



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NETWORK



Falling Through the Cracks

a look at

Hidden Poverty in Co. Wicklow

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

HIDDEN POVERTY in CO. WICKLOW

ACCOMMODATION
COMMUNICATION & ISOLATION
FOOD

POVERTY

JOIN US TO LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD.

WHEN: MONDAY 17TH OCTOBER
FROM 7.30PM TO 9PM
WHERE: ONLINE

1 ¹⁰⁰ POVERTY

EVENT TO MARK INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY

17th October 2022

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 402 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 & Recreation Partnership, Co Wicklow Volunteer Centre, County Wicklow Partnership, South East Fisheries & Local Action Group, Ring a Link, Wicklow Heritage Forum, and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee. PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector are prioritised within local policy processes.

Introducing County Wicklow Partnership & Croi Rath Naoi

County Wicklow Community Partnership receives SICAP (Social Inclusion Community Action Programme) funding from the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development. This funding is used specifically to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. SICAP addresses high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted, innovative and locally led approaches. It supports disadvantaged communities and individuals including unemployed people, people living in deprived areas, people with disabilities, single parent families, people on a low income, members of the Traveller and Roma community and other disadvantaged groups such as new communities. The funded area is known as LOT 15-2 by Local Electoral Areas (LEA) is as follows: Arklow LEA, Wicklow LEA – 210 Ukrainian, and Baltinglass LEA.

Croi Rath Naoi is County Wicklow Partnerships funded (through SICAP) Community Development Project based in Rathnew Village. This project works in collaboration with Wicklow Public Participation Network through the Women Of Wicklow Social Inclusion Network, coordinated for Lot 15-5, to support various Local Women's Groups in the county.

Background and Context for “Falling Through the Cracks”

Throughout the world October the 17th is marked as The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The day presents an opportunity to promote dialogue and understanding between people living in and at risk of poverty and their communities.

“It represents an opportunity to acknowledge the efforts and struggles of people living in poverty, a chance for them to make their concerns heard and a moment to recognise that people are in the forefront in the fight against poverty.” (United Nations, Report of the Secretary General, A/61/308, para. 58).

Dignity for all in practice is the umbrella theme of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty for 2022-2023. The dignity of the human being is not only a fundamental right in itself but constitutes the basis of all other fundamental rights. Therefore, “Dignity” is not an abstract concept: it belongs to each and every one. Today, many people living in persistent poverty experience their dignity being denied and disrespected ([International Day for the Eradication of Poverty | United Nations](#))

Aims and Objectives

Aim: To facilitate an opportunity to raise awareness of hidden poverty in Co Wicklow particularly in the areas of accommodation; food poverty; and isolation.

Objectives:

- To share information and supports within Co Wicklow communities
- To inform PPN submissions on consultations
- To inform PPN Representatives on county policy and decision-making bodies
- To inform Co Wicklow Partnership Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme of emerging issues on the ground through the community (in their lot) that relate to Food Poverty, Social Isolation and Accommodation.
- To inform other agencies active in the relevant areas in Co Wicklow

Acknowledgements

Co Wicklow PPN & Co Wicklow Partnership would like to extend our thanks to our presenters -

- Food Poverty: Hilary Sharpe, a community activist based in the Arklow area working in the area of food poverty
- Accommodation: Denise Cahill, Bray Family Resource & Development Centre & Wicklow Travellers Group, & Niamh Wogan, Bray Family Resource & Development Centre
- Isolation: Paul Brennan, East Coast Samaritans

A special thank you -

to all our community group members, service providers and elected representatives who joined in our discussions

Presentations

Food Poverty: Hilary Sharpe

We work with Food Cloud through Aldi, & Lidl in Arklow, Gorey & Wicklow to collect food and distribute it to families in need. The Bridgewater Shopping Centre provides us with space to coordinate our operations.

We are currently supporting approximately 50 families and are experiencing a growing need resulting in some families being on a waiting list.

A significant number of families are now faced with a choice of buying food, paying bills or ensuring the family home is warm. We are increasingly seeing parents going without food to ensure their children are fed as well as seeing evidence of children who are obviously hungry.

Along with food we are now being asked to provide heavy coats and extra bedding so that families and stay warm.

Lately we have noticed that the volume of food being donated has reduced. We believe this could be due to other charities applying for food, as well as more families who would have normally shopped in prime time hours, waiting for food to be reduced in the evening.

We have also noticed that people who in the past supported food banks by supplying food are now in the unfortunate situation of needing that support themselves.

Accommodation: Nimah Wogan & Denise Cahill

Hidden homelessness & multi-occupancy – can cause mental illness depression and anxiety among the family unit. Grandmothers become mothers to a new generation. Mothers can become detached from the responsibility of parenting their children. Privacy becomes an issue. Poverty becomes prevalent as the bills get higher, the cost of living goes up and more mouths need to be fed. Children who are now adults don't want to be told how to live their lives, but can't escape their parents. Life revolves around the younger ones in the house again. The feeling that you home is no longer you own causing arguments and stress

Emergency homeless system – contrary to popular belief this is not free. For the families in this system who manage to get a permanent room, they must pay a rent to the local authority. Add to this the fact that where you stay may not be near the area your kids go to school and you are now paying extra costs for public transport. There are no cooking facilities in hotel rooms so take away is usually the food of necessity. All these things keep you in a never ending poverty trap

Rough Sleeping – this can come with complete chaos. Criminality can increase as a person steals the things they need to survive. Addiction can become an issue, but not always. The lack of support to help you access payments. The need to be able to ring the emergency beds line and even if you get a hostel bed it can be that they are dangerous places for those accessing them.

