The Eden Alternative

New York/Ireland

Stephen Cassidy

Project Stage: Growth

Website: http://www.edenalternative.ie

Aging  
Health care  
Wellness

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

The Eden Alternative empowers staff in residential care to eliminate helplessness, loneliness and boredom and create homes where life is worth living.

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Institutions that are designed to care for the elderly and improve their health can actually make them sicker. The focus has shifted away from the individual needs of residents, and towards the government funding agencies and their requirements. Some of the greatest burden of suffering comes from loneliness, helplessness and boredom, and these are addressed either inadequately or not at all by a system that relies on medications and guidelines to direct care. Ireland has one of the highest rates of over-65s living in long-term care in Europe, yet funding pressures have led to huge numbers of beds in nursing homes being closed (around 1,200 since 2011). At the same time, increasing regulation of the care sector – intended to improve standards for those living in facilities – has worsened outcomes. The fear of stepping outside these narrow guidelines has created boundaries between residents and staff. While regulation to protect against abuse and neglect is absolutely essential, there is a danger that the human element of life in nursing homes can be lost. Activities are carried out without any emphasis on value or meaning, and the lack of mental stimulation or empowerment leads to dependency and physical decline.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

The Eden Alternative empowers staff in existing facilities to use tools and resources already available to them to create small “households” within large facilities. The training introduces a complete, principle-centred philosophy designed to move facilities away from being institutions whose purpose is to look after the sick and infirm into habitats built for human beings to live in. The Eden Alternative is built around ten core principles, and focuses on giving staff permission to use their own skills and creativity to shift the emphasis of care onto individual residents. It involves a low-cost, 3 day training unlike any other, and ongoing support, to support staff and residents on the culture change journey within their facility. With a rapidly ageing population putting further strain on already-stretched healthcare budgets, health authorities and service providers, along with elders and their families need to be sure that facilities are providing quality care effectively, while taking into account the needs of the individuals. Over the next thirty years, the total number of people in Ireland aged 65 years and older is projected to more than double and the number of those aged 85 years to quadruple, (CSO 2009). Life expectancy is increasing at the rate of 2.5 years per decade (which translates into 5 hours a day) and there will shortly be more older adults over the age of 60 than there are children under the age of 5.

Impact: How does it Work
Eden Alternative training focuses on providing residents with the opportunity to give as well as receive care (tackling helplessness), form loving relationships (tackling loneliness, and distinguishing between caring FOR someone and caring ABOUT them), and introducing variety and spontaneity into facilities (tackling boredom). This will be different in each facility, and there is an emphasis on harnessing the creativity of staff in making this appropriate for their own workplace. Children, plants and animals are a key tenet of the Eden philosophy - for what they provide for elders and what the elders can provide to them. Medication is looked at as the servant of care, rather than its master, and alternatives to using medication as a first resort are encouraged. Residents are involved in decision-making processes as much as possible, and hierarchical structures are discouraged.

--- Sustainability

**Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?**

The Teaghlach Project aims to change the culture of care in nursing homes by empowering residents in a way similar to the Eden Alternative. It is currently being researched by the Netwell Centre at Dundalk Institute of Technology. “Places to Flourish” is a resource which was developed out of the Teaghlach Project, again utilising many of the same principles as the Eden Alternative. However there is no structured implementation plan or process for engaging with care providers. The Eden Alternative is different in that it actively engages with staff and residents to empower them to make this change happen. The Eden Alternative views itself as a complementary tool to allow nursing homes to achieve the elements of person-centred care which the sector is moving towards. It is not meant to replace other principles or models, but to enhance them. However, it is unique in the practical aspects of support and training for implementation.

--- About You

**First Name**
Stephen

**Last Name**
Cassidy

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--- Implementer(s) and cooperation partners

**Name**
Eden Alternative Ireland

**Type**
Social enterprise (partly economically self-sustained through market products and services, primary mission is to solve a social problem)

**Country where main implementer is located**

**How long has the main implementer been operating?**
Less than a year

**Please provide a short description of the main implementer.**

The information you provide here will be used to fill in any parts of your profile that have been left blank, such as interests, organization information, and website. No contact information will be made public. Please uncheck here if you do not want this to happen.

--- Cooperation partner

**Name**
Eden Alternative UK

**Type**
Social enterprise (partly economically self-sustained through market products and services, primary mission is to solve a social problem)

**Website**
www.eden-alternative.co.uk

**How does this cooperation partner support the initiative? What competencies and resources does this partner bring to the initiative?**

Eden Alternative UK is providing support in establishing the Irish branch of the Eden Alternative. They include two registered Eden Alternative trainers who will deliver training and mentoring until I am certified as an Eden trainer (expected by end 2012/early 2013).
Social enterprise

www.edenalt.org

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Problem and solution

Which of these fields of Active and Healthy Ageing are addressed by your initiative?

Personalized health management, Assisted daily living, Age friendly buildings, environments, and communities.

