

CycleUp Textiles in Athleague is

By Richard Canny

The CycleUp Textiles social enterprise located at the Riverside Centre in Athleague — the only social enterprise of its kind in the West of Ireland — is going from strength to strength.

CycleUp Textiles is a circular economy initiative that transforms or 'upcycles' waste textiles into quality giftware while at the same time promoting sustainability and offering relevant skills training.

Everything from pre-loved jeans to fabric samples from curtain shops are transformed into visually attractive high-end products.

When the *Herald* visited the Riverside Centre recently the quality of stylish products, all made from 100% upcycled materials, was immediately evident.

On display were beautifully handcrafted leather bags, tote and beach bags, and a range of hats, cushions, blankets, and upholstered stools.

The seeds of this flourishing initiative were sown seven years ago in 2018 when the volunteers at the Roscommon Women's Network (RWN) charity shop in Castlerea were motivated to do something about the amount of unsold textiles.

Incredibly, discarded clothing made from non-biodegradable fabrics can sit in landfills for up to 200 years while a pair of jeans made by a company produces as much greenhouse gases as driving a car more than



CycleUp Textiles manager Charlene Hurley, Progression and Skills Innovation co-ordinator Martina Hourigan, and administrator Aisling Owens. Pictures: Gerard O'Loughlin

80 miles.

The environmental impact of minimising that waste is evidenced by the 240kg of used textiles that went into products and workshops at the Riverside Centre in 2023.

Since those early beginnings seven years ago, the original volunteer-led enterprise has now evolved into a very strong team structure.

Funding has allowed staff resources to grow into a very structured approach.

The CycleUp Textiles project is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Develop-

ment and Pobal through the Community Services Programme.

It is also co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-2027.

Charlene Hurley, CycleUp Textiles social enterprise manager, who came on board last month, is leading the team of 13 in the Riverside Centre.

She is keen to emphasise that high quality is a hallmark of the work being created in a thriving production studio.

"That's one of the key

things, everything here is unique, a once-off, handmade and bespoke.

"I want people to understand that these products made in Athleague are top notch quality," she said.

Charlene outlines that everything created in the workshop goes through quality control and is made by a team of highly-skilled people.

As the social enterprise continues to scale up, one of the key objectives now for CycleUp Textiles is to highlight all the beautiful creations to a wider audience.

Areas actively being



A pre-loved pair of jeans is turned into a stylish bag at CycleUp Textiles — the only social enterprise of its kind in the West of Ireland — based at the Riverside Centre in Athleague.

developed include further diversifying more into business commissions, such as creating bespoke products for events and conferences.

A clear selling point here is getting companies to look at their branding from a sustainability point of view.

The marketing of the CycleUp products will also involve direct selling into companies. When the *Herald* spoke to Charlene, she and administrator Aisling Owens were planning to go out on to the road to engage with more companies with a view to nurturing

business relationships.

From a more personal customer perspective, Charlene tells a powerful story. A leather coat belonging to someone who passed away was transformed into handbags and wallets for family members.

These keepsake items for the family became unique mementos to a person who had been a big part of their lives.

The journey to broaden the customer base will also include developing website and social media strategies.

"Where I would love to see the business going by

the end of this year is that more and more local people know about us and maybe develop a pop-up shop for people looking for a birthday present or Christmas gift," she said.

As a special thank you to readers, CycleUp Textiles is offering an exclusive discount code through the Roscommon Herald when purchasing at www.cycleup.ie.

Enter **IWDRH15** at the checkout for 15% off. Every purchase supports sustainable Irish craftsmanship while helping to empower women in the community.



Product team lead at CycleUp Textiles, Alena Gurn is a former dressmaker from Belarus.

CycleUp production studio alive with creativity

By Richard Canny

The production studio at CycleUp Textiles at the Riverside Centre in Athleague is a hive of creativity.

During the *Herald's* visit, a highly skilled process was underway to transform unwanted textiles into beautiful giftware. A busy team of 13 at the centre includes a product team lead and four part-time product creators.

Product team lead Alena Gurn, a former dressmaker from Belarus, has been working at the centre since the end of September 2023. She explains that consultation and a creative process sit side-by-side to ensure that quality is at the centre of everything produced.

