



County Kildare LEADER PARTNERSHIP

CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community Development & Leadership Training

Background

Community development approaches to social inclusion are only effective if there is a foundation of community activity upon which social inclusion initiatives can be developed and progressed. Building the capacity of the community sector in County Kildare is a primary objective of County Kildare Leader Partnership (CKLP) as part of its remit in implementing the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). CKLP is also committed to supporting representation from disadvantaged communities in local, regional and national planning and decision-making processes, including the Public Participation Network (PPN), for it is these structures that decide the priorities and strategies that impact on marginalised communities.

A general concern about the need for greater levels of participation and leadership in locally-based community group activity emerged following a community consultation process by CKLP in 2010. This led to discussions with the Adult and Continuing Education Department of Maynooth University, to implement a locally-based Level 7 Certificate in Community Development & Leadership course.

The course was implemented in Naas and Athy in 2011/2012, with 20 plus participants in each location. The course targeted those involved in community and voluntary work in the community, particularly within disadvantaged communities, while ensuring a mixed participant cohort.

The course took place over the academic year (September to May) and comprised 100 contact hours, with 20 credits accruing towards higher level qualifications upon completion.



Programme Development

The Community Development & Leadership course focused on developing leadership skills and promoting an understanding and adoption of community development approaches. A number of modules comprised the course, including: community development studies; working with groups; social analysis; and project planning.

A Certificate in Adult & Community Education Level 8 and an online Equality Studies course at Level 7 were later introduced to enable participants to progress to higher level courses and/or to accumulate sufficient credits for a Diploma in Arts: Training & Development for Socially Inclusive Workplaces. All of these courses were CKLP-Maynooth provided and were taken up by many of those who completed the initial Community Development & Leadership course.

In 2014 having reflected on the development of the courses against the original aim it was decided to focus solely on the Certificate in Community Development & Leadership, as this best served the capacity building intent to develop leadership skills and enhance participation in local activity and in regional and national forums. This course continues to target disadvantaged communities and to be implemented in Naas.

The aim of SICAP is to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality in Ireland through supporting communities and individuals using community development approaches, engagement and collaboration.



Recruitment

The focus of the course was on participants from disadvantaged communities who were the target groups of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and its successor Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP). Under SICAP the Programme has been open to tender under public procurement rules. Participants were recruited through an advertising campaign and via established relationships with communities and included: long-term unemployed, Travellers, those working in community and youth work, asylum seekers in direct provision, LGBT activists, single parents, refugees and those with leave-to-remain. A high proportion of participants were involved in local community activity, for example 34 out of 45 in the first year of the course.

In terms of prior education, 43% of participant had a primary degree or equivalent, 16% had completed 2nd level senior cycle, 7% completed FETAC level 5, 11% had completed an apprenticeship or NQF level 6 Certificate, 11% completed 2nd level junior cycle and 7% completed their education at primary level.

Supporting Participation

As well as managing the non-college administration of the course, CKLP staff also provided additional individual supports in what was sometimes a challenging personal journey. CKLP staff were constantly available to discuss and help address any emerging difficulties.



CKLP staff also provided material supports – tutorials, study space, internet access, and photocopying. A text book library was established, as the cost of core reading material for the course was prohibitive for some. Transport was initially a problem for some participants but this was resolved by organising a car-pooling solution.

These examples illustrate the important role played by CKLP staff in maintaining a constantly responsive support process alongside the main academic programme.

Outcomes

Although the original objective was to enhance community development capacity it is difficult to separate personal and collective development outcomes in community education programmes. Thus raising the capacity of the individual in community development courses also increases the capability of community organisations to make more affective interventions. Similarly, adult and community education seeks to increase the capacity of individuals to be animators in the development of community participation and active citizenship. However, the collective development outcome can only be achieved if the intent is clearly outlined and adhered to in the content of the course.

Evaluations demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the course content and the delivery of the course. Peer support was highly regarded underlining the importance of supportive group dynamics and collective learning methodologies. Interestingly, almost half the responding participants had contemplated leaving the course at some stage - low confidence, expectations of the course, overwhelmed by the content or volume of work, financial and family pressures were the main reasons. When asked about their overall experience of the course participants were very positive, identifying how the course had provided both personal and community related benefits – more confidence, critical awareness, enhanced leadership skills, ability to analyse situations and to develop solutions to problems.

