



# **The Financial Impact of COVID-19 on Co Wicklow Community Groups**

**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 354 diverse member groups, 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; all of the Wicklow County Council Strategic Policy Committees; 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, County Wicklow Partnership, and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee. PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector are prioritised within local policy processes.

### **Background & Context**

The COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting restrictions in relation to people engaging with each other at community level has had a severe impact on community groups. Group activities have been greatly reduced or have ceased for months on end. Community buildings have operated at reduced capacity where they have opened at all. Where halls have opened and activities have taken place, groups have had to adapt their services and supports to implement the health and safety measures required for them to operate and to keep their members and service users safe. These measures have come with an added cost at a time when groups have also had their normal fundraising activities severely curtailed.

Throughout this pandemic Co Wicklow PPN has maintained contact with member groups, highlighting the issues that groups are contending with and supporting them where possible by providing information and training that is relevant to them. As the pandemic continued concerns escalated and some of them were highlighted during Co Wicklow PPN's Meet Your Elected Representative Events in October 2020. One group in particular highlighted concern felt by voluntary committees that were responsible for large loans and mortgages on community buildings when raising the funds to meet repayments is so challenging. This prompted Co Wicklow PPN to run a survey with member groups to find out what the financial impact of COVID-19 has been on Co Wicklow Community Groups.

## Survey

The survey was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> October and remained open until midnight on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. The survey was circulated to Co Wicklow PPN member groups and advertised through social media channels.

Duplicate responses to the survey were removed, and where more than one response was received for a group, individual responses collated, resulting in the gathering of information, experience and learning from 39 community groups in total.

## Respondents

Responses were evenly spread across the county and from each of the 5 Municipal Districts. The PPN colleges, Social Inclusion, Community & Voluntary and Environment were also represented. Included were sports clubs; community halls, women's groups; men's sheds; youth groups, culture & heritage groups, and more. A full list of groups can be found in Appendix 1 on page 10.

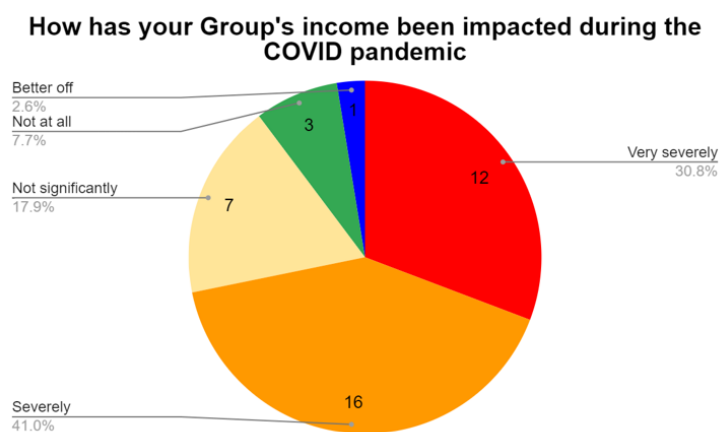
## Responses

### Section 1 – General Financial

#### Impact

Section 1 of the survey asked groups how their income has been impacted in general during the COVID-19 pandemic.

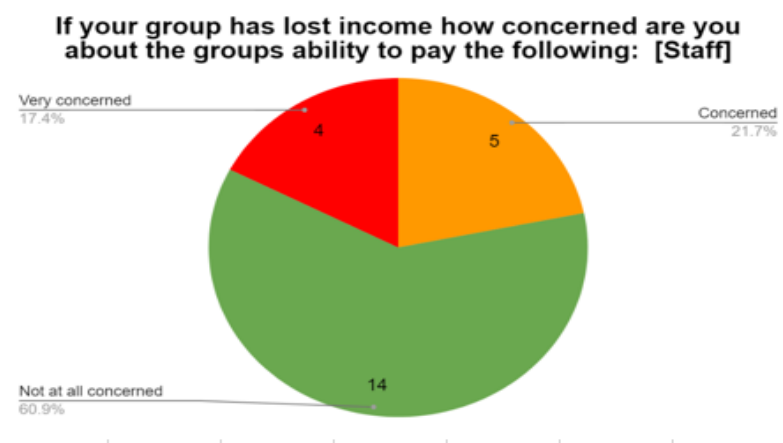
Approximately 72% of respondent groups reported that their income had been severely/very severely impacted during the COVID pandemic (see Figure 1)



