



An Carn Pottery Ltd Maghera, Northern Ireland



Credit: An Carn Pottery Ltd

PROJECT DETAILS...

- The Association's project team was led by Claire Doherty - she contacted Rural Community Network (RCN), the Village SOS country partner organisation for Northern Ireland.
- RCN provided Claire and the Association with help and support from Michelle Clarke (a Business/Social Enterprise Advisor with Workspace) and staff at Ulster Ceramics. They helped with the purchase/supply of pottery and test marketing.
- Claire and the Association also worked with a small local design workshop, Carn Creative, who helped with the design elements (e.g. decoration, colours). The project team selected the outline of the Carnatogher Mountain.
- Rainey Business Solutions considered the overall presentation, marketing and financial planning of the test market/sample pottery - including whether the pottery could become part of An Carn or a separate social enterprise.

Action taken with VSOS support:

To develop and test market sample pottery in the An Carn gift and craft shop, Village SOS supported the Association by providing the project team with an understanding of the process (design, materials and supply chain) and potential costs of producing the pottery. This also included support with the test marketing of sample pottery.

Now the sample pottery has been purchased and is undergoing market testing, Village SOS has supported the Association to see if the pottery activity should be part of the Association's work or become a separate social enterprise.

For many years Carnatogher suffered depopulation, the erosion of its Gaelic linguistic and cultural heritage and agricultural decline. Carnatogher Community Association was set up in 1992 to help tackle some of these issues. The Association established 'An Carn' - based at the foot of the Carnatogher Mountain - the site offers a range of facilities and activities for local communities and visitors alike (e.g. Irish Language primary school, community centre, arts centre, conference centre, self-catering accommodation, nature reserve, gift and craft shop).

The Association wanted to make pottery and sell it in their gift and craft shop rather than solely acting as an outlet for other suppliers. They wanted their pottery to be unique, celebrate the local area and contain words from the Irish language. The Association approached Village SOS for help to develop a bespoke range of pottery.

Rural Community Network, the country partner for Village SOS in Northern Ireland, linked the Association with Workspace Enterprises (a local enterprise agency based in Drapperstown) and Ulster Ceramics (a local business providing potter's materials and equipment). The Association worked with these organisations to design and test market the pottery.



Keeping in touch...

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Funding the project...

Village SOS took the Association from the 'ideas' stage to the 'production and test marketing' stage.

The Association paid for the pottery itself which is now stocked in the gift and craft shop.

The test marketing stage is being used by the Association to see if the current range and price of pottery appeals to customers and also whether the range can be expanded – perhaps as part of 'A Taste of Carntogher' brand – and where the funding to do this might come from.

Learning from others...

Other members of staff at An Carn supported the team to make sure the project remained focused and grounded. While the project team worked with local organisations who understood the technical/design, business and financial needs underpinning the pottery they wanted to produce, they did not always have the capacity or quality systems in place to produce the final product therefore additional research and contacts were made.



WHAT HAS HAPPENED...

The Association's project team has a bespoke range of pottery that is being sold in the An Carn gift and craft shop. They have also developed some marketing materials and are investigating other potential suppliers alongside carrying out customer feedback.

By understanding the technical and financial steps needed to produce and sell the pottery the Association is developing a business plan. This will further consider whether the product has the potential to stand alone as a social enterprise or whether it should remain under An Carn Ltd.

As a result of their involvement in Village

SOS, the Association is enthused by the potential of their pottery products.

What advice would the group pass on to others?

- Consider issues around the design, quality and supply of any products you are looking to develop.
- Make contact with other organisations that have done something similar – they may share what they have learned and you can see what can be achieved.
- Believe in yourself and have a go – about a community having the courage to do something for itself.

What comes next?

- Respond to customer feedback– initial responses from people suggest they are looking to purchase gift sets rather than individual pieces.
- Refine the costs, prices and suppliers for the pottery.
- Develop the presentation and packaging of the pottery further.
- Market and sell the pottery at a wider range of outlets (e.g. craft fairs).

Other useful sources of support...

 Rainey Business Solutions
www.rbsolutions.org.uk

 Rural Community Network
www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org

 Workspace
www.workspace.org.uk

 Ulster Ceramics
www.ulsterceramicspotterysupplies.co.uk

RCN NI

This case study was produced by Rural Community Network NI as the Village SOS partner in Northern Ireland.

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