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ANNA O’GRADY

Dogwood Designs



Anna O’Grady, a teacher from Gurteen in Co Sligo, originally left Ireland in 2002 to go backpacking in Australia with a group of other teachers.

She returned from that trip with an Australian husband and, after spending some time in London, the couple went back to Melbourne and spent 13 years there.

At first, Anna continued with teaching in Melbourne, but she later did a postgraduate degree in business before moving into training and development work. Meanwhile, her husband, Danny Ogge, was making bespoke furniture for friends in Melbourne, and Anna became involved in the business.

In 2020, the couple returned to Ireland with their family for personal reasons. “The kids got to the age where they were starting school, and I wanted them to experience life in Ireland and get to know family over here. There was no particular plan in place for when we got here,” she says.

A plan quickly emerged. Anna and Danny decided to make a go of the furniture design business, and they registered Dogwood Designs in March 2021. Dogwood Designs

creates plywood kitchens and bathroom vanities as well as custom-made bespoke designs. “So many people in Ireland, who are building, or renovating, are looking for more than what’s on offer in the bigger chain stores,” Anna says.

Based in Westport, where they also live, Anna, who is responsible for marketing and business development, launched the business through social media and a company website.

The move back to Ireland has worked for the family. “Westport is beautiful. You are surrounded by mountains and the ocean. It wasn’t the easiest place to set up a business, but it was about a lifestyle for the family, as well as a business. The lifestyle has been brilliant, and we’ve made the business work,” she says.

She says not having a network is the biggest issue with coming home from abroad. “You have to start from scratch all over again,” she says. “But the Enterprise Office in Castlebar helped us initially with how to form a business and everyone has been so helpful and welcoming.”

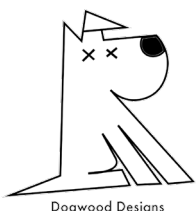
The biggest business struggle for Dogwood Designs has been securing a larger premises,

but Anna is philosophical about it. “We set up in a tourist town, so it was always going to prove more difficult,” she says.

One of the highlights for the company so far has been receiving recognition as a finalist in the Best Emerging Business category in the Mayo Business Awards. “That was pretty special. It was validation that we were doing the right thing,” Anna says.

Initially, Anna was daunted by the Back for Business programme. “I felt like a bit of a fraud because I was a teacher who started a furniture design business. I thought it would be very corporate, but it wasn’t,” she says. “There were people from all sorts of backgrounds who were starting all sorts of businesses, and an awful lot of them were doing something completely removed from their previous career. Back for Business was invaluable in helping me to find my feet in the business world.”

Anna’s plans for the business are to expand into a larger workshop and hire staff to help Danny with making the furniture so he can be freed up to design. She’s also working towards shortening the lead time on delivery of orders.



POSITION
Co-founder

WHAT WE DO
Dogwood Designs creates plywood kitchens and bathroom vanities as well as custom-made bespoke designs.

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