**Figure 1**

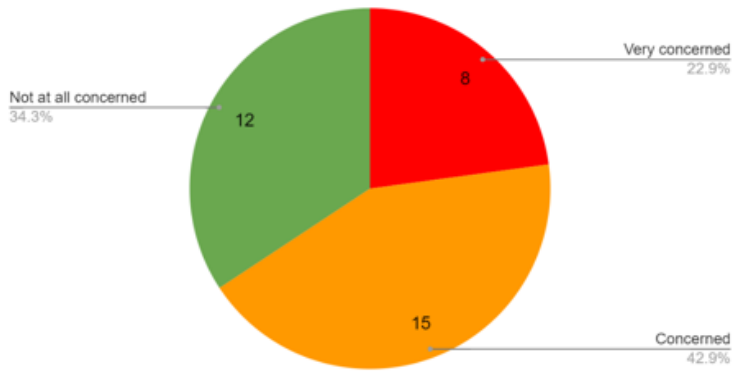
Groups were then asked to indicate how concerned they were in relation to meeting various cost if their income had been reduced.

39% of respondents expressed concern about ability to pay Staff Costs (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2**

**If your group has lost income how concerned are you about the groups ability to pay the following: [Overheads]**

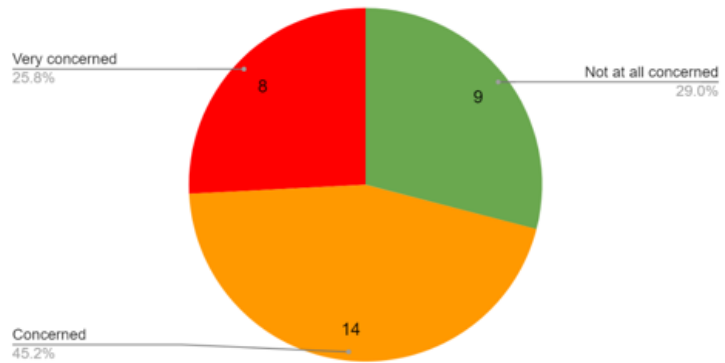


65% of respondents expressed concern about ability to pay Overheads (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

**If your group has lost income how concerned are you about the groups ability to pay the following: [Actions/P...]**

71% of respondents expressed concern about ability to pay Programme costs (see Figure 4)



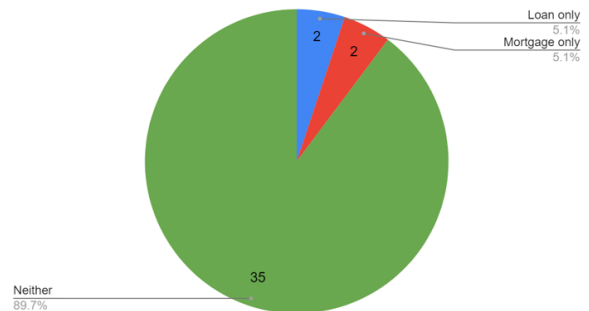
**Figure 4**

**Section 2 – Mortgages & Loan Finance**

Section 2 of the survey specifically explored the area of mortgages and loan finance for groups.

