

Lean on Me initiative is spreading from Limerick to nationwide

When concerned professionals in Limerick realised their treasured local businesses faced destruction in the wake of the Covid-19 lockdown they decided to do something about it.

[Lean on Me](#), an initiative that was sparked by the realisation among a loyal cohort of professionals that local businesses faced an untimely demise and were being overtaken by savvier online players, is beginning to become a national movement.

A group of local volunteers consisting of a lawyer, a newspaper publisher, business people and an economist devised a clever idea to enable consumers to buy vouchers now that could be used in the future. But in the meantime the revenue from the vouchers would help local firms like coffee shops and retailers get immediate cash to pay for bills that keep arriving in the post even though their income has disappeared.

So far more than €80,000 has been raised to help local businesses cover their bills and the movement has spilled over from Limerick into neighbouring Clare and up to Galway with two more counties expected to join the platform in the coming weeks.

The volunteers who sparked the movement include John Moran, chair of #Liveable Limerick and CEO of RHH International, Limerick local independent business supporter Joe Brooks, Credit Grid Finance director Patrick Fitzgerald, managing director of the *Limerick Post* Will Ryan, partner at Sellors Solicitors Miriam O'Connor, ELIVE Web Hosting MD Seanie Ryan, economist Séan Golden and head of Sales at Grid Finance Lorraine Blake.

A lightning response to Covid-19

ThinkBusiness caught up with Miriam O'Connor to discuss the origins of the initiative. Everything, she explained, happened at lightning speed.

“John Moran and Joe Brooks were bouncing ideas off each other to find a way to keep the businesses we love open and felt they were onto something and John brought the rest of the core

group together to take this from being an idea into a reality.

“I got a call from John out of the blue and said he was setting up a call with the core group. After the call we all had jobs to do. I’m a solicitor in Limerick city-centre so I worked on the terms and conditions and within a day and a half we had the website and logo. Basically, 10 days from the initial call we were up and running with Leanonme.eu.”

O’Connor said that emphasis was on supporting businesses that through no fault of their own were impacted by the crisis and even while shut due to restrictions they still had bills mounting up.

“We wanted to provide an online platform for small, independent businesses that didn’t have an online presence. The local barber for example might have a Facebook page but won’t have a website or a facility to sell a voucher. Likewise there are a lot of small boutique businesses and coffee shops who are impacted and unlike tech firms or professional services firms cannot work remotely.

“When Covid-19 struck many small businesses were forced to close their doors completely. They had no more cash flow. And every day this lockdown endures revenues are lost to them.

“So the idea was that we could allow loyal customers to buy vouchers that they could redeem after the lockdown. In the meantime, this would be used to enable cash flow to go back into the business while it is closed and pay off those mounting bills.”

O’Connor said the team were blown away by how strongly the local community backed the initiative but were even more surprised when other counties wanted to emulate what they had done in Limerick.

Within weeks Clare came on board and now Galway is live and two more counties are about to get up and running with the initiative.

Protect the businesses you love

“The amazing thing about Lean on Me is that it has spread through word-of-mouth. We’re getting lots of calls from people who want to help businesses in their areas that have been impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak. We’re going to take this as far as we can.

“The main drivers for this are people who just love their community. All of us love Limerick and we want to see a city and a county that is thriving. It was the same for Roisin Garvey in Clare who is passionate about helping independent businesses there survive and thrive.

“The lynchpin of a national rollout of this are the passionate local volunteers who love their local businesses and want them to keep going and reopen.”

A core aspect of the success of Lean on Me has been the various professionals with various backgrounds from web to marketing who want to help out. “Joe Brooks put it very nicely when he said ‘we’re not even knocking on doors, you just go to the door and it opens and people are asking how they can help.’

“And I think that’s going to be the theme with every county that launches with us,” O’Connor concluded.

Pictured at top: Patrick Fitzgerald, John Moran, Miriam O’Connor, Joe Brooks, Will Ryan and Seanie Ryan. Image: Limerick Post

Written by [John Kennedy](mailto:john.kennedy3@boi.com) (john.kennedy3@boi.com)

Published: 3 June, 2020