

UNITED KINGDOM

Rural revitalisation

Location

LAG Rural Perth and Kinross.
Blairgowrie.

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local
development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 536 988
EAFRD 356 664
Private 180 324

Project duration

2016 – 2019

Project promoter

Growbiz SME.

Contact

jackie@growbiz.co.uk

Website

<https://growbiz.co.uk/>

The GrowBiz approach to enterprise support is based on building long-term relationships with businesses and encouraging them to connect, collaborate, share and network with other enterprises in their local community and further afield.

Summary

Typically, start-up enterprises require more support in rural areas due to the unique challenges they face. This project aims to provide a comprehensive support service for new and existing enterprises in rural Perthshire in Scotland, leading to increased employment, improved skills and a stronger local economy.

GrowBiz and the Enterprising Rural Perthshire project, provide community-based enterprise support in rural Perth & Kinross, through a combination of one-to-one support, peer learning & support sessions, a mentoring programme and networking events. It has worked with more than 500 individuals who were starting or growing businesses and social enterprises in a rural area in the period from October 2016 to November 2018. The project promoter is the SME Growbiz.



Results

Over 400 rural businesses and 500 individuals have taken advantage of the support provided by GrowBiz.

2 500 attendees across 200+ learning and networking events.

45 trained mentors with a particular interest in small businesses.

Three new women's enterprise networks were set up and now meet every month.

Created more than 100 new businesses and over 200 jobs in the Eastern and Highland areas of Perthshire.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The GrowBiz approach to enterprise support is unique in Scotland and is based on a 'relational' model, rather than a 'transactional' approach, building long-term relationships with the businesses and encouraging them to connect, collaborate and share with other enterprises in their local community, as well as networking further afield.
- ❑ GrowBiz has already supported over 400 micro businesses and start-ups in the rural Perth & Kinross area, supporting a uniquely diverse local economy and providing job opportunities not usually available to those living outside a more urban area. The real added value of this project is the network and legacy that it leaves behind for the businesses that they support, they equip small business owners with the tools and networking skills to do well on their own rather than fostering dependency.

Context

Perth and Kinross is one of the 32 council areas of Scotland and has a population of around 95 000 people. Demographically its population is ageing, its elderly population is above average, and unemployment is higher than the average national rates. Access to services, measured in terms of time needed to drive to shopping facilities is about 40% greater than the Scottish average.

The Local Development Strategy (LDS) for Rural Perth & Kinross highlights 'promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy' as one of its two key strategic objectives. As key topics for priority projects were identified as capacity building and support to SMEs and micro-enterprises. The LDS also highlights the priorities identified as a result of an engagement process and consultation carried out in 2014, which included:

- Improvements needed for small business start-up, including support, training and networking;
- Support for young people, particularly in respect to youth unemployment;
- 'Simple to access' start-up grants.

93% of consultees agreed that nurturing business start-ups should be prioritised. Many rural enterprises are disadvantaged simply because of their location, and can't access existing services such as the [Business Gateway](#) because of lack of transport, and the expense and time involved travelling. There is a real need from start-up and micro rural businesses for extra support as they face unique challenges and barriers, including poor connectivity and transport links. It is therefore important to foster development in these areas, as growth comes from within the community.

Objectives

The objectives of this project included:

- Raise awareness of and generate interest in enterprises in rural Perthshire;
- Provide flexible and tailored enterprise support to anyone seeking to become self-employed, start/grow a micro-business or social enterprises in the target areas;
- Create self-sustaining and supportive networks of micro-businesses and social enterprises in rural Perthshire;
- Identify enterprise skills gaps and coordinate or deliver appropriate learning and training in rural areas, with a particular focus on digital upskilling;

- Deliver a mentoring training and support programme, creating a network of trained enterprise mentors across rural Perthshire, complementing the national Business Mentoring Scotland initiative;
- Support rural secondary schools with enterprise activities and engage with local businesses.

