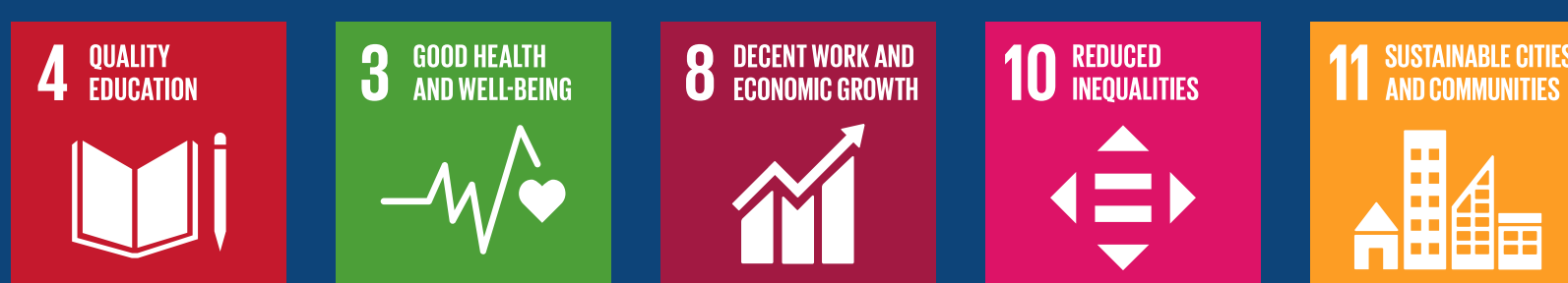
## SCALING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INNOVATION LAUNCHED BY OUR MODEL

### INSPIRE (LinkedIn, Rethink and Irish Youth Foundation)

INSPIRE Mentoring is a unique online mentoring programme that provides social and community support via powerful formal online mentoring. INSPIRE is a holistic intervention with a simple concept. To use the power of skilled mentoring to support marginalised young people reach their full potential by matching them with a professional mentor, from a similar background. Using our unique digital platform, the young person is empowered to select the best mentor for them. Mentoring is formal with weekly meetings underpinned by the identification and achievement of goals.

INSPIRE Mentoring addresses a significant system gap where our most marginalised young adults struggle to gain connections and insights into the professional world of work. It is the subtle inequalities that are related to growing up in a community and environment where they are the first generation to continue education after school. INSPIRE supports participants to navigate and plan their future, post Covid. INSPIRE mentoring supports the young person through educational transitions such as moving from education to employment.

In 2021 Innovate Communities were runners up in the Irish Times Social Innovation Awards and were shortlisted for the Volunteer Ireland Awards 2021, Large Group Category.



### Incubate for Growth (Dublin City Council)

We know that growing a social enterprise or business is tough, but everyone should have the chance to make a real go of it, especially when they are starting out. That's why each year Innovate Communities offers the chance for 10 local entrepreneurs (and social entrepreneurs) to take part in 'Incubate for Growth, a fabulous ten-month programme based in our Social Innovation Hub in Ballymun, Dublin. The programme helps small start-ups and social enterprises take their business to the next level by providing them with free desk space in our Hub for 10 months where they can develop their business and their networks. It also builds on the supports already provided to them by the Department of Social Protection, Local Partnerships and Local Enterprise Offices.

As well as great networking, participants have access to a suite of additional supports to help get their ideas off the ground. This includes business mentoring, marketing development, workshops and advice about their business plan. Using these supports, they are able to fully develop and validate their business proposition, identify potential customers, sales channels and funding options and grow their business offering. For those already trading that may mean an increase in customers, for others it may mean setting themselves up to trade.

In 2021 we welcomed a number of startup social enterprises onto the programme. We also delivered 200 business mentoring sessions to participants. See our clients stories! <https://www.thinkbusiness.ie/?s=shining+spotlight+on+social+enterprise>



### Incubator Programme for Social Entrepreneurs (Social Impact Ireland)

In partnership with Social Impact Ireland we continued the delivery of this 6 month free incubator programme for social entrepreneurs, designed specifically to create and develop sustainable businesses that aimed to make a positive social impact in our communities. The primary purpose of the programme was to guide the participants through a journey: Business, Personal and Social. It provided a safe space to stop and dissect the enterprise from idea/concept to formation and all the different aspects in between, creating a solid foundation from which to launch, and preparing the participants for development and growth.