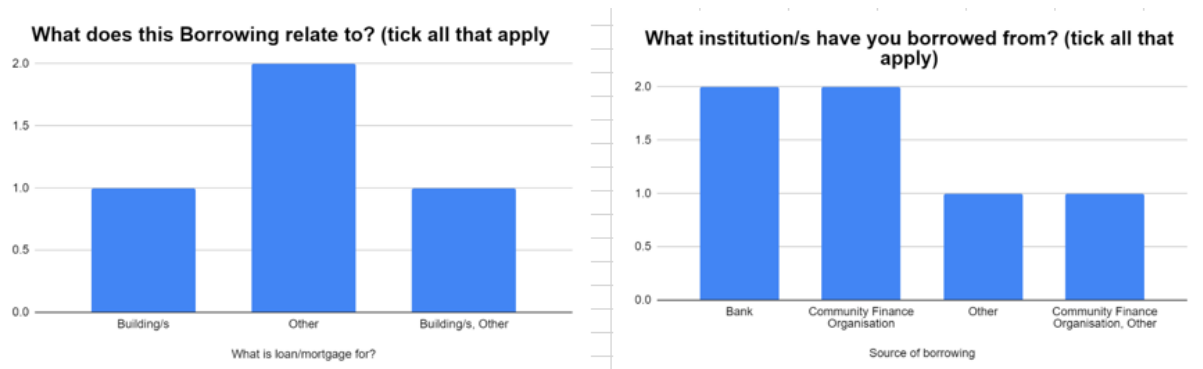
Only 4 (approx. 10%) of the 39 group responses have borrowings - loan or mortgage (see Figure 5)

**Has your Group a loan or mortgage?**



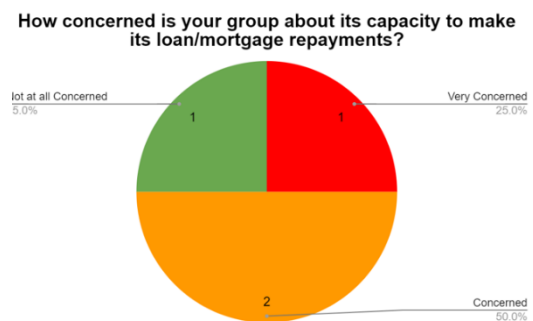
**Figure 5**

The 4 groups that had borrowed money indicated that loans were undertaken for buildings, and other expenditure or a mix of both. Loan providers were in the most part either banks or community finance providers (see Figure 6)



**Figure 6**

Of the 4 groups with borrowings - 3 (75%) of them are concerned about their capacity to make their repayments (see Figure 7)



**Figure 7**

### **Section 3 – Detailed Responses**

Section 3 asked groups if there was anything else that they would like to share/highlight in relation to their current financial situation. Here groups spoke about experiencing a reduction in rental income, fundraising, membership fees etc. without a corresponding reduction in ongoing costs. Issues in relation to the payment of grants was also raised by several respondents. Attention was also drawn to the non-financial impact of the Pandemic on communities (i.e. social isolation and mental health concerns)

#### **Detailed Responses Re: Loss of Income**

- Our current difficulties are solely because of the pandemic restrictions. Until now we have not had any difficulty meeting our commitments. This is lost income; it cannot be recouped. The rental time slots are lost.
- Our Hall is financed by the activities that go on in it and the rental from them, we are lucky in that the childcare covers the mortgage and part of the bills like Elec, gas and water. When the building reopened, we thought we would be ok, but it is closed again now under Level 3, we have insurance, VAT, etc coming up near Xmas time

