



## Award for social care worker who provides adventure therapy

by Áilín Quinlan

A Cork-based social care worker who provides adventure therapy to young people in care has won a prestigious award worth €30,000.

Rock-climbing, mountain-biking, kayaking, canoeing, fishing and snorkelling are just some of the activities Raymond Burke's company has been providing to young people between the ages of eight and 18 who have often been referred by the social services.

The founder of Active Connections outside Killeagh in East Cork, he was last week presented with a 2014 **Social Entrepreneurs Ireland Elevator Award**.

**Social Entrepreneurs Ireland** is an Irish not-for-profit organisation which supports people with new solutions to Ireland's biggest social problems.

In April 2011, Mr Burke set up Active Connections and the firm now works with the HSE and its service users, as well as with clients from the private sector.

He got the idea after spending time in the US in 2000 in a leadership role at an adventure-based therapy company.

"We go to the young person's environment and use their environment to carry out adventure therapy programmes — for example, in Cork City or Mallow we'd use the river, in Youghal we'd use the cliffs around the town, and in North Cork it would be the Galtee Mountains."

Adventure therapy involves the combination of

physically and psychologically demanding activities — gorge-walking and climbing are some examples, often in a group setting.

The therapy requires high levels of engagement, challenging participants to confront negative behaviour and address their thought processes.

Active Connections also caters for guardians and carers, providing them with support and training in an attempt to ensure improved outcomes for the young participants.

"I saw this at work in the US and it was very successful, because you're giving the young person the opportunity to develop in a way they wouldn't normally get," he says.

Nine social entrepreneurs were awarded a total prize fund worth €600,000.



Raymond Burke, Active Connections, with Annalisa O'Carroll, head of impact at **Social Entrepreneurs Ireland**, Tommy Breen, CEO of DCC plc, and Tony Griffin of Soar, receiving the 2014 **Social Entrepreneurs Ireland Elevator Award**.