### Youth Academy (Youth Reach, CDET, ESB, Dublin Airport Authority)

Youth Academy is a skills development programme run over 10 weeks in Design Thinking (DT) and Project Management (PM) skills for vulnerable Young People (16-25) from Youth Reach (providing opportunities for people who left school without formal qualifications). The programme leverages Young People's creative approaches to overcome social problems. Working in teams, participants apply DT and PM techniques to identify problems related to local community issues and creates solutions to address them. In 2021 we developed an online version of the program and successfully delivered it for the Prince's Trust in Northern Ireland.



## PROMOTING AND AMPLIFYING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INNOVATION

### Research Paper Compiled on Community-Driven Innovation

Social innovation is now seen as a social movement, a shared impulse by people to address the pressing issues around them in new ways, ways that can mark a path towards resolving the more general societal problems that give rise to these issues. It is valuing diversity and being culturally aware, challenging existing routines and the creating new ways of acting and cooperating in some part of society. It can happen in any domain or social field, in business, academia, public or voluntary services, nationally or internationally or at local community level. Community-driven innovation is change that is initiated by community members that brings meaningful benefits to the community and can serve as an exemplar or stimulus for wider social change in the longer term.

### Podcast Series \* featured on Apple Podcast

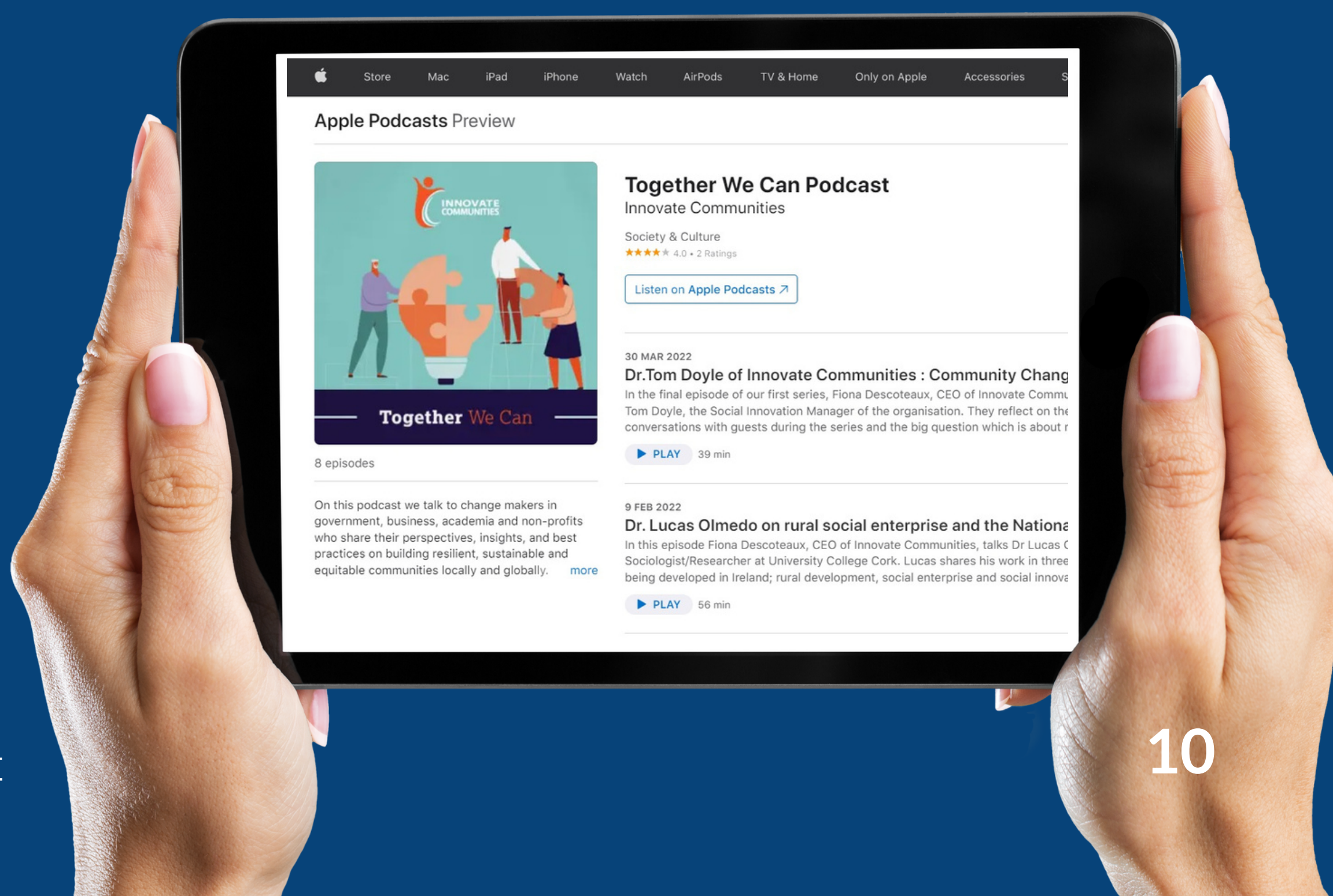
We began our series late in 2021 and on this podcast we talk to change makers in government, business, academia and non-profits who share their perspectives, insights, and best practices on building resilient, sustainable and equitable communities locally and globally. If you are looking to maximise the impact of your work in social innovation, community innovation, social enterprise, economic development, sustainable development or corporate social responsibility/innovation, this podcast is for you! Let's work together to make our communities thrive!

