

Featured family business: Homecare Independent Living



Homecare Independent Living is a first generation family business, based in Co. Armagh.

Speaking to Mairead Mackle, CEO and founder, we hear about how the company innovates, helps the community, and Mairead's ambitions for empowering women.

Before you founded Homecare Independent Living, where were you and what were you doing?

I initially chose podiatry as a career because I liked the idea of clinical autonomy, I wanted that element of independence. Having completed my studies in Belfast, I started up a podiatry practice in Armagh many moons ago! Soon after my first son, Colum was born, I realised as a mother I

needed flexibility and I felt trapped within that working environment, it was far too restrictive for me so I knew had to find a way to change things, a new business or some new idea that allowed me to employ just one person, someone to be in the practice every day from 9am – 5pm so that I could be there for my children and also explore my other interests. I then founded Homecare Independent Living in 1995 and our first office desk was the kitchen table. We grew the company organically and as we faced challenges we developed solutions and added divisions. We now employ 1200 people across Ireland.

So it was about freedom?

Yes, my first step into business was about freedom, both financial and practical, especially freedom as a new mother and it's still really important now as a mother of 7. I realise how difficult it is for women with a full-time job to juggle sports days, doctor's appointments, even with a supportive spouse/partner, you want to be at those important events yourself. I wouldn't like to be in that position where I couldn't get to these things, so I don't like to put anybody else in that position. My husband Gerald brought me a book when he was in the USA over 20 years ago called *The Emyth* by Michael Gerber and its shaped my view of business.

Gerber says in that book: “if a business isn’t giving you more life, its taking your life away and if it doesn’t give you more freedom it isn’t a business at all, its only a job!”

And its always been through that lens that I look on my business.



Do you think that the family aspect has shaped the business?

HCIL is a family business with family values – it’s what we pride ourselves on. We don’t ever want to be a big corporate entity because our values are so important to us. I do have some family members in the business. My brother in law heads up our Homecare Housing division and my sister in law manages recruitment. My older sons are involved in the Fleetwise and Fabracco businesses and my older daughters are students but are also part of the Evolve leadership team.

I believe that to be successful we need an inner circle of trusted people. Whether it’s a conscious or

unconscious decision, my own experience is that you attract people who share your personal values, those are the people that will not only go on the journey with you but who understand and buy into your vision, and feel passionate about delivering results.

We of course want to continue to grow our business, but we also made a decision that we want to stay true to our family values. Our core business areas are care and housing. Our clients and service users are often our most vulnerable and/or at risk of homelessness. For our people, this is not simply a job or a career, it’s a vocation – to care. They chose to make a difference to someone’s life and that is very powerful.

So, tell me about iCare

The very heart of our business is the communities in which we operate. In 2010, a small group of likeminded employees got together with the idea of making a difference in their local communities through acts of kindness.

In December 2010, iCare embarked on its first major fundraiser using the grounds of the listed estate in Milford to create a magical Santa experience, Santa's gate lodge. This was entirely volunteer run with a team of HCIL employees working alongside over 300 volunteers from the local schools and community.

In 2012, iCare launched its iCare Wishes initiatives – where any member of the public could nominate someone they felt could benefit from an act of kindness. We now have another major annual event, launched in 2016 our iCare Purple Run which is a 3km family run, 5k and 10k chipped race. This year all proceeds raised went to the Southern Area Hospice.



Since 2016, all HCIL staff donate one hour of their salary towards the iCare Wish initiative and so far raised over £15,000. So far, iCare has raised over £300,000 and granted over 300 iCare Wishes in communities across Ireland. This Christmas we are using our funds to buy Christmas presents for 300 homeless children across the country.

We recognise that a simple act of kindness can have a profound impact on someone's life. Our mantra is "you'll find us wherever kindness can make a difference"

Are there any exciting new businesses or projects you're working on at the minute?

Yes, we have loads of new exciting projects in the pipeline! We're just launching iCare Digital, which is a whole new way of thinking about social care. Research has shown that we will need over 22% of school leavers to come into health and social care if we are to meet the demands of our aging population, which is a global problem. We have to find a better way of providing the much-needed services while also using our resources more effectively. We provide over 6000 calls every day and find that one of the biggest problems among our elderly is the devastating effect of loneliness. So by introducing a digital platform, we hope to one day virtually connect a community of people who are confined to their homes and all the benefits that comes with it.

The other thing we've just launched this year is a new innovative product from Fabracco. As part of this new exciting organisation we transform simple shipping containers into modern and quality homes and offices, which has endless applications. Homecare Housing provide 2,200 beds for homeless services every night, so we decided that we should come up with some new and innovative way to address the major homeless problem in Ireland. We have the potential now to give people the freedom of their own home environment while addressing the growing housing crisis. And then of course there is Evolve

With Evolve, what's the aim that you would like to achieve for the people involved? What's the guiding value there?

My passions are equality, diversity & using the power of business for doing good. So this year we launched Evolve Women and it's all about 'empowering women to be women of power' and 'becoming the best version of you'.

I believe that women are the architects of our society but so many women lack the basic confidence to take their talents to the next level, so Evolve Women, through their four pillars of Wellbeing, Leadership, Inspiration, and Purpose will encourage women to take the next step into greatness.



I know the company has a history of different awards and being recognised. But if you were to nominate somebody for an award - hypothetically - if you were to say, that person deserves recognition for something, who would that be?

I would nominate Caroline Rafferty, our Managing Director - she's a fantastic role model for women! I work closely with Caroline on a daily basis and she embodies the values and beliefs of our organisation. As a working mother of three she has been able to balance the demands of her role with her family life. She has worked for over ten years in our company as CFO and recently taken on the responsibility of Managing Director. Everyone within the team was delighted to see her move into this position and supported her in her new role. Caroline has stepped in to this new role with determination and understanding of our vision and goals, and has the ability to transform the organisation and evolve our operations onto the next level. She is a great leader and an invaluable member of our team!



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