



**Submission to Co Wicklow LCDC in relation to
SICAP Annual Plans 2017**

By

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

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Introducing County Wicklow Public Participation Network

County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system. Co Wicklow PPN has 149 diverse member groups including sports groups, women's groups, older people's groups, tidy towns, LGBT groups, Travellers groups, community councils, resident's associations, youth groups and more. Member groups span the 5 Municipal Areas of Co Wicklow and the 3 PPN colleges which are Social Inclusion, Community & Voluntary and Environment. Some of these groups are networks in their own right.

PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Housing & Corporate Estate Strategic Policy Committee; Planning & Development Strategic Policy Committee; Transport, Water & Environment Strategic Policy Committee; Community, Cultural & Social Development Strategic Policy Committee; Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee; Wicklow County Childcare Committee; Co Wicklow Children & Young People's Services Committee; Co Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Wicklow County Tourism Board; Co Wicklow Volunteer Centre and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee.

PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector are prioritised within local policy processes.

Purpose

An invitation was issued by the Chairperson of the SICAP sub-group of Co Wicklow LCDC for LCDC members to consult with their nominating organisations in order to identify any issues and suggestions that might be considered for inclusion in the SICAP Annual Plans 2017.

Co Wicklow PPN welcomes this opportunity to input into the SICAP programme. It should be noted however that due to the tight time frame of the request, consultation was limited and restricted to a meeting of the Co Wicklow PPN Secretariat and Representatives which took place on Wednesday 19th October 2016. This submission is based on the discussions and agreement of attendees at the meeting. Co Wicklow PPN respectfully requests that if this opportunity is available in the future, our organisation receives at least one month's notice to enable us to fully consult our social inclusion college and make a more considered response.

This submission highlights 2 specific suggestions for support and more general observations/considerations that the LCDC might consider advocating for.

Specifics

1. Support for Somalian Refugees

LECP Objective(s): 1,3, 5 and 8, County Wicklow Partnership Action(s) 1,2,4,5, and 6

Pre-2013 a number of Somalian refugees were resettled into Co Wicklow with Arklow being the predominant location. Initially funding was provided to employ a worker to support these families. The funding ceased in March 2015. Since then the Citizens Information Service has reported a huge increase in demand on their service from this cohort (see figure 1)

Most of the queries (see figure 2) are complex and require multiple interventions by Arklow CIC before resolution

Fig 1. No of Queries to local CIS offices from Somali Refugees

| Year | Bray | Arklow | Wicklow |
|------|------|--------|---------|
| 2011 | 3 | | |
| 2012 | 1 | | |
| 2013 | 1 | | 1 |
| 2014 | 1 | 12 | |
| 2015 | | 145 | 1 |
| 2016 | | 182 | |

N.B. Queries to the Arklow CIS office has increased by 30% in the last 9 months

Fig 2. Types of Queries to local CIS offices from Somali Refugees

1. *Problem with having electricity account transferred to caller's name, several actions required before matter resolved.*
2. *Due to confusion on behalf of caller and poor understanding of English, payment meant for electricity bill went into landlord's account, several actions required for resolution.*
3. *Multiple applications for medical cards all complex because of programme refugee status.*
4. *Multiple applications for social welfare payments all complex because of programme refugee status.*
5. *Multiple applications for child benefit all complex because of programme refugee status.*
6. *Multiple applications for travel documents*
7. *Multiple applications for family reunification*
8. *Multiple applications for Red Cross funding towards travel costs in relation to family reunification.*
The applications under 6, 7 & 8 above all required Arklow CIC to develop relationships with the relevant personnel in INIS and the Red Cross.
These were very complex processes and in many cases involved using standard forms which were not designed to deal with programme refugees
9. *Problems around registering for school transport and receiving tickets.*

All of the above actions required a considerable amount of time and dedication.

Arklow CIS also reports the following experiences:

A number of families were housed by Wicklow County Council. However, when additional family members came to Arklow under family reunification, the Council advised the tenants that Wicklow County Council had no responsibility to house these additional family members.