- Part of our funding comes from Box Office Proceeds from performances, but we cannot stage performances during COVID-19 or if we do the proceeds are significantly less.
- Purple House Cancer support relies almost entirely on fundraising events and donations. All of our planned events for 2020 were cancelled or postponed. We availed of the Government COVID-19 wage subsidy for 3 months which was a great help. Some of our Grant applications were successful and some were refused.
- We have absolutely no way of raising funds for day to day expenses such as insurance cost of room rental etc we need a type specific grant or discretionary money needs to be used on community groups rather than tarmac ready projects
- Fundraising events for match funding for projects is our main concern
- One of our main sources of income is sponsorship. Due to COVID-19 this has dried up
- As the festival didn't happen, we didn't incur any expenses but we would not have been able to stage any events in August as we were not able to carry out fund raising events in the preceding months. We need at least 6 months' notice for the go-ahead next August.
- We have continued with certain projects which we have funding for via grant applications. We would normally ask village residents for a donation towards our work, but we haven't done that this year due to the crisis and not wanting to put pressure on people. Our CES team continue with our day-to-day work and we cover their insurance and other payments. We had funds in-hand so that hasn't been an issue this year. We had not taken on a major project requiring part funding, so we've managed to keep expenses to a minimum.
- All our fundraising is gone as we hold a monthly draw, do bucket collections & bag packing and also get support from the snooker club and none of this is possible now. Our public liability insurance is very high and when I inquired re getting something back all they could do was cancel policy & give a very small refund.
- Wicklow SPCA invested in a new development at the end of 2019 taking into account our projected income for 2020. The pandemic has totally limited our normal interaction with the public. No on-site fundraising and limited income through our business of rehoming animals. To date I have found it impossible to source any grant aid as most require your organisation to be human related. We reverted to our investments to pay outstanding invoices as to leave the project unfinished would also not fulfil the conditions attached to the allocation of the original grants from Leader in 2019
- Our paid-up membership income is significantly lower than last year. Yet we have to pay for the musical director, accompanist, line leaders and associated new equipment for the online zoom rehearsals.
- Our fundraising such as weekly Bingo and Hall hire has stopped completely. The only income at the moment is Preschool room hire (when open) and hire of 1 office to CE scheme which due to DEASP guidelines has to be minimal. The funds are required for light, heat, insurance and the upkeep of the Community Hall. We have 2 employees who are funded by Pobal, so their jobs are secure.
- Shillelagh Community Games don't have any loans or mortgages. Due to our reduced level of activity our annual income streams have dried up to the extent that we are not in a position to utilize our recent Sport Capital Grant for equipment. As you

might know in order access the funds organizations first need to purchase equipment and then contact the grant awarding body to get reimbursed for costs. Which means that unless an organisation has the cash up front it's very hard to actually utilize the available funding. It's more akin to what comes first in a 'chicken or egg' scenario.

- We depend on fundraising to meet the costs (2.5K) of pitch rental, we pay an annual fee of which we did not get much use of this year. We fund raise to keep the cost of membership down
- As we have been unable to get started due to COVID concerns we have no membership income in order to pay our membership fees to scouting Ireland.
- we have rent and maintenance of building to cover. may not have as much income from members next year. Have not got money promised from grants
- we are having to negotiate with our various companies to find other options for paying.
- There is not enough money to cover the cost of insurance, so I have made up the balance from my own pocket.

#### **Detailed Responses Re COVID-19 Related Costs**

- We have had to purchase materials to cover the cost of COVID-19 and these have not been reimbursed by funders as of yet  
We are concerned about the funding being cut in the following years, particularly as we were overstretched as is. We do not have sufficient funding to cover programme and activity costs and increasing overheads. Concerned about the implications of COVID-19.

#### **Detailed Responses Re On-going Costs**

- Our group rent the local Scout den for our meetings although we are not meeting indoors at present, we still have to pay registration and insurance. We also had to pay €200 euros for the upkeep of the Scout den.

#### **Detailed Responses Re Implications Going Forward**

- This year we achieved almost full membership payment - however, speaking with members, they are not so sure about paying next year with all the uncertainty

#### **Detailed Responses Re Non-Financial Impact**

- Finance issues are not the main concern for our group. Our main concern is in relation to the social isolation of our members brought about by the Pandemic and the possible impact on the mental health of our members/community.

#### **Detailed Responses Re Positive Impacts of COVID-19 for Groups**

- As we were holed up in the lock down we were able to make money making and selling masks. It threw up new opportunities and ideas that we would not have thought of had there been no COVID-19. It's an ill wind that blows no good.

