



The Urban Co-op
Annual Report 2018



2018 has been a game-changer year of pivotal growth and development for The Urban Co-op, bringing us to a new vision for our project. Managing this change has been at the forefront of our priority for the year and reflecting on the new directions that these changes have brought is a key focus for the coming year of 2019.

RELOCATION

The move to a larger premises has been the major event this year. The decision was led by a combination of factors. In particular, the continuing rise of membership numbers and resulting need for storage space for stock. The vision to develop a community wellness hub as part of the wider suite of offerings by The Urban Co-op also required access to extra space. The space available to us at Tait House was becoming less fit for purpose with the growing membership. The license agreement was also up for renewal in July. Two years in Southill were instrumental in developing the direction of the current Co-op.

Board consensus to move was made in April and efforts were made to find a suitable premises in Limerick. Consultations with Regeneration Limerick were held in order to fulfil the funding requirements due to the relocation.



With much voluntary support from members, staff and supporters the move was made in the second week of August and trading began in the new premises at Eastway Business Park on 15th August. A commercial lease for 5 years has been signed.

A sincere thank you must be made to Tracey Lynch and all the staff at Tait House who gave us such support as we grew our enterprise in the intervening 2 years there. In our time at Tait House our membership tripled in number and our supplier numbers rose from 30 to 70.

We held an official opening event for the new premises on 27th September which was a huge success. We invited many of our suppliers to showcase their goods and meet the members. We celebrated our 1000th member on the night.

As part of our vision to create a Community Wellness Hub, we refurbished two rooms on the premises and subdivided the space to create three more rooms. There are now three rooms available to rent, and classes including yoga, pilates and meditation are taking place in these rooms daily. We have also held a series of talks on health and wellness topics which were well attended

SOCIAL CAPITAL

The Urban Co-op is run by a board of 8 directors and at the beginning of the year recorded 714 members.

New membership in 2018: **396**

Average 350 transactions per week

Staff: 1 full-time, 4 part time staff - 2 staff supported under TUS programme. Manager supported through SIF2017 funding.

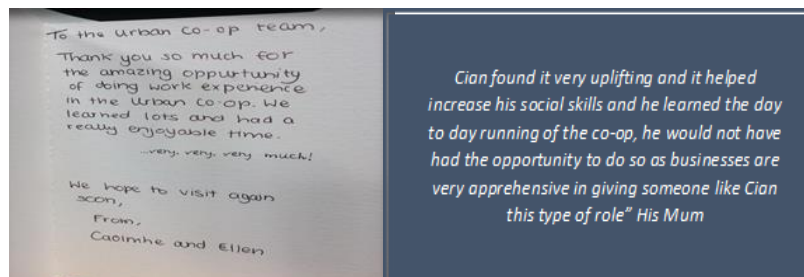
Dec 2018: **7** employed. 4 are fully supported by the business. 3 are part supported by SIF2018 fund. Our Business Development Manager has been offered another one-year contract, from October with hours extended to 27, covering an extra day. This is part funded by SIF2018 funding.

Volunteers: **50 – 100**

The support of volunteers is crucial for the business and we continuously encourage volunteerism opportunities and links with other organisations that facilitate this aspect.

Schools in Limerick and Tipperary have linked with us to access work experience opportunities. We have particularly welcomed students with extra needs.

8 students supported.



Organisations we linked with in 2018

Our new premises has created many new opportunities to facilitate volunteerism. This aspect is still in its infancy as we make links with organisations, so these figures are really reflective of the last quarter of 2018.

- Brothers of Charity: **2** volunteers supported
- Direct Provision Centre: **5** volunteers supported
- Probation Service: **3** volunteers supported
- Limerick Volunteer Centre: **5** volunteers supported.

Throughout the process of moving we engaged the help of many members who volunteered their time and resources to help make the transition run smoothly for us. As a key principle of co-operatives we have seen the steady rise of volunteerism as the business has grown. This mutually beneficial relationship is one we are particularly proud of. Efforts to gather more data on volunteers will be made in 2019

Estimated volunteers throughout year: **30 - 50**



Supporting Our Farmers & Small Suppliers

Without food security we cannot support our community. At The Urban Co-op we understand the need to support our farmers and small suppliers through our enterprise. We continue to provide not only a regular income but a social connection for our suppliers through the following activities and initiatives.

Educational tours for schools and groups: **8** visits

Supplier meet & greet for customers: **20**



Festivals & Shows Representation: **10** attended

- Limerick Spring Festival
- Tipperary Enterprise Town
- Limerick Producer Showcase
- Clonmel Show
- Limerick Garden Festival
- Valley of the Arts
- Open Day at Jim Cronin's Farm
- The Urban Co-op Official Opening Night
- Pigtown Network Event
- National Social Enterprise Development EXPO



**Meeting Daithi O Se in Tipperary.
Suppliers Sean Condon & Angela Barrett**

In house pop up tasters to encourage customers and suppliers to engage with each other are very popular.

Supplier showcase pop ups are a very popular way to educate the members and suppliers about our small food businesses and give the opportunity to learn more about where our food comes from. The relaxed atmosphere is a welcome change for producers who face much stress in the competitive market place.

Suppliers are encouraged to attend these events in order to increase profile and develop confidence in their business. Under the banner of The Urban Co-op, it is easier for suppliers to invest time in these events and reap the rewards of same.

Food Academy

As part of our vision to develop aspects of food production we took the opportunity to take part in the Super Valu Food Academy programme. Driven by some board members and with relevant voluntary support the process of bringing a product through from idea to market on a limited budget has been an interesting and informative journey for all involved. In particular, the learning has included an insight to the obstacles faced by suppliers who are developing food products for market.