The DSP referred a number of Somalian refugees to Arklow Jobs Club and they requested that the refugees complete CV's; there were difficulties in obtaining the exact details required for the CV's.

As far as we are aware there are no English classes for the refugees.

We believe that there is a need for ongoing specialist training for the refugees to help them to acclimatise to our society

We believe that a number of state agencies require training to understand the needs of the refugees. Here is an example of a problem which arose from poor communication/language problems.

- *A maternity hospital incorrectly entered details of a birth indicating that the father of the child was resident in Ireland. Because of this the mother had great difficulty in applying for One Parent Family Payment. The social worker in the hospital would or could not deal with the issue as the mother was no longer a patient. Arklow CIC had to sort out the matter which was complex, involved and lengthy.*

There was a need for coordination within the Arklow CIC office to ensure that matters were not duplicated, while at the same time ensuring that our guarantee of confidentiality was not broken. This was achieved by designating two members of staff who dealt with most if not all of the queries. This was resource intensive.

Arklow CIS continues to strive to provide a service to the Somalian Refugees who they treat with dignity, respect and empathy. However sustaining this on an ongoing basis with limited resources is very problematic for the service

A staff member of Arklow Further Education and Training Centre informs us that there are language classes available to Somali Refugees in Arklow through the FEC. This information identifies that while there are people and services who welcome refugees and are willing to help however they can, there is a lack of overall coordination of services for this cohort.

Suggestions/Recommendations:

In consideration of the relocated Somali families and the proposed relocation of Syrian Refugees in the future Co Wicklow PPN make the following suggestions/recommendations:

- Provide a dedicated support worker in the county to assist refugees on an ongoing basis
- Undertake an audit of services and supports available to refugees
- Set up a sub-group to co-ordinate services for refugees.
- It is our understanding that the government has agreed to accept a number of Syrian refugees, the experience of the Somalian refugees and the agencies dealing with them should be reviewed in order that the problems which arose and are still evident will be dealt with before the Syrian refugees arrive.

2. Support for Out of School Children

LECP Objective(s): 3, 5 and 8, County Wicklow Partnership Action(s): 5, and 6, Bray Area Partnership Action(s): 7

A sub-committee of Wicklow CYPSC (Children and Young Peoples' Services Committee) met on several occasions between October 2015 and April 2016 to map this issue which was identified by many members. They worked on identifying:

1. Risk factors
2. Protective factors
3. Challenges that exist within the system
4. The positives
5. Services already provided in Wicklow
6. Next steps.

1. Risk Factors

- Lower socio-economic status
- Poor parental support/interest which may be due to a number of factors (drug/alcohol abuse, mental health challenges, poor literacy/numeracy)
- Homelessness: Family may be accommodated a distance from the school, seems to be a lack of communication between neighbouring local authorities. This allows some children to fall between the cracks.
- Social Worker involvement with the family – why is school attendance not being seen as an issue?
- School size: Child who is vulnerable can get “lost” in a huge school
- Social Anxiety (with or without diagnosis), children with ASD appear to be at particular risk. Local support group Triple A Alliance has at least 10% of children between 10 and 16 who are out of school or attending on an irregular basis
- Behavioural issues leading to suspensions, expulsions etc.
- Undiagnosed learning difficulties such as dyslexia
- Difficult transition to post primary, 2nd year appears to be a key time
- Child involved with drugs, drug debt, petty crime
- Trauma in child’s life (parental death, separation, domestic violence, abuse)
- Child in role of carer/childminder.
- Second year – issues come to the fore – more likely to drop out in this year. Mostly boys.

