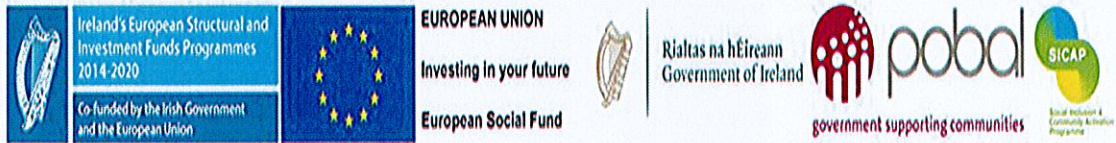




SOUTH KERRY DEVELOPMENT
PARTNERSHIP CLG.



South Kerry Development Partnership CLG. Lot 19-3

SICAP Case Study 2020

Delivering Community Responses to COVID-19 through SICAP.

Goal 1 & Goal 2

Case Study Background – Social Inclusion in South Kerry during Covid-19

Covid19 – 19 restrictions over the past few months have brought unprecedented changes in the way in which people work, socialise, interact and take part in daily activities. Local development companies have shown that we are able to adapt how we provide supports to those we work with, while responding to the national guidelines, this is a positive and shows the strength of the SICAP programme and the flexibility of those working within it. Restrictions imposed by the national government to safeguard its people from the virus have altered the way the SICAP programme is delivered locally. On March 27th the country went into lockdown which meant all SKDP staff were asked to work from home and not attend any meetings face to face or visit any SICAP clients either at home or in public places. A local forum was developed by the Local Authority to lead the co-ordination of Covid-19 community supports and the SKDP CEO participated on this forum representing all SKDP programmes including SICAP. In Kerry this forum built on existing structures such as the LCDC and PPN which meant that the supports were put in place in a timely fashion rather than starting from scratch.

Local emergency response will be led by Local authorities who will bring together all the state agencies, as well as local community groups, charities and volunteers, to ensure that all of our citizens get the help they need at this exceptional time (Leo Varadkar, 27th March 2020).

This case study examines how SICAP was delivered in the first half of 2020 during the pandemic and the lessons learned from this time. This case study will showcase the innovation used to overcome issues and how SICAP assisted with providing supports to the most vulnerable in our communities, collaborating with partner agencies and other SKDP programmes.

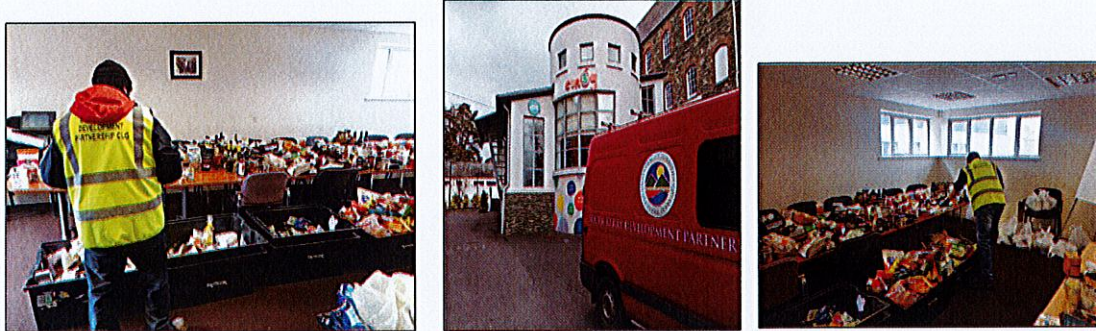
Goal 1

Action – People in Disadvantaged Areas

During the Covid19 19 pandemic the needs of families changed and priorities were shifted back to the necessities of life, activities to keep children occupied was something that was required and welcomed by every family we engaged with. Through consultation with the Family Resource Centres and TUS Supervisors we identified a number of families who were grateful for activity packs early on. 16 families availed of the packs – which assisted up to 35 children in the Killarney Area. These packs included a number of documents for families and support guides to help them during the most uncertain time of 2020.

In April Kerry County Council announced Covid19 Emergency Response Funding through which we applied for funding to supply more activity packs and food parcels to those in need. The SICAP team consulted with the local FRCs to see what the priorities were in their areas. In Killarney the priority needs were identified as food bags as the Family Resource Centre has a waiting list for those interested in getting support through Food Share. The food purchased was distributed to those who are on this waiting list. In Kenmare, the FRC had been working with all the families in need so the focus for that area were activity packs which were delivered to families in the Direct Provision Centre (15 children), Lone Parent Families (5 families, 6 children) and families whose parent is a participant on the TUS scheme (7 families, 15 children), as well as families involved with a disability

group that the SICAP Team supports. These families also received a bag of foodie treats that were kindly donated to SKDP from TKMaxx Killarney.



During the lockdown it was obvious that those with intellectual disabilities were really missing out on their activities, to try remedy that the Community Development Officer contracted a facilitator to deliver a 5 week programme online that included art, exercise, short stories/films and news/documentaries, the programme was designed to support people with disabilities with their communication, fine motor skills and life skills. These videos were viewed with the first week alone being watched by upwards of 40 individuals. The idea was to follow on from these workshops with an exhibition of artwork for people to enjoy.

The Community Development Officer received training as a Lead Worker for the SKDP Killarney office and so has a set of skills now that are offered to community groups hoping to reopen the doors to their facility. SICAP funding has also been used to buy supplies to ensure the health and wellbeing for all those using those centres – this has allowed community houses and community centres to look forward to reopening and get back on track.

Action – Mental Health and Rural Isolation

Although the Men’s Sheds were not meeting, the Community Development Officer remained in contact with the groups as it was a particularly worrying time for them as many of their members were cocooning during the pandemic. The members of the Sheds showed great resilience to the lockdown and were very eager to get back up and running. A list of suggested activities was distributed to all groups to help keep them in contact with each other and to keep busy. When restrictions were lifted groups were encouraged to take part in outdoor activities and events they could safely organise, like local fishing trips etc. The enthusiasm of the members to get back into to the Sheds is testament to the need for these groups for everyone.

In early 2020 funding was obtained from Healthy Ireland to recruit a rural men’s outreach officer to extend out the SICAP action of engaging with isolated rural men. The interview process took place in early March 2020 just before lock down. The appointment of the officer was deferred until the Covid19- 19 lockdown restrictions were lifted and the officer DJ Moran began working with the rural men in late July 2020. DJ began updating the current data base and making phone contact with the men. The rural men welcomed the contact and for many it was the first social contact they had for a while.

The normal activity of day and overnight outings and social gatherings