If none of the above, answer here:

The founder of the Eden Alternative, Dr Bill Thomas, developed the principles based on his own experience as a nursing home geriatrician and in consultation with staff and residents. Since then, Eden Alternative training has been evolving and adapting to fit with current best practices and with the cultures and systems of the countries to which it has spread. There is a great focus on collaborating with staff and residents of each new facility to ensure it fits within each particular home.

Has your solution been tested in trials, experimentations, or pilot projects? If yes, please describe the process and outcome.

There are almost twenty years’ worth of data, both anecdotal and academic, peer-reviewed research, on the impact of the Eden Alternative. Some common findings include:

- Residents live longer
- Residents take fewer medications
- Residents have fewer falls
- Infection rates drop
- Staff turnover goes down
- Staff absenteeism goes down
- Occupancy rates improve
- Costs are reduced.

The Eden Alternative has been implemented in one Irish nursing home, who recently received a Public Service Excellence Award in recognition of the success of their work with the Eden Alternative. Eden Alternative Ireland was established in January 2013 to expand the network of Eden Alternative homes.

How long has your solution been in operation?

for less than a year

Please select the relationship between your solution and related solutions currently established in our society. Is your solution...

complementary (your solution is complementing existing solutions and compensating their weaknesses while not intending to substitute them)

What barriers might hinder the success of your initiative? How do you plan to overcome them?

Any system-changing initiative will be subject to a certain institutional resistance to change, but this can be overcome by engaging key influencers and early adopters, and pointing to the internationally-proven results.

Even though the cost of Eden Alternative training is low, with budgets stretched thin across the sector, the financial aspect may be a barrier. I have raised a pot of restricted funding solely to subsidise training and offer free places.

Regularly paid employees
Volunteers
1

Trainees
0

External advisers and experts
10

Others (please specify)

What are the specific professional backgrounds and competencies your team brings to the initiative?

I have an academic medical background and several years of experience working in the non-profit sector, particularly on health initiatives. I have recruited a team of sector leaders with combined decades of experience working in ageing and in health. I also have the support of the Eden Alternative UK and global offices, with many years experience in delivering training and scaling the network. I am also supported by Ashoka Ireland, and their networks and experience in scaling social enterprises.

Please describe your management or coordination structure in the initiative.

I am currently the only paid employee, and I report to Ashoka Ireland as well as the advisors I have recruited to act as overseers. I also report to the Eden Alternative UK and global offices.

Please provide the total yearly budget in Euro that your initiative spends on implementing the solution.

30,000

National public funding
0%

European Union public funding
0%

Economic return from own products/services
0%

Foundations and philanthropy capital
40%

Single donations from private individuals
0%

Donations from private companies
50%

Crowdfunding platforms
10%

Participation fees
0%

Other (please specify)
0%

Target group, scale and impact

Which target group(s) do you want to reach with your solution?

The target group for training is staff at all levels within nursing homes. The beneficiaries are all elders (nominally aged 65+) living in long-term residential care in Ireland.

Please estimate the number of persons within your target group (users, clients, etc.) that you currently reach directly with your solution.

130

In which local/regional/national area(s) is the solution currently implemented?

Currently one nursing home in Roscommon town, Ireland

What is the impact on your target group (users, clients) you want to generate?

For staff: more empowerment and fulfilment in their jobs, and the ability to think creatively about new approaches to care that best benefit residents.
For residents: the elimination of helplessness, loneliness and boredom; increased well-being; better clinical outcomes.
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<tr>
<th>What is the wider impact on society you want to generate?</th>
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<tr>
<td>I want the Eden Alternative to be available to every person in Ireland who is thinking of making the move into residential care. I also want to open up a wider conversation about ageing, and challenge our perceptions of it; to reframe the discourse into including the benefits that our elders can continue to provide.</td>
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<tr>
<th>What are the impacts on your target group you already achieved?</th>
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<tr>
<td>The staff and residents in the nursing home in Roscommon town are already seeing the impact that the Eden Alternative has had worldwide. Staff are much more fulfilled and focusing on individual residents, and residents have a greater sense of purpose and well-being. They are also seeing improved clinical outcomes.</td>
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<th>How has the impact of your initiative been assessed?</th>
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<td>Feedback-based self-assessment (you assessed the impacts based on feedback from the target group without using specific methods).</td>
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**Public information and strategy**

**What information on your initiative is publicly available?**

Mission and strategy, Organisational structure, Information on team members, Working method and 'theory of change'.

**Please indicate webpage or contact for obtaining the respective information.**

www.edenalt.org

**What are your milestones for further developing, implementing, and establishing your initiative in the next three years? Please describe 1-3 milestones.**

In 3 years:
1. 70 Irish nursing homes will have begun implementing the Eden Alternative.
2. Qualitative and quantitative research will be underway to track the impact.
3. The Eden Alternative will be seen as best practice at a policy level.

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**Source URL:** https://www.changemakers.com/innovationinageing/enTRIES/eden-alternative