



Keeping the lights on for Pieta

How RTÉ & Spark Foundry helped Electric Ireland and Pieta keep a life-saving service open during the pandemic



Executive Summary

Darkness Into Light is Pieta's annual flagship fundraiser supported by **Electric Ireland** working to bring hope to customers, staff and communities across Ireland that have been affected by suicide and self-harm. The event has grown each year, and it was expected that on May 9th 2020 over 250,000 people across every continent would walk together. However due to Covid-19 the walks couldn't take place as planned.

Darkness Into Light is the main annual source of funding for Pieta, before COVID-19 the public need for Pieta's services was on the increase, and the impact of the Pandemic posed the stark prospect that Pieta would not be able to continue to provide its services.

This is the story of how **RTÉ** and **Spark Foundry** collaborated to deliver a groundbreaking partnership for Electric Ireland to support the Darkness Into Light 'Sunrise' appeal. Creating a weekend of innovative and highly emotive content across RTÉ TV which helped drive €4M in fundraising, helping to keep Pieta's lights on and continue to deliver its services at a time when people needed it most.



The Challenge

Electric Ireland has supported Darkness into Light since 2013, working with Pieta to bring hope to customers, staff and communities across Ireland that have been affected by suicide. The event has grown from 20 venues to over 200. Due to Covid-19 the walks couldn't take place as planned in May 2020. The resultant loss of fundraising was potentially catastrophic for Pieta, and for the people relying on its services.

Before COVID-19, the public need for Pieta's services was on the increase, with calls to Pieta's helpline up 49% year on year while text messages to Pieta had increased by 46%, and now when people needed it most it's very existence was threatened.

Electric Ireland and Spark Foundry began work on a communications plan that would deliver on the key objectives:

1. ***Generate life-saving funds for Pieta***
2. ***Deliver long term brand building for Electric Ireland, cementing Electric Ireland's ongoing support of Pieta and communities***
3. ***Raise awareness of the Sunrise Appeal, encouraging participation and social sharing of the sunrise moment on May 9th***

Audiences had limited emotional bandwidth due to the tumultuous period of Lockdown we were also faced with the potential 'compassion fatigue' due to the large number of charitable causes who were also in dire straits from a funding perspective and were active at the time.



Execution

RTÉ is Ireland's most trusted media organisation, and this was never more evident than during the lockdown as audiences turned to the national broadcaster as the source for updates, news and to find out what was happening next. We knew that viewership levels were significantly up during the period, however we were asking people to reach into their hearts, and into their pockets during a time when most were already financially stretched and emotionally exhausted.

RTÉ began to work with Spark on the brief, with the objectives of building awareness and involvement in the Sunrise Appeal, targeting the days leading up to May 9th, and then concentrating activity around the weekend of May 9th.

RTÉ and Spark's content strategy was built around three pillars: ***Awareness, Emotional Connection and Communion*** all building incrementally across a two week period towards Saturday 9th May

Two Weeks Out: Awareness Build

To drive awareness, we used 2fm. The activity ran right across the 2fm schedule and included live mentions by the presenters across all shows, and 30" promos, running for two weeks building to the Sunrise Appeal on May 9th. 2fm content also included on-air pieces with Sunrise Appeal ambassadors

2fm also supported through its social channels Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with viral hashtags #DIL2020, #DILSunriseappeal and the Electric Ireland handle.

The Eve Of Darkness-Into-Light: Emotional Connection

The campaign's penultimate phase of the campaign included The Late Late Show who kicked off a monumental evening for the partnership with a candle-lit tribute to the memory of all those who died by suicide in the last year. The programme continued with powerful stories of dark times, bravery, compassion and hope,

In a highly poignant and moving introduction to the show Ryan revealed that the campus in RTE has been covered in candles to remember everyone who had passed away by suicide the previous year.



"Each candle represents a person who died by suicide in this beautiful country in the year 2019....each candle is one too many."

Ryan Tubridy



This was a groundbreaking moment in Irish television history. Ireland was once a place where suicide and self-harm were whispered in the darkness, the stories shared demonstrated that these issues can be discussed without stigma and shame.



To support the editorial, we ran a series of **long-form break takeovers across the evening** featuring the two and half minute 'Hope & Love' Darkness Into Light execution, as well as the Electric Ireland 30 second brand ad and these ran in the first and last ad breaks during the Late Late Show to drive awareness and donations and to further drive association with Electric Ireland and the cause.



The Day Itself: Communion & Celebration (Saturday May 9th)

The day started with a unique Live Sunrise radio broadcast on RTÉ 2fm on May 9th, supporting the initiative with uplifting music and messages of hope raising the spirit of the audience, all rising at 4.30am in solidarity.

Finally, we used a truly national platform to thank, celebrate and honour those who participated and contributed to Darkness Into Light 2020. So, RTÉ's Commercial Creative Team produced a three minute film which aired as two three minute ad-break takeovers around the Nine News, the film also ran on RTÉ and Electric Ireland social channels.



From over 200 content submissions, a three minute film featuring over 100 pieces of content (videos and photos) of magical sunrise moments that were **captured on mobile devices by the public earlier that same day, which were then produced and aired just hours later.**





Results

We generated life-saving funds for Pieta

- The partnership was hugely successful and historic, raising an incredible €4 million in response to the emergency 'Sunrise Appeal' across the weekend (€2m raised in one night on the Late Late Show)

We delivered long term brand building for Electric Ireland, cementing Electric Ireland's ongoing support of Pieta and communities

- Contextual long form breaks across the evening of May 8th reached 744 000 Adults
- The Agile executions (captured and aired same day) on Saturday 9th May reached over 542,000 Adults
- Approx. 673,000 listeners heard the 30" Promos across 2fm
- Social support tagging Electric Ireland on 2fm had a reach of over 1.6 Million
- The combination of media activity via TV and radio delivered information on Pieta's life-saving services as well as highlighting Electric Ireland's partnership with Pieta to help support communities.

We raised awareness of the Sunrise Appeal, encouraging participation and social sharing of the sunrise moment on May 9th

- We saw a Darkness Into Light like no other, as tens of thousands of people all over the country rose at dawn and participated in a 'Sunrise' moment, marking the time when they would have walked from Darkness Into Light. *Many people shared touching images, words and videos across social media, supporting the cause and offering hope and solidarity to those impacted by suicide.*
- The historic weekend saw an array of well-known personalities support the 'Sunrise Appeal', including: An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Laura Whitmore, Eoghan McDermott, Jennifer Zamparelli, Elaine Crowley, Louise Cooney, Roz Purcell, Vogue Williams, Niamh Cullen, Hannah Tyrell, Darren Kennedy and many more. They joined the Gaelic Players Association, the Women's Gaelic Players Association, and a vast army of Pieta supporters.

"There's good things happening, because there are good people in the community making them happen", said former president Mary McAleese.