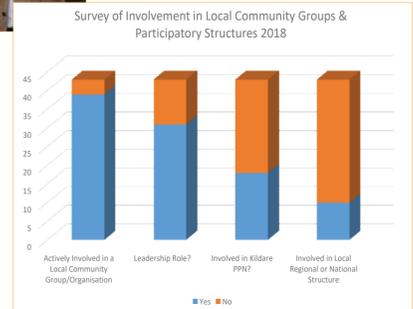
Most of the participants completed the course, although a small number deferred completion until the following year because of difficulties in completing assignments. The majority of participants completed all the coursework (81%) and there were a high number of honours results in the assignments. Attendance was also good, with 76% of participants completed all of the compulsory hours of the courses.



Maynooth University Courses (May 2016) show that participants gained confidence and motivation, knowledge and critical awareness, interpersonal skills and organisation capability.

In May 2016, CKLP conducted a survey of participants of these certificate courses between 2011 and 2016. In terms of the expectations of participants 54% viewed their personal education progression as extremely important. A significant proportion of the participants progressed to further courses - the survey of participants showed 24% of former participants in full or part-time education in 2016.

Personal development (personal confidence) and improved employment prospects (education) were listed gains in the participants survey. Although the course was essentially a community capacity building measure, 48% of participants believed that it also improved their employment prospects.



Impact

The initiative was devised as a capacity building measure to raise the effectiveness of the community sector in Kildare County and to build community leadership, although progression of individuals was always going to be a parallel outcome. Collective outcomes can be quantifiably verified on the basis of impacts against Goal 1.3 of SICAP (to support local community group members to participate in local, regional and national decision-making structures).

A follow-up survey by CKLP showed an impressive level of participation at all levels of community participation.

It is also possible to make a more qualitative judgement on the basis of feedback from ongoing evaluations/surveys over the period of the initiative. Individual impacts, based on the data collected in the Survey of Participants on

'Yes, I have got involved in the community and have taken an active role'
'Understanding the community, identifying needs and assessment of what is needed locally is one new skill that I learnt on the course'
'I encourage more involvement with different cultures and diverse groups to be involved together'
'It really opened my eyes to (community involvement in) structures in KCC – i.e. that community work is only effective if participants buy-in to the concept and that what we are doing in our group needed serious review'

An evaluation of the Certificate in Adult & Community Education also identified confidence, critical awareness, a deeper understanding of contemporary society and an ability to analyse issues and identify solutions.

'I am more confident and want to show what I can do. I am not afraid to put myself forward and make myself heard now. I feel I am now in a position to handle almost any situation with confidence'

'With a deeper knowledge of how society works, I feel confident about joining a group that one fights for social change. Knowledge is power'

'Now I can help my community group to analyse issues affecting them and identifying solutions to problems, support voluntary organisations and volunteers to work effectively, challenging discrimination and inequality in my community'

Learning

The collaboration between CKLP and Maynooth University worked very well at both an administrative and academic level, demonstrating the benefits of educators and local development organisations working together for community benefit. CKLP looked after recruitment and provided ongoing support, while the Adult and Continuing Education Department of Maynooth University, with the assistance of the Admissions Office, managed the academic process with prudence and sensitivity.

Involving participants from disadvantaged communities in training initiatives requires significant flanking supports. This was provided by CKLP community workers,



who created the conditions for participation and were on hand to maintain that participation through the course.

Barriers to participation included childcare, affordability, literacy and transport – some of the courses were based at opposite ends of a very large county. Most of these were overcome, although the need for mentoring support remained constant.

In terms of the community development objectives of the initiative - to build/enhance community development capacity in the county - the indicators are that this was achieved, although the full effect will only become obvious over time as this enhanced community leadership capacity is applied.

Maynooth University Certificated Courses Contracted by County Kildare Leader Partnership 2011 - MAY 2017	
SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED	
Number of Individuals Registered for 1 or more course	128
Numbers Awarded 1 Certificate	78
Numbers Awarded 2 Certificates	11
Numbers Awarded 3 Certificates	18
Total Number of Certificates Awarded	107

