

Longford Community Resources Clg SICAP Case Study 2018

For the purposes of this case study, an action in Longford Community Resources Clg's 2018 SICAP Annual Plan under Goal 2 was selected. The action is:-

Action 8: Providing Lifelong Learning Opportunities

This action issues from the Strategic Response 8 of the Longford Community Resources Clg SICAP Strategic Plan:-

8. *To provide tailored training/educational courses aimed at improving personal skills, wellbeing and capabilities with a view to increasing participation in civic life, education and/or employment or improving health.*

Identifying the Need

Census 2016 shows that County Longford, at the time of the census, had a higher percentage of residents from cultural or ethnic minority groups than the national average, with 20% of the population from cultural and ethnic groups other than 'White Irish' and 'White Irish Traveller' compared with 17% nationally¹. The highest concentrations of people from cultural and ethnic groups other than 'White Irish' and 'White Irish Traveller' were in Longford Town (33%) and Edgeworthstown (41%). Of note was the level of increase in the number of people from cultural and ethnic minority groups in County Longford which had occurred between the 2006 and 2016.

Significantly, in response to the 2016 Census, 6,340 persons resident in County Longford stated that they spoke a language other than Irish or English at home, of which 1,454 persons stated they were unable to speak English well or at all, with 235 of people stating that they are unable to speak English at all.

These statistics reflect the experience of Longford Community Resources Clg staff on the ground, who increasingly, when going door to door in disadvantaged areas or through the actions and programmes run by the organisation, were encountering people with low levels of English language. For example, the SICAP Enterprise Officer was frequently being approached by people wishing to start up in business on the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme whom she had difficulty conversing with because their English language was so poor.

Staff in Longford Community Resources Clg were aware of the English language courses provided by Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board and regularly referred

people to these classes. However, given the number of people presenting with low levels of conversational English, it was felt that we, as an organisation charged with addressing social exclusion, could do something to improve this situation.

Commencing the Initiative

Consequently, in autumn 2016, the SICAP Community Development Worker met with staff in Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board to consult with them on the issue. Staff in the ETB said that they had a waiting list for English language classes and were happy with the suggestion by the Longford Community Resources Clg Community Development Worker that we, the Local Development Company, would start English conversation classes in addition to and complementary to the classes run by the ETB.

The Community Development Worker then approached Third Age Ireland in relation to their 'Fáilte Isteach' model of conversational English classes. Fáilte Isteach is a community project where volunteers welcome migrants to their community by delivering conversational English classes. Classes generally run according to the academic year with breaks for mid-term, Christmas and Easter. A class consists of a volunteer tutor working with 3-5 participants in a relaxed and informal environment where learning is student-centred. Most classes are two hours in length with a 20 minute coffee break half way.

Third Age Ireland provides resources, role descriptions and sample policies, to support recruitment of volunteers and participants, and the running of the classes. They also provide initial and annual refresher training for volunteer tutors - which includes practical information about the supporting materials and teaching ideas – and support for co-ordinators (the two Longford Community Resources Clg staff attended the Regional Coordinator Seminar in April this year in Dublin).

Start-up in Longford Town

Early in 2017 the Community Development Worker linked with Longford Volunteer Centre (which is another project of Longford Community Resources Clg) to source volunteers to work as tutors for the classes in Longford Town and five tutors were recruited. The volunteers were asked, as is the practice, to sign a volunteer agreement which sets out their commitment to teaching each week during term time, and undertook two 2 hour sessions of training with Third Age Ireland.

Renting a venue in the centre of Longford Town, Longford Community Resources Clg was able to commence weekly, two hour long, conversational English classes in April 2017, with Third Age Ireland attending the first three sessions as a support.

The first class took place with only two participants. This progressed week by week as word spread, and more people began to attend. Before the summer break up to eight people

were attending each week and in the autumn of 2017, there were up to 21 people attending the group in Longford Town each week. The group has continued through 2018 with good numbers attending weekly.

Start-up in Edgeworthstown

Given the number of people with low levels of English who Longford Community Resources Clg staff were encountering in Edgeworthstown (mirroring the statistics referred to above) and the very positive feedback which staff were receiving from people attending the English conversation class in Longford Town, it was decided to commence a Failte Isteach group in Edgeworthstown in 2018.

Having secured a local venue to rent, eight volunteers were then recruited (6 referred from the Volunteer Centre and two retired teachers who were recruited through a retired teachers' network).

The classes in Edgeworthstown started in February 2018 with six tutors and six participants attending. There are currently on average 12 participants attending each class (out of 22 participants registered). Most of the participants in Edgeworthstown are doing shift work in the local factories or in the nursing home, so they attend the class when they are off work.

Recruitment of Participants

Participants are recruited through outreach in the estates where Longford Community Resources Clg have a presence, engaging people on their doorsteps; through referral from other Longford Community Resources Clg staff and from colleagues in other organisationsⁱⁱ; as well as through advertisements put up around the towns, in the Longford Leader, parish bulletins, and on Longford Community Resources Clg's Facebook and Twitter pages. However, word of mouth has probably been the most beneficial form of publicity about the classes, when people who are participating in the classes recommend them to their friends.