2. Protective factors

- Engagement in extra-curricular activities
- Availability of “one key person” teacher, counsellor
- Positive parental attitude to school
- Flexibility in school: Reduced curriculum, a quiet room, shorter school day (suitable for some young people – not all – may create a disconnect and make it more difficult for some young people to reintegrate)
- Early identification of “at risk” children, how might this happen? Notification when 10 days have been missed?
- Programmes like Reading and Maths recovery which provide targeted individualised support

3. Challenges within the system

Loss of specialist teaching posts since 2012: Support teachers for travellers, Visiting teacher service for travellers, Support teachers for children from EAL background, Guidance posts, pastoral care often a post of responsibility at post primary level such posts are not replaced due to the moratorium

Lack of stability in funding: Many interventions are funded on an annual basis, this may lead to difficulties retaining staff and building capacity

Teachers not as engaged in the community: Fewer after school activities, teachers unable to afford to live in the area, less "connection" with the community that they serve

Resource teachers at post primary: Resource hours are often used to build up subject hours into a fulltime post (lack of expertise/interest in some cases)

Resource hours for pupils who do not have Irish exemptions: Often lose out as timetabling support can be an issue

Community supports: Long waiting lists for counselling and psychology at primary care level, long waiting lists for Psychiatry (Lucena Bray had no psychiatrist for most of last year). Cases are increasingly complex due to such lengthy delays. No service exists for children with ASD

Travellers no longer have access to the second level training provided by Milltown (funding cut)

YouthReach : Some children can't meet the minimum requirements for literacy/numeracy and lose out on a place

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds who attend non-DEIS schools

4. The Positives

-Home School Liaison teachers who can engage with families and also forge links between primary and secondary schools

-Headlamps initiative: very good intervention but requires a lot of additional admin and a management committee (all voluntary). The Headlamps scheme in Ravenswell is funded by the Bray Drugs Task Force and is now run by Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board

-Strong family links with schools in Bray-Stable population with families having a history with the school

-Parenting Plus programme (engages parents) Parents Plus programme for adolescents running in the Kilcoole area and another one covering Newtown and Wicklow area.

5. What do we have in Wicklow?

Headlamps project at primary level (Deis schools) only available in Bray.

St Killian's school in Bray has support from National Behaviour Support Service

Strong links had been established between primary schools and St Thomas in Bray(now lost as St Thomas has been phased out)

School Completion personnel: Jane Sharpe, Mary O’Riordan, Joanne O’Halloran (countywide service)

Arklow has Springboard model. Springboard model also exists in Wicklow Town – Wicklow Child and Family Project.

School Completion programme exists in Wicklow and Arklow Including Carnew.

Bray reasonably well resourced – other areas of the county not so. Some groups identified as at increased risk-Children with High Functioning Autism who may have social anxiety, children with mental health difficulties

6. Next Steps:

Continue to collate case studies to see factors in common

Obtain data from Tusla re school attendance/dropout

Information needed from rural areas as well as Bray area.

Urgent need to support children/families who are not attending DEIS schools and have no access to the support offered by a Home School Liaison teacher. Funding through SICAP to fund a project worker?

Suggestions/Recommendations:

School leavers are a group that are not currently adequately catered for. Co Wicklow PPN suggests that “school drop-outs” should be included as a cohort within the SICAP Plans and that either or both programme implementers might assign a project worker to gather the information identified in the Next Steps Section above and work with service providers to develop supports to children and families who are affected by school drop-out.

General Observations/Considerations:

Many programmes and interventions that focus on disadvantage seem to focus on geographical area and don’t consider that the idea of “community” can be wider than that. A community can be dispersed. For example in the case of integrated social housing policy, many local authorities own and let houses that could be situated in what might be considered an affluent area. Communities can also be defined by a common need/interest e.g. disability.

The definition of disadvantaged should also be broadened to encompass issue groups. Examples of these might be young people with mental health issues.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a cohort of unskilled individuals aged between 18 and 28 that left school early and who are excluded from many programmes targeted at young people. Co Wicklow PPN suggests that the LEADER programme definition of youth i.e. 15 years to 35 years should be adopted across all programmes to provide the support needed to those that fall through this net.

Conclusion

As previously stated Co Wicklow PPN welcomes the opportunity to feed into the SICAP plans for Co Wicklow and we hope the issues and suggestions raised in this submission are helpful and will be considered.

We believe that the more opportunities for this type of consultation and feedback in developing local programmes can only enrich the programmes and support their efficiency and relevancy,

leading to shared resources, co-ordinated services and better outcomes for communities. We hope that Co Wicklow PPN will be afforded the same opportunity in future planning.