EDUCATION

Formal and informal education opportunities are a major facet of the vision of The Urban Co-op. Here is a snapshot of activities and impacts.

Raw Milk Producer Guidelines

Following a lengthy process of collaboration with Raw Milk Ireland, new guidelines for the sale of raw milk in Ireland have been approved. Farmers have been trained in HACCP procedures through support from The Urban Co-op. This has had a major impact on the confidence of raw milk suppliers and customers' perception of the value of this traditional food.

Staff & Board Training

- Staff trained in HACCP
- Customer Service training
- EPOS Training & system management
- Financial Reports Analysis through Skillsnet
- Food Academy

Talks & Events

A series of events were organised throughout the year. These are bespoke to the growing needs of our members and present under various themes of Cook, Connect, Contribute & Cope. They included the following and reflect many repeatable concepts:



The poster features the Urban Co-op logo and the title 'T.U.C. TALKS'. It lists a series of talks for November, including sessions on vegetable gardening, chronic disease prevention, pregnancy preparation, and thyroid health. It also mentions that speakers will be announced and provides contact information for tickets and times.

Our popular series of talks resumes in November, covering various Nutrition, Health and Well-Being topics.

Thursday 1st November: Jim Cronin (Part 1 of 2)
"Selecting and Preparing a site for vegetable gardening in 2019"

Thursday 8th: Ivor Cummins aka "The Fat Emperor"
"An Engineering guide to avoiding chronic disease"

Thursday 15th: Jim Cronin (Part 2)
"Selecting and Preparing a site for vegetable gardening in 2019"

Thursday 22nd: "Preparing for Pregnancy" by natural fertility consultant: Brendan O'Brien

Thursday 29th: Olivia Beck
"Understanding Your Thyroid Health"

Saturday 10th November: Eva Hill
"Gut and Immune System, from Flu to Allergies and Autoimmunity"

More speakers to be announced!

Spaces will be limited so it is advised to book your space early!
Tickets available at The Urban Co-op: €10
Times: 7:00 - 9:00pm

www.theurbanco-op.ie 061-294389 info@theurbanco-op.ie

- TUC Talks
- Zero Waste Seminar
- Pop Up Cooking classes
- Visit by Polish Co-op Group
- Visits by other social enterprises

Estimated attendees: 200



FUNDING IMPACT

Our main funding support has been through the Social Intervention Fund from Regeneration Limerick and has proven to be very critical to the progress of The Urban Co-op through its development and growth.

Through the SIF2017 fund of €40,000 we have employed a business manager who, with the support of the board, has steered the direction of the project towards the wellness hub vision. This fund has also helped in the transition to the new premises by facilitating the framework for the education spaces envisaged for the project. These funds have been fully used in 2018.

We also received €1,200 from LA21 Limerick City & County Council for an environmental project. We used to develop the garden space at the new premises using old pallets and for internal fittings. We continue to apply for suitable funding streams as the project grows.

Funding support for 2018 was approx. 9% of income. (13% in 2017)

Fundraising

Fundraising efforts have become a priority for the Board with the expansion of the capacity of the project.

While still very much in the early stages, there have been a few events that are planned for the ongoing growth and vision. In line with same, the choice of fundraisers are in keeping with the activities that promote social connection and enhance the lives of the members.

Fundraising activities to date:

- Kickstarter campaign
- TUC Talks
- Weekend Wellness Workshops
- Cooking Demos
- Room rental
- Community Wellness Hub

“The Kickstarter campaign as a digital media option for fundraising was a learning experience for us. While it did not yield financial results, it was an opportunity to harness much social support for our move at a critical time of our development”.

A key benefit with our increased space and room has been the opportunity to provide classes concerned with wellness. Having invited therapists and trainers to rent rooms for these options, we have seen a considerable uptake for individuals of varying ages interested in wellness activities such as pilates, yoga, meditation etc. These are proving very popular and demand for room space is increasing. We have also hosted events regarding community wellness including restorative justice and collaborative housing themes.

Estimated number of therapists using space: **7**

Estimated numbers of clients: **50 -70**

COLLABORATION

We continue to collaborate with organisations in Limerick City and County as well as the wider community. Such collaborations are important for recognising opportunities, sharing resources and enhancing the outcomes of all stakeholders. Examples of some collaborations:

- Limerick Institute of Technology: We have teamed up with the Interior Design department to offer our space as a project for students to use as a case study design.
- Paul Partnership: Through the support of the Social Enterprise Development team we have been showcased at the National Social Enterprise Forum and EXPO and are exploring further collaborations including Men's Shed projects.
- Brothers of Charity: We are providing opportunities for purposeful work experience and supported work placements for the disability sector.
- Limerick City & County Council: We are one of the first venues to support the Breastfeeding Limerick initiative and received LA21 environmental project funding.

AGM

The AGM was held in October following the launch of the new premises in September.

There were replacements to the board and we welcome Sarah Ryan and John Liston to the team.

Both have considerable expertise in the organic sectors. We thank both John Buttery and Jenny Lyons for their input to the Board as they step down.

Election of Officers: The Board reinstated the current officers in their positions.

Chairperson: Deirdre MacMahon **Secretary:** Kathy MacAndrew Wallace **Treasurer:** Anne Maher

Board Members

Deirdre MacMahon (resigned 11/06/19)

Anne Maher

Geraldine Fitzpatrick

Sarah Ryan

Kathy MacAndrew Wallace

John Liston

Lizzy O'Connell

Paul Broderick

With much progress in 2018
we aim to develop a
strategic plan in 2019 under
the following themes:

Cook

Connect

Contribute

Cope