



Heydi Foster Breslin
CEO

“Overall, our partnership has been transformational: Caplor Horizons has worked with me in finding innovative, creative ways to re-energise the organisation.

Caplor Horizons work with really complex ideas and they manage to make it look easy. There are times when people don't appreciate that we are working on the strategy because they are having fun and enjoying it. People say, "it didn't feel like work".”

“An Cosán is Ireland's largest community education organisation. Our mission is to empower through education – we do that by providing people of all ages with pathways to learning, leadership and enterprise. An Cosán offers a variety of programmes in early years education and care, parenting, community, further and higher education.

I joined An Cosán as CEO in November 2019. The ethos of this great organisation – equality, inclusion and determination to leave no-one behind – so closely matches my own commitment as a leader in the not-for-profit sector over twenty years and my former work as a commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).

The services that we provide are second to none. The work that we do with families and children that are extremely vulnerable are essential services. We provide a safe place, where voices are heard, and everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

However, in taking over as CEO I identified a need to focus internally on resources, systems, policies etc. As a CEO I have always sought to bring about improvements in strategy, organisational culture and effectiveness. As a result, I felt that it was important to partner with Caplor Horizons to reframe our strategy, build our organisational capacity and strengthen our teamworking.

My relationship with Caplor Horizons pre-dates my position at An Cosán. I began working with Caplor in 2014 in my last role as CEO of Mísean Cara. I was very impressed by the way they facilitated our strategy development and review process, which included a global consultation process involving over 1,500 people – the most participatory and inclusive approach that Mísean Cara had ever undertaken. Since then, Caplor and their team of highly experienced Advisors continued to support our staff and Board development. They helped us overcome challenges and support strategy processes. As a result, when I started at An Cosán I was keen to utilise their services with my new team/family. The partnership with them continues, including important activities recently in 2023.

It commenced in January 2020: Caplor Horizons facilitated a team development day in Tallaght, Dublin. 127 staff attended this day, and it was a significant occasion as it was the first time that all the staff members had come together in this way. The day focused on strengthening leadership and teamworking as well as paying attention to strategy and organisational culture. Bringing together a range of different teams with different experiences and skillsets is not easy, but Caplor Horizons was able to do it in a way that people felt included and



Heydi Foster Breslin
CEO

respected. This day was an exciting turning point that established our team as a 'wolf pack' and created a sense of unity among team members.

Since the success of the first session, we have carried out multiple online and in-person sessions over the years.

These have extended and embedded the learning from the first face-to-face session as well as covering other topics such as the 4Ps of sustainability.

Overall, great progress has been made: in particular, in all areas of the organisational culture; the team is feeling more connected, individuals are being supportive and compassionate towards one another, and we have been courageous in our approach during such a turbulent time.

In all these sessions, including large team gatherings in 2022 and 2023, Caplor's facilitation has been participatory and fun! It has been great to see the team opening up, being enthusiastic and sharing their thoughts, feelings and points of view with the wider team.

Caplor Horizons work with really complex ideas and they manage to make it look easy. There are times when people don't appreciate that we are working on the strategy because they are having fun and enjoying it. People say, "it didn't feel like work".

Furthermore, Rosie Bishop, from Caplor Horizons, has consistently produced succinct and compelling strategy documents and other reports that are visually attractive and so easy to digest; her ability to bring everything together in this way has been really helpful and has added a new dimension to this process.

Over the years Dr Ian Williams, another member of the Caplor Horizons team, has become my 'frentor' – a friend and a mentor. He has been my 'sounding board' especially when times have been tough, and I need to reflect on the best way forward. I have never felt patronised by him. He shares his own dilemmas and asks for my advice. He treats me as an equal which is important to me as a woman of colour.

Overall, our partnership has been transformational. Caplor Horizons has worked with me in finding innovative, creative ways to re-energise the organisation.

They have helped to strengthen the way we work together as a team and an organisation so that we can continue to provide our essential services to individuals, families and children across Ireland.

We are continuing our partnership with Caplor Horizons and have plans to run further team sessions in 2024."