Activities

'GrowBiz - Enterprising Rural Perthshire' is a collaborative project with partner organisations: 'Elevator', 'Perth & Kinross Association of Voluntary Service' and 'Perthshire Chamber of Commerce'. The partners shared delivery of the various aspects of the project, including one to one advice, peer support, learning sessions, training workshops, networking and the mentoring programme. An indicative timeline of activities is presented below:

October to December 2016: awareness events, initial business one to one meetings and mentor recruitment.

January to March 2017: first thirty business start-ups & 20 learning events; organised a mentor training course.

April to September 2017: organised more than 100 events in the first year of the project; support provided for 180 businesses, trained 16 new mentors.

October to March 2018: Launched a pilot micro-grant fund using windfarm funds; focused on tourism, care, niche manufacturing and creative sectors.

April 2018 to present: support has been provided to more than 400 rural businesses; 2500 attendees at 200+ learning and networking events; trained 45 mentors; accreditation acquired for mentoring programme; three women's enterprise networks now meeting monthly; set up a project for creative care (enterprising approach to delivery of social care & wellbeing).

GrowBiz also facilitates a number of sectoral peer support groups including for creative activity tourism and entrepreneurs with health issues. In addition, it manages three well-supported women's enterprise initiatives and administers a windfarm enterprise fund. It has supported the development of a rural Care & Wellbeing cooperative with 30 member businesses, and now, through its Creative Care Project, provides an innovative enterprising response to the provision of care, support and wellbeing in rural areas.

Main Results

Direct Benefits:

- Over 400 rural businesses and 500 individuals have taken advantage of the support provided by GrowBiz
- 2500 attendees across 200+ learning and networking events
- 45 trained mentors with a particular interest in small businesses
- Established an accredited mentoring programme
- Three new women's enterprise networks set up which meet monthly
- Created more than 100 new businesses and over 200 jobs in the Eastern and Highland areas of Perthshire
- Of the businesses who have received support from GrowBiz, one of the most successful is Agrivision Scotland Ltd., who export European-sourced farm machinery and equipment to a worldwide customer base (<http://www.agrivision.co.uk/>)

Networking value:

At the heart of this project's aims and objectives was the idea of creating a network of small rural businesses which can support each other autonomously. One of the ways in which they have achieved this is through the 'GrowBiz XChange' which takes place every two months with members from a wide range of backgrounds, including farmers, entrepreneurs, therapists and bank managers.

This is also the first time four diverse enterprise organisations have collaborated to deliver support across rural Perthshire, with a particular focus on micro-businesses and social enterprise. Although each partner brings its unique expertise, knowledge and reach to the project, the combined power of the collaboration will add significant value to its outputs and outcomes. It will also aim to improve exchange of information, communications and cross-sectoral working.

Transferability:

As Scotland's first community-based organisation supporting rural enterprise development, GrowBiz's endeavours have been well documented since their launch in 2007. This approach has been evidenced elsewhere in Europe and thus is proven to be easily adapted to other rural areas facing the same barriers to development.

Synergies with other EU Policies:

Besides contributing to local rural development policy, this project also ties in with the 'Entrepreneurship and Small business' strategy under Business and Industry policy. By directly tackling socioeconomic deprivation in the area, it also contributes to strategies related to 'Employment and social affairs'.



"Rural Perth and Kinross LEADER are thrilled to have been able to support the Enterprising Rural Perthshire project. The support and mentoring they offer is invaluable to start-up, micro and small businesses. It's fantastic to see the hard work put in by the mentoring team being recognised, this project perfectly demonstrates the ethos of the LEADER Programme"

Iain Matheson, Vice-chair of the Rural Perth and Kinross LEADER

Additional sources of information

www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/business/business-news/761358/perthshire-mentoring-scheme-receives-national-recognition/

www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/local/perth-kinross/628275/dragons-den-grilling-for-highland-perthshire-youngsters/

*This project has been categorised under 'Rural Revitalisation' by the nominating National Rural Network