What we rarely see is the social impact homelessness has on those affected by the current situation. Families living in grossly overcrowded situations, children with families of their own now in multi occupancy situations and expected by our local authorities to be grateful for the roof they have over their head. People who fall into that grey area of not being able to afford to rent or buy but earning too much to access social housing lists. These are all hidden homeless who show up in no published figures therefore keeping the homeless figures actually lower than they truly are.

Social effects of homelessness include: stigma; shame; criminality; bullying; hunger; poverty; poor mental health; and addiction

There is an ongoing issue of affordability in the town (Bray). Currently the average price for a 2-bed apartment is €1800 per month which is significantly more than the approved HAP limit and out of reach for anyone renting who is not in receipt of housing support.

There is a shortage of both private and social units. There is also discrimination against HAP tenants as letting agencies and many landlords will not consider renting properties to them.

The lack of accommodation / housing is having a devastating impact on young parents who are unable to secure accommodation for their own family unit, resulting with the vast majority living in their parents/ family members' homes. Issues include

- Overcrowding with several different generations unable to have any personal space.
- Lack of opportunity to develop and practice their parenting skills/ the role of parent is taken over by the grandparent/ older family member.
- Lack of opportunity for the young parent to manage and run their own household e.g. budgeting.
- Often the young parents are living separately in their respective family home so there is no chance to develop their own family unit.
- Lack of physical space for the child's physical development / refining motor skills etc.
- Huge issues with growing tension between the young parent and other siblings. This is especially evident when there are teenagers in the house. There is an unfair expectation on teenagers to stay quiet and facilitate the bedtime and other requirements of the children of their siblings.
- Young people's development/ transition into independent living and the responsibilities that come with it are being compromised and the skills and responsibilities that come with looking after yourself are non-existent. Also, they are missing out on opportunities to develop and form loving and sexual relationships with their partners/ prospective partners.
- Children are not getting the chance to have their fathers living with them and being involved in their daily and night-time routines
- Covid exacerbated the problem – huge tensions in households when people couldn't get out added to breakdowns in family relationships which are continuing today

We have seen a few instances where young people under 18 have presented to us as homeless. In these cases, procedures are very difficult to navigate and have caused a huge

amount of stress and delayed the young people's needs being addressed. The only accommodation for those vulnerable under 18s is in the city centre. These are not suitable and safe for young people who are already at risk.

There is a significant lack of adequate out of hour's social work services.

Isolation: Paul Brennan

Samaritans is a free emotional support service that is operated 24 hours per day, every day by volunteers. They receive approximately 500,000 calls per year which equates to approximately 1,600 calls for help per day and over 100,000 voluntary hours. Samaritans have 21 local branches across Ireland. Samaritans work in communities, prisons, schools, and festivals.

The primary role of Samaritans is to listen and dispel feelings of isolation. Where possible they will also signpost people to other support structures

According to figures compiled by the Samaritans while comparing call statistics for Christmas eve, Christmas day and Boxing Day, calls were up 38% in 2020 in comparison to 2019 and 2019 showed a 33% increase on the previous year. The majority of these calls were contributed to feelings of isolation and loneliness. This was followed physical and mental health challenges and family issues. Over the 3-day Christmas period in 2020 Samaritans answered 3,200 calls and emails, approximately 45 calls per hour.

Contact with the Samaritans indicate the following are the main contributors to feelings of isolation & loneliness:

- Long term illness/physical & mental health
- Coronavirus/lockdowns
- Disabilities
- Transportation issues
- De-population of rural areas – those left behind
- Exposure to domestic /community violence / Safety & security fears
- Unemployment
- Age & break up of the nuclear family
- Lack of confidence
- Loss of family and friends
- Poverty
- Marginalisation / exclusion
- Poor nutrition leading to physical & mental health issues

Thematic discussion Groups Feed Back Points and Recommendations.

Food Poverty

Volunteers are now recipients of the food they used to distribute – New Poor

Voluntary agencies have lost volunteers since covid due to burn out; ill health; natural retirement due to age

Deficit in West Wicklow of supply of food distribution and collection responses. No Food Cloud.

West Wicklow Accessibility is only available to persons who know where it is through HSE etc

Meals and Wheel's through referrals only Arklow

Well established groups providing food in Arklow area e.g. Arklow Resource Centre; Meals and Wheels and Friendship Local community Group for distribution

Meals and Wheels in Newcastle

Food cloud just launched

Newcastle Centre has a HSE Approved kitchen for response and volunteers

Newcastle has a community Café

Newcastle community Centre has a community space with access to kitchen

Newcastle Centre has access to cookery classes for healthy nutrition and budgeting

Newcastle has a Community Garden space just launched a programme "GROW COOK & Eat" that is Intergenerational (local community groups inclusive of youth) in remit under social inclusion.