- We are managing to keep our overheads covered due to less use of the centre during lockdowns. Our hire of hall for individual therapies etc has enabled us to keep afloat until proper sporting activities can resume safely

### **Suggestions on How the Community & Voluntary Sector Can Be Supported Through the Health Crisis**

The final question in the survey asked community groups for ideas and suggestions about how the sector could be supported through the challenges that COVID-19 has created.

#### **Detailed Responses Re Grants**

- The Community and Voluntary sector was front line in the community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and relied almost entirely on the commitment and passion of our Volunteers. This is only sustainable up to a point but Statutory financial support and other non-monetary supports from Corporate Responsibility are vital to this sector so that we can sustain our services to our most vulnerable in our community.
- Increased funding from HSE and other government funded departments
- Any help in relation to grants etc would be much appreciated until this desperate situation is behind us in order to keep our group going.
- If committed funding can be assured for the next two years. One problem for these groups is annual funding with no ongoing /roll over funds.
- Perhaps there might be some grant funding available from the Arts Council or Dept. of Arts for amateur community groups such as ours?
- Grants from local authority, national lottery, dormant funds
- Not sure WCC gave us money to cover the COVID-19 alteration expenses, that was very welcome
- A small grant of around €1000 would help keep organisations like ours in a solvent state so that when the COVID-19 crisis abates we are in a position to resume our activities and have all our equipment in place to deliver a full sporting and cultural programme.
- Funding has not been given towards costs involved for remote working - such as laptops for staff and other essential resources required to meet services users needs
- Apply for grants schemes announced.
- More Government support is needed.
- Perhaps an extra COVID-19 Grant could be issued by the local authority.

#### **Detailed Responses Re Payment Breaks**

- Either a further payment break or a grant to cover payments.
- I intend asking some service providers to reduce their fees or number of visits
- waive rent next year
- cancelling rent to local authority where applicable
- for us one thing would have helped would be something on insurance if only to credit us on next year's policy.



### **Other Suggestions**

- We could have had a lot more people working for us if we had the money to pay them just the minimum wage.
- It depends on the specific group and their activity. It seems that some groups and activities are not really affected while others are in a very difficult spot. You'd need to be more specific. Advice and survey of key issues would be the first thing. Groups want to feel part of the WCC bigger picture. Liaison with our councillors and County Council personnel really helps, and of course the PPN. Sometimes groups don't know what help is out there. Most groups are mothballing/hibernating at the moment, but obviously any care groups will be extremely under pressure. Prioritising the groups in most need of help might help clarify.
- It is difficult to give a definitive answer to this question. The government and County Council are doing their best in this time of great uncertainty and challenge. All loans have to be paid back some day and it is the next generation that will have the burden.

## **Appendix 1 - Community Group Respondents**

80 MAX

Annamoe Community Development  
Arklow Coastcare  
Arklow Geraldines Ballymoney GAA Club  
Arklow Town Team  
Ashford Community Group  
Aughrim Community Sports and Leisure Association  
Avoca Community Hall  
Ballyconnell ICA & Community Enhancement Group  
Blessington and District Forum  
Bray Choral Society  
Bray Mens And Womens shed  
Cairdeas Clubhouse  
Coolkenno Ladies Football Club  
County Wicklow Volunteer Centre  
Cruthu  
Daughters of Charity Child and Family Services - Arklow Springboard  
Golden Circle Social Group  
Grange Con Tidy Towns  
Hollywood ICA  
Kilcoole Camogie Club  
Lacken Community Development Association  
Making Waves Youth Theatre  
Mens Shed Kilcoole  
Purple House Cancer Support  
Rathnew Community Centre  
Roundwood & District Athletic Club  
Roundwood Men's Shed  
Roundwood Scouts  
Shillelagh Community Games  
Valleymount GAA  
Vartry Angling Club  
Wicklow Aquanauts(Bray divers)  
Wicklow Dementia Support  
Wicklow Rapid Response  
Wicklow Regatta Festival  
Wicklow SPCA  
Wicklow Town Active Retired Assoc  
Wicklow Travellers Group CLG