

Case Study

Participant: Maria Hourigan, RWN CycleUp

Conducted by: **Trevor Murray**, Content Marketing Specialist, Marketing | PorterShed

Date: 7th November 2022

Q. CycleUp is one of those interesting examples of a social enterprise where the people, like yourself, who are enjoying it - are actually the people who kick started the enterprise in the first place. How important do you think it is that people continue to take the power into their own hands to create positive change and make things better for themselves and others?

A. I believe that it is very important for people to do all that they can to improve their own lives and situation. Only by improving one's-self can you then make things better for yourself and by extension to the people that are around you. There is nothing more satisfying than the feeling of 'I did that' of 'I was part of that'. More so when you see that what you are a part of is being recognised by so many people around the globe. It gives you a great sense of accomplishment and a huge boost to your confidence, which in turn makes you want to continue, and to share your knowledge and experiences with others in the hopes that it inspires them to go for it.

Q. What has your experience with CycleUp been like? How would you describe the time you've spent as part of the group there?

A. When I first started with CycleUp, I felt like a fish out of water as I couldn't sew to save my life. But as time went on and I learned new skills, I thought to myself if I can do this what else can I do, So by being part of CycleUp I found a passion and drive to further my knowledge and skills. I was then given the opportunity to do more training, which gave me the skills needed for me to become a tutor and to train people in sewing and upcycling.

Q. Could you tell me about some of the fun times you've had at CycleUp? Have there been a few moments where you've realised 'yes, this is where I need to be - and I'm glad I'm here...'?

A. I love when we all get together to decide on what we are going to make next and to see how we progress from the start to finish of an idea. When we are out giving classes it can be quite funny with some of the things that the people we are teaching come up with. In one of the classes two of the students wanted to show everyone how they made 'knickers' for charity, so we said fair enough and had a demonstration class, at first other students were not thrilled with the idea of making them, but by the end of the class they were in stitches laughing with what they made and loved it. Most of the students from this up-cycling and sewing training course have since set up a sewing club and help us with making large orders.

Seeing how the people that I have trained continued on with the sewing, makes me think this is where I should be and what I should be doing.

Q. Would you be able to tell me a little about your own story? If you're comfortable sharing, I'd like to hear why you jumped on board with CycleUp and how it's had a positive effect on your life? *any identifiable information can of course be kept anonymous if you like.

A. My story is, I came from a very poor and disadvantaged area in Dublin where going on to further education was not even a thought. I got work when I finished school. I got married at 23, then moved to Laois in the country, travelled back to Dublin for work daily, was involved in a bad car crash at 24, found out I was pregnant, so I gave up work to raise my children, at 28 with a 1 & 3 yr old separated from my controlling and cheating husband. Moved down to Roscommon next door to my mom as was not getting any financial support from ex husband, so had to sell home in Carlow. My boys were 3 & 5 when we moved, I was involved in another car accident where I broke 2 vertebrae and was told I would be very limited in my career choices. After recovery I decided to go back to adult education, so I did a business and art level 5 course over 2 years. From this I got an opportunity to go to college as a mature student. In 2009 at 35 I started a 4 year Forensic science degree. My mom who is the person that encouraged me and helped me with my boys while I went back to education, she had a massive heart attack and heart failure 2 days before I was due to start college, While she was in the hospital and we weren't sure if she would pull through, she made me promise that I would still start college the next day. So I did, the first week was hectic between college in Sligo, my boys in Roscommon and going to the hospital in Galway daily. But thankfully she pulled through. So I continued on with college and graduated with honors in 2013 at age 39. My mom who was involved in the Roscommon women's network then at 59 started a fine art degree in Sligo college, so she asked if I could take over the craft group she was doing in the RWN. From there I started volunteering in their charity shop. My mom was in her 4th year of college and her health deteriorated so she had to give it up. I became her full time carer, her health improved after a while and she attended a cycle-up course and was one of the core members from the beginning. Over time I would help her at home with some of the cycle-up orders.

Q. How long have you been part of CycleUp, and have you taken part in any of the courses they offer?

A. I have been a part of RWN CycleUp since early 2020, when Covid hit. I was helping make face masks for care homes and any groups that needed them. I was then invited to join CycleUp. During lock down with the other members of the group I did a QQI Level 6 Train the Trainer course online, this gave the necessary skills needed to be able to deliver the training course. To date I have given 6 different training courses in up-cycling textiles and sewing, from one day courses up to 8 week courses. This give me some extra income, and next month I should be starting a part time employment scheme working for 19 hrs a week as a sewing and upcycling assistant with the Cycle-up social enterprise, as well as continuing giving training courses.