Bray Community development Projects sign posting to provision – also breakfast clubs targeted responses in their area

Two Christian churches providing food donations

Bray Partnership targeted families in need during covid

Police have a register from covid in Bray area that community providers can use to target and check in with vulnerable persons living alone

Five loafs provide food

Youth Services Bray targeted response

HSE Slainte Care Bray targeted sign posting and response under nutrition

Greystones Meals and wheels targeted

Bray Area Partnership SPECs targeted for children

Wicklow town Ceart Wicklow Traveller Group Community Development Project – targeted approach

Rathnew National School DEIS new status 2 – targeted for children in need – school lunches etc

Food Banks food is of such poor quality that people are insulted and dump it

Hidden Harms

Malnutrition

Poor diet

Poor concentration

Stigma when sourcing food

Feeling the cold due to poor diet

Cost to Access Services too high rurally

Can't afford to travel to collect food needed for work and school – cost prohibitive

No budgeting skills living with parents who are now controlling household to make ends meet

Vincent DePaul – having to contact Dublin for appropriate person – volunteers needed people falling through the cracks

You had to be in the know rurally to avail of certain food interventions – danger of isolation perception and nothing available to you as you don't qualify you are not a target group for government interventions.

Recommendations

Hard Copy accessible directive of accessible Countywide Food Services available through community notice Boards, Libraries, HSE; GAA etc

Local collection points and delivery to homes as people cannot afford to travel

A coordinated approach to join up all the services with one contact person for information

A Grow Cook & Eat Community Garden Project in each small town or area

More distribution of healthy good food to the new hidden poor needed – those who were once considered managing

Standards applied if possible, to food banks as some of its donations were substandard and couldn't be used – hugely problematic as lots of hunger

Accommodation

Accommodation is a fundamental right.

Finland operates under the principal of homing people in need to stop the social problems caused by homelessness.

Providing accommodation will stem many of the health and social problems experienced by many people today.

Loss of identity

Issue not only with social housing but also planning permission issues – Delays in all matters relating to planning is causing subsequent issues with overcrowding etc which leads to further hidden harms (Isolated farming community)

No step-down facilities in the county for DV – Return to abuse as no other options

No Family Hub in the county

Emergency accommodation in Arklow is mouldy and full of vermin- needs immediate addressing

Intergenerational overcrowding is causing relationships to fall apart and leading to other forms of DV

Trauma for rest centres, direct provision

Issues regarding Traveller accommodation

Racism is creeping in regarding modular homes/ refugees etc.

System failure

WCC failure 74 boarded up houses in Bray

Hidden poverty in Greystones

HAP is major issue

Cost of refurb is immense

Delays in accessing housing adaptation etc

There are restrictions to building houses outside the metropolitan area, but there can be zoning for factories

The planning process can't take time and is an irritant to development

Social low-cost housing does not turn much profit for private builders

The state has lagged in building houses for the last 10 years

In the private market prices have rocketed and young people may not be able to afford to buy their own house, they will also not get sufficient mortgage from the banks

Recommendations

Need forward planning- Look at rightsizing model in housing for all

Good pilot in Bray OPDs at front with courtyard used as a downsizing project free up 3 bed family homes.

Need more information about support services and how to sign post people to appropriate services.

When rehoming people in safe accommodation they should not be moved away from the support networks they already have in place

Isolation

Due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of calls to Samaritans statistical data cannot be gathered or analysed to either identify or map social issues.

Samaritans must self-fund and are in competition with other charities for limited funding

Concern was raised that the community effort during the pandemic has reduced and this has had an impact on those who had become used to it making them feel even more lonely.

The sense of loss during the pandemic increased loneliness

A person can feel isolated even when part of a busy household.

Feelings of isolation can be caused by: digital poverty i.e. being unable (for various reasons) to access information, support, and social interaction using digital devices & processes; lack of transport causing access difficulties; being unable to provide/participate in social & recreational activities; having different cultures/habits/beliefs/practises than others.

Covid showed what is possible regarding connecting and supporting communities. Sustainability wasn't factored into these supports. There is a need to validate and enable the permanency of community supports.

Recommendations

More awareness is needed of community supports including Samaritans and more people should consider volunteering with them.

A dog can help with loneliness by being a companion and also being a conversation opener with other dog owners.

Pets in general can help to stem feelings of loneliness and isolation.

There is a significant number of widows living in the areas covered by Bray Family Resource & Development Centre. During Covid the centre staff and volunteers conducted door to door visits and when appropriate started outdoor coffee mornings. These groups have continued to operate since restrictions lifted.

The community response to the Covid pandemic was phenomenal. Some of those that had not engaged in voluntary activities before Covid have retained their voluntary contributions where possible.

Zoom/online communications have played a significant role in connecting people.

The voluntary effort from young people during Covid was highly commended, particularly their support for older members of their community

Communities should become more aware of hidden loneliness and make time to chat to people in their community more.