Participant Profile

There is quite a mix of participants in terms of age, education and socio economic status in both groups. Some participants are unemployed and keenly seeking work; some participants are working; a number are older women who mind their grandchildren; others are from the Direct Provision Centre.

The level of English varies from those with little or no English to those who are seeking to practice what they learn in the ETB classes. There have also been a couple of participants whose level of English is actually very good, but have come to the groups because they are new to Longford Town or Edgeworthstown and want to make connections and learn about the services available.

The level of individual support need also varies between participants. For example, there are a number of Muslim women who said that they would have known very few people and felt quite isolated in Longford, whilst other participant might be working or have good connections within the community.

The Role of SICAP Staff

As well as organising venues, recruiting and supporting volunteers, engaging and supporting participants, liaising with organisations and generally co-ordinating the English language classes, the SICAP staff members attend each weekly meeting in order to work with participants on other areas additional to their language skills, as outlined below:-

- ***Facilitating the Group***

The SICAP staff members facilitate the classes, ensuring that any new members feel welcome, partnering participants with tutors, ensuring that people feel comfortable to participate and feel included, and dealing with any issues that may arise. Staff have also organised celebrations such as a Christmas party in 2017 and end of term parties and certificate giving to acknowledge the work done by the volunteer tutors and the learning outcomes achieved by the participants.

- ***Working with Participants on an Individual Basis***

When the participants are settled in the group the Longford Community Resources Clg staff member meets with each person individually, completes the IRIS paperwork and devises a Personal Action Plan (in as much as can be done, depending on the level of English the individual has). From here the person can be referred to other colleagues or services where appropriate. For example, many of the participants are interested in gaining employment. The staff member refers these people to the SICAP Education and Employment Mediator for supports in looking for employment. Other times people may need a referral for social supports, for example to the Community Gardai or Community Mothers.

Many participants are new to County Longford and from coming to the classes they learn more about Longford and what is going on in the County. For example, using a map of Longford Town which was designed by Longford Community Resources Clg under a previous integration project, we can inform them where the Citizens Information Centre is, where there are GP services, the County Council etc. (The map is a great educational learning tool for participants).

Participants are also encouraged to get involved in other activities. In April 2018, for example participants were invited to attend an active citizenship information session organised by Longford Community Resources Clg and delivered by the Immigrant Council of Ireland. Six participants from the Longford Town Failte Isteach group attended this. A number of participants have gone on to join the multicultural women's groups in Longford

Town and Edgeworthstown and a couple of others have started volunteering with the Volunteer Centre.

- ***Working on Issues***

A very important role of the SICAP staff in facilitating the English classes is to try to identify some of the social inclusion issues which people from cultural and ethnic groups may be facing in County Longford. For example, the conversation that arises within the little groups can sometimes be in relation to issues which participants are facing in the housing estate where they live, can be regarding problems in accessing services or racism etc. This means that the SICAP staff members learn about what is going on in the community and can either support the person to take action (through referral to appropriate services for example) or can use that information to feed into activities which are about addressing social exclusion. For example, points raised by participants at the Failte Isteach classes in relation to the Gardai were fed into the Longford Community Resources Clg's Social Inclusion Network submission to the Joint Policing Commission.

Observations

Whilst most of the participants like the informal nature of the classes:

[The classes] *“are informal, homely. There is more talking, playing...I remember more when I see a picture”* (we use pictures as an aid to teach in our classes). (Rasa, Failte Isteach participant).

there have been a few migrants who have come to the Failte Isteach classes once and then decided that this was not for them. This was stated to be because the Failte Isteach classes are so informal and taught by volunteers and not teachers. These people preferred the more formal style of learning and they were encouraged (as all participants) to enrol with the ETB classes.

Room rental is an on-going cost for the SICAP programme. Both groups require central locations so Longford Community Resources Clg has to rent rooms.

Conclusion

Running the Failte Isteach classes for the past two years, we have seen many benefits for the individuals involved. People have improved their language skills, made friends, been supported to access services and supports, and generally feel more connected in the community, thus aiding their integration.

“I like it here so much. My husband found out about the class and arranged for me to come. Tutors are very good. The Christmas party was great. Very nice group” (Mia, Failte Isteach participant).

At the same time, Longford Community Resources Clg staff have been able to hear the voices of some of the most marginalised people in Longford and raise the experiences of these people in local fora and at national level (through advocacy organisations such as such as the Migrants Rights Centre of Ireland, European Anti-poverty Network, Community Work Ireland) with a view to informing policy and practice in relation to migrants.

“I am satisfied; I am learning a lot of English. Everybody welcomes me with love. I am very happy and satisfied”. (Ismat, Failte Isteach participant).

ⁱ Longford Community Resources Clg ‘Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2018 – 2022 Appendix 1: Part B - Tender Response Form’

ⁱⁱ Longford Community Resources Clg staff – other SICAP staff; Youth Service; Volunteer Centre, TUS and Rural Social Scheme. Other organisations – for example, Citizens Information, Direct Provision Centre; Longford Westmeath Education and Training Board, Cluid Housing, Longford Women’s Link.