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Life of a CEO in a community development organisation during the Covid 19 pandemic

The pandemic impacted on every aspect of life both personal and professional in rural and urban areas and created many challenges. In many instances it proved to be uncharted territory for both citizens and the State. The first consideration for me, as a CEO of an organisation dealing with human resource development in the Irish language or Gaelic speaking regions of Ireland, with a staff of 140, was to decide which staff would become essential workers in our main and regional offices.

Ten staff members were chosen to act as front-line staff in our Galway and Donegal offices. These staff were responsible for delivering food, groceries and medication to elderly and vulnerable people in the community. Our restaurant remained open with staff in the kitchen and a transport crew who delivered cooked meals to the elderly people in the local area. We worked with health care workers and providers so that we would be a link between them and their clients. We maintained a core staff in our administrative office to co-ordinate all aspects of these essential services.

We also remained in communication with the staff who were working from home or remotely. This ensured that we were able to provide and develop our childcare, education, training and Irish language services to young people by using Zoom.

We produced short videos / films based on folklore, history, mythology and stories which were available on our website and could be viewed by parents and children in their homes to provide learning opportunities and continue with their education. We extended this model to our Childcare sector and although it was not ideal it provided a means of keeping in contact with the children. Funding was provided by the government which allowed us to develop an online presence. We were also able to develop new innovative programs for young people which helped them to develop skills such as resilience in those challenging times.

The pandemic created serious challenges to our organisation, but it also increased our resilience and overall strength. We are proud that we were able to provide important services to the elderly in our community. This effort improved teamwork and communication within our organisation. We

developed strong ties and working relationships with government departments and agencies because of our willingness to take on new tasks and responsibilities.

There is a strong sense of co-operation and community in rural areas along the West of Ireland in which our organisation works. This sense of community is further enhanced by the Gaelic language which is spoken in this region. The word for resilience in Gaelic is *‘teach aniar’*, which literally means *‘coming from the west’*. We *“came from the West”* and became a stronger organisation during this crisis as a result of the support we gave and received from the community.

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