When the *Herald* spoke to her, Alena was examining fabric for its possible

uses.

"I'm looking at the fabric and thinking what could it be suitable for. All the ideas are borne from the fabrics. We can make bags or blankets. We made meditation cushions that are stuffed with material cut-offs which can't be used anymore. So, we are minimising waste as much as possible," she said. "Everybody here has skills that can shine so we work on the strengths of the people. Everyone is working on their own projects and products," said Elena.

Two of the product creators are from Ukraine.

Olena Piankova is a qualified pattern creator. Olena explained that when she was working in a factory in her home country, she was creating thousands of patterns but didn't have the opportunity before now to do any creative work. When the



Abo Haieh Admad, one of the product creators, is a skilled tailor from Syria.

Herald met her, Olena was transforming pre-loved jeans into a slouch bag for teenagers.

Her colleague Victoria Manaienko had previous textile experience in Ukraine. Everything had to be done by hand in her home country and she is now bringing those skills directly into the studio.

Another team member,

Abo Haieh Admad is a skilled tailor from Syria. He had owned a woman's clothing factory in Damascus and joined his family here after they fled the conflict in their country. One of his specialities is creating visually stunning leather bags. The fourth product creator is Maria Hourigan whose mother was a founder member of the

CycleUp initiative. "When I started, I couldn't sew to save my life," she laughed. Maria has a science background and is also one of the tutors at the centre.

Emer Giblin from Glenamaddy, a graduate in textiles from the National College of Art & Design, is one of the sewing and upcycling assistants at the centre.

ready to go to next level

Ballinagare native appointed FAI's new chief operating officer



Another example of CycleUp's high-quality work is this old stool which got a whole new lease of life when upholstered with curtain fabric samples.



Emer Giblin and Olena Piankova busy at work at the CycleUp production studio in Athleague.

"I couldn't believe it when I found out the centre was here. It's allowing me to use my degree and apply my knowledge", said Emer who is also keen on upskilling and will be participating in a Level 4 course in design and sewing. As the CycleUp Textiles Progression and



Ballinagare native Christina Kenny is the FAI's new chief operating officer.

By Richard Canny

Ballinagare woman Christina Kenny has been appointed the new chief operating officer of the Football Association of Ireland (FAI).

Ms Kenny grew up in Ballinagare and attended Castlerea Community school. Her family is based around the Castlerea and Roscommon Town area.

The FAI said it was delighted to announce her appointment in a role which it described as a crucial one for the organisation.

Speaking about her appointment, Ms Kenny said: "I am honoured to take on the role of chief operating officer at the FAI. I look forward to working alongside the dedicated team at the FAI to cultivate a culture of collaboration, transparency, and excellence."

"Together, we will work towards our strategic goals and create an environment where football can thrive at all levels across Ireland."

She will report directly to the chief executive officer and serve as a key member of the FAI Senior Leadership Team (SLT), where she will be instrumental in shaping and executing the FAI's growth strategy across all levels of football in Ireland.

Ms Kenny has over 25 years of extensive experience in leadership, operational excellence, and strategic development. She has worked in prominent Irish companies including INTR Group, Voxpro and Taoglas with a

background that spans numerous sectors, including sports, education, technology, and renewable energy.

Through her previous role as an Independent Committee Member at the FAI for a number of years, the FAI said she had a deep understanding of the organisation and the commitment to the growth of football in Ireland.

She is also a FIFA licensed agent so has a wider understanding of the landscape.

In her new position, she will oversee the day-to-day operations of the FAI, focusing on enhancing operational frameworks and fostering innovation.

Her proven track record in managing complex transformations and leading large teams will be invaluable as the FAI navigates a transformative period aimed at establishing a strong future for the sport in Ireland.

FAI CEO David Courell said: "Christina's extensive experience and commitment to good governance make her an exceptional choice for this critical role."

"We are confident that her strategic vision and operational expertise will be a significant contribution to Irish football."

In collaboration with FAI Board members and key stakeholders, she will lead strategic planning initiatives that align with the FAI's objectives, identifying and implementing growth strategies that drive performance across the organisation.