



Local Enterprise Office  
Making It Happen

# STARTUP STORIES: SHORLA PHARMA

PHARMA FRIENDS: SEE HOW LEO TIPPERARY HELPED TWO WOMEN  
GET THEIR HEALTHCARE BUSINESS OFF THE GROUND

**Making It Happen:** Michael Begley of Local Enterprise Office Tipperary with Orlaith Ryan and Sharon Cunningham of Shorla Pharma.

## ORLAITH RYAN AND SHARON CUNNINGHAM WERE BOTH WORKING FOR THE SAME PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY WHEN THEY HAD AN IDEA FOR ONE OF THEIR OWN.

Their idea was to develop innovative oncology pharmaceutical drugs with a particular interest in women's and children's cancers.

To progress that idea, they got in touch with Local Enterprise Office Tipperary.

Each of the women has a strong background in the pharmaceutical sector, having risen to the top of their respective areas in the fields of finance and regulatory affairs.

"We worked together at EirGen Pharma and were very much part of the entrepreneurial

journey of that company. When it was acquired we started thinking of doing something ourselves, particularly as we have such a complementary skill set," says Orlaith Ryan.

Starting the business together helped. "It's been great working with Sharon, there has never been a bad word between us and it's easier not to do it on your own. You can support each other through the bad days, and celebrate the good days together," she says.

The pair spent a lot of time working on a business plan out of office hours, before leaving their jobs. They were looking not to invent new drugs but to work with existing ones which they could innovate in order to solve a problem not being addressed in the market.

One example is a treatment for children with cancer. There is a very effective drug already on the market, but it is only available in a very large capsule form.

"It is very hard for children to take and so parents are opening it and mixing it with things like juice, but the drug is dangerous to the carer and mixing it makes it unstable," says Ryan.

Shorla has set about developing an oral solution, just one of a range of products it has in its pipeline. Each is designed to similarly address a gap in the market. A current drug formulation for breast and ovarian cancer has to be diluted by a pharmacist and administered immediately. Working with a team of clinicians and key opinion leaders, Shorla is developing a more stable ready-to-inject

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*Orlaith Ryan, Shorla Pharma*

version. LEO Tipperary has been supporting Cunningham and Ryan throughout their startup journey.

“We went to talk to them very early on, their office is just up the road,” says Ryan. Shorla received a Business Priming Grant that is available to startups to cover the cost of salaries and equipment.

It also received a Trading Online Voucher to help build their website, and two TAME (Technical Assistance for Micro Enterprises) grants, which enabled them to travel to an oncology conference and an investment summit, both in the US.

“These accelerated the growth of our networks enormously,” she says.

It isn't just funding. “LEO Tipperary and the local business development officer have been fantastic at introducing us to people. At one stage we needed a contact in a large US children's hospital - and they had one! The LEO's outreach is amazing. LEOs want to help you and want to see you succeed, so go to them as early as possible,” she advises.

Michael Begley at Local Enterprise Office Tipperary agrees.

“The Local Enterprise Office is the first stop shop for anybody looking to start or develop a business in Ireland,” he says.

“It has a range of supports available from providing general advice, training and mentoring as well as our suite of financial supports. It is not uncommon for a new entrepreneur to be in contact with us for several months before they start on their journey and we feel this relationship at the early stage is important.”

An early stage startup may apply for a Feasibility Study Grant of up to €15,000, to help establish the market for their product or service, or to assist with overcoming technical challenges or developing a prototype.

“When a promoter is ready to launch their product or service they can apply for the Business Priming Grant which is effectively a startup grant designed to assist micro-enterprises in their first 18 months of

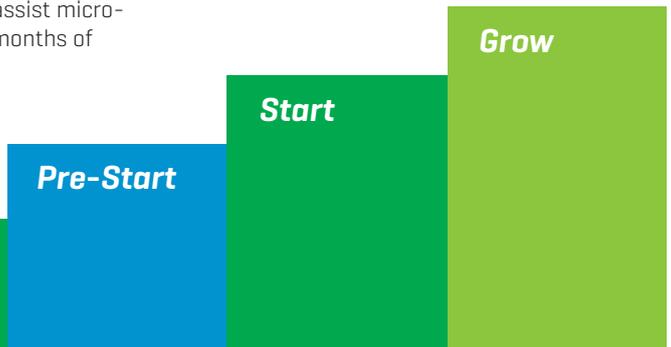
trading. The grant can be used to offset investment in the business such as equipment and machinery, salary costs for new employees or marketing activities,” says Begley.

Shorla received a major boost in its second year when Sharon won Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur, a national entrepreneurship programme run by the LEOs and supported by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. As well as invaluable media coverage, this netted the pair €40,000 in investment funding.

Shorla now hopes to become a client of Enterprise Ireland, which will help it scale up and internationalise.

Says Cunningham: “We're much more confident doing so now, and that's because of the LEO.”

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