### Open Government Partnership (OGP) Network Ireland – member

In OGP, governments work with civil society to create action plans with concrete reforms. This model helps ensure citizens play a role in shaping and overseeing government. Since its founding in 2011, OGP has grown to 77 countries and 106 local jurisdictions that work alongside thousands of civil society organizations. Every two years, each member submits an action plan co-created with civil society that outlines concrete commitments to enhance transparency, accountability and public participation in government. Fiona Descoteaux represents Irish Civil Society as one of six representatives for a two-year cycle 2021 – 2023.

### Development of Ireland's Social Innovation Competency Centre - member

Our CEO is one of 19 Irish Experts in Social Innovation invited to collaborate in a project to establish a sustainable and responsive National Competence Centre for Social Innovation (NCCSI). Led by Rethink Ireland and Genio Trust (Ireland), the consortium also incorporates partners from Portugal, Bulgaria and Cyprus.

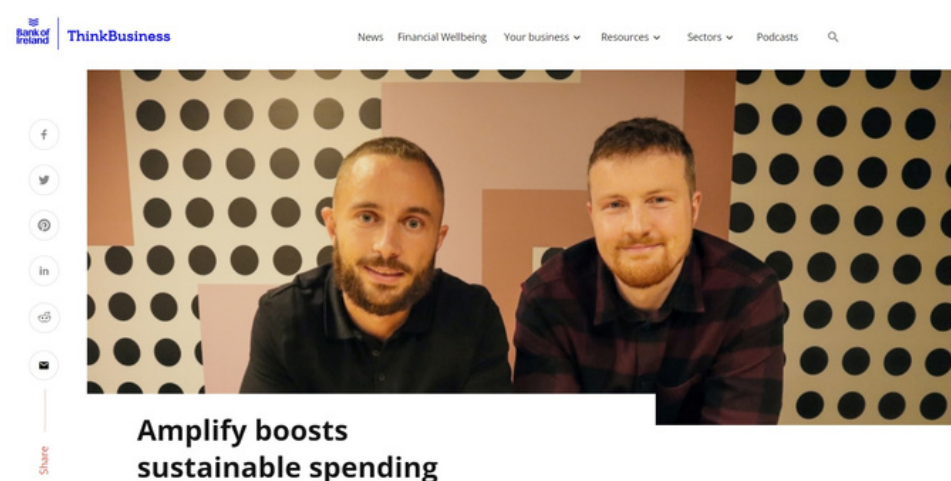


# Snapshot of our impact

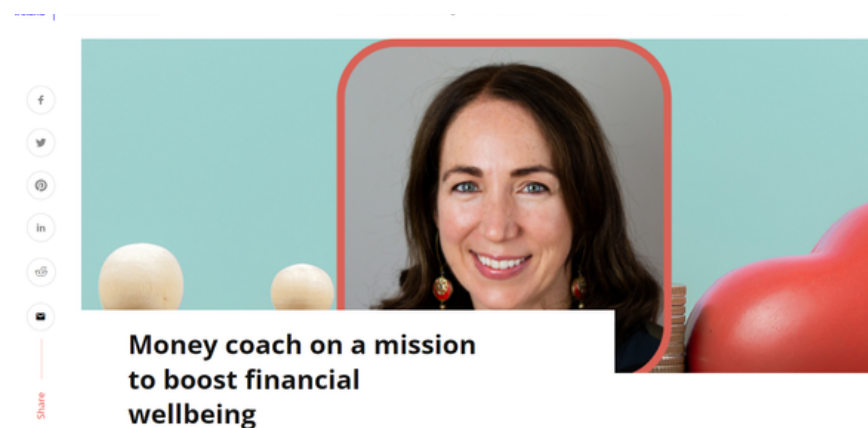


## INCUBATE FOR GROWTH

“**Sinead Ryan, Founder, Little Fitness:** “Little Fitness is a Social Enterprise providing fun, inclusive educational fitness classes to children experiencing homelessness. Innovate Communities has been a great support throughout the past year for Little Fitness as we navigate as a Social Enterprise Start Up. Innovate Communities has allowed Little Fitness the opportunity to attend the Social Innovation Hub, where there have been numerous networking opportunities. The mentoring has been invaluable to me both professionally and personally, allowing Little Fitness to stay focused and push forward with the business. The ongoing one to one support has kept Little Fitness moving forward after an extremely difficult year navigating through the pandemic.” ”



**David Beaky, Co Founder & CFM, Amplify:** “Amplify is a climate donation fintech startup on a mission to transform the climate action of every sustainable purchase. Amplify allows conscious shoppers to earn free donations for climate causes as they shop with a network of sustainable brand partners. The support of Innovate Communities came at a pivotal moment in our journey. After the pandemic derailed our initial business, we were still figuring out our next move when we discovered the Incubate for Growth programme. Amid all of the chaos, Innovate Communities supported us with free desk space, mentoring, access to really great advisors who were industry experts, and ongoing support from their wonderful team. I cannot stress enough how beneficial the programme was in the early stages of our businesses.”



**Anne Marie Macken, Founder, Money Coaching Ireland:** “The purpose of Money Coaching Ireland is to bring ease to how people USE (understand, spend and earn) money. We support your financial well-being – how secure and free you feel about money – through coaching, education and development. I was fortunate to get a place on the Incubate For Growth programme with Innovate Communities. Over 10 months, I received free one-on-one mentoring, desk space in the social innovation hub in Ballymun and access to a wide network of other businesses and relevant contacts. What I gained most from the programme is a sense of community and camaraderie. People to share the ups and downs of the start-up world – celebrating the wins and keeping you going through the tougher days.”





**Elaine McHugh, CEO Hair Together:**

"Through barber and hairdressing classes social enterprise Hair Together has created a new lease of life for vulnerable teens. Innovate Communities has helped us grow as an organisation in so many ways. The one to ones with the Social Innovation Manager at Innovate Communities have been invaluable, giving us guidance and structure throughout our journey. Having this manager to bounce ideas off and having her knowledge and experience there gives us much-needed confidence as we are navigating unfamiliar territory as a social enterprise. Not having a base of our own, the Social Innovation Hub has been a great place to come and work. Being able to use the board room for our meetings and inviting our guests into this lovely space has also helped us progress and grow."



INSPIRE MENTORING (LINKEDIN)

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**Robert Kelly, Mentee:** "It was exceptional, my mentor was Mark Reilly who is an entrepreneur. I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur and he has helped me out tremendously in my journey. I was in final year of studies when I first started the programme, he helped me through all of that. Now that I'm out of that and in the working world he has helped with network and skillsets, and I can't recommend it enough."

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**Mark O'Reilly Founder of Fitvision & INSPIRE Mentor:**

"The biggest benefit I would say is that first you get to give back to an individual who may have been in a similar circumstance to you when you were starting out. The other side is there is a lot of value in you learning a lot from the mentee, developing a really strong relationship. I would highly recommend the programme."

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**Alisha Doody, Ballymun Youthreach Teacher**

"The programme makes things accessible to the students, particularly around product development. There are four key stages studied, first about exploring their interests and they did that through using the internet and using technologies. Again, very important for our students who don't always get these opportunities. And then it was about ideas generation, doing things like word salad and benchmarking and figuring out where their ideas sit with other people's."



**Programme Participant**

"The main focus that I've been working on is how to manage projects, and also teamwork and team building exercises. We studied the Business Canvas Model, the model that teaches you the steps and key factors involved in making a product and what variables you have to look out for, like advertising, key resources and customer care."

**Programme Participant**

"When I started on the programme, I didn't think we'd come this far. I think we've started to get out of our comfort zone to do a lot of things, especially for our future."





# Finances

## **Innovate Dublin Communities Company Limited By Guarantee**

### **DIRECTORS' REPORT**

#### **for the financial year ended 31 December 2021**

The directors present their report and the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.

#### **Principal Activity and Review of the Business**

Innovate Communities (IC) is a social enterprise and a registered charity that has evolved over the last six years from a Local Development Company formed in 1995, to an organisation whose mission is to promote, support and deliver community-driven innovation in Ireland. During this time IC adopted and tested the principles of social design (the application of design methodologies to tackle complex human issues, placing the social as the priority) to develop a new pathway to deliver community-driven innovation in communities.

The first iteration of our model facilitated the design and launch of the Social Innovation Hub, a physical space for visioning, building and investing in social infrastructure for communities of the future - developing physical (new services and infrastructure), human (capabilities and skills), social (trust and collaboration) and intellectual (new knowledge and learning) capital within a community[i]. Developing our methodology through the space led the company to create impactful outcomes with and for the community, in 2021 we impacted 411 people's lives. To launch these interventions and services we worked with corporates (LinkedIn and Workday), Local Government (Dublin City Council), Government (Enterprise Ireland), Politicians (TD Paul McAuliffe and Deputy Lord Mayor Mary Callaghan), Non-profits (UK Princes' Trust and Social Impact Ireland), Universities (TCD and TU Dublin), local individuals and community organisations in the area. These services engaged and supported; the unemployed, social entrepreneurs, business, community organisations, local residents (predominantly youth), university students, universities nationally, local professionals and US multinationals. Reviewing our work, our model of using design thinking as an engagement and development tool to start-up social innovation projects in the community, for the community, was highly impactful:-

- We tackled specific local problems experienced by groups on the ground that were not addressed by the market or existing institutions.
- We created added value projects, programmes and services - delivering measurable social and economic benefit to the community.
- We scaled successful projects across sectors and geographies from micro to meso, with corporates, universities, local government and non-profits.

In 2021 we adopted a system thinking approach to our work. This work has led us to develop a model that nurtures and amplifies the capabilities of individuals and communities, facilitating them to determine their own arrangements for satisfying their issues, develop mutually beneficial goals to achieve this and demonstrate the benefit of these practices to all – this is community-driven innovation.

The Company is limited by guarantee not having a share capital.

The directors aim to present a balanced and comprehensive review of the development and performance of the business during the year and its position as at the year end. Our review is consistent with the size and non-complex nature of our business and is written in the context of the risks and uncertainties we face. The directors are satisfied that the results for the year are consistent with expected levels. As for many businesses of this size, the industry in which it operates continues to be challenging. With the risks and uncertainties faced in mind, as detailed below, the directors are aware that any plans for the future development of the business may be subject to unforeseen future events outside of our control.

#### **Financial Results**

At the end of the financial year, the company has assets of €855,722 and the net assets of the company have increased by €44,220.



# INNOVATE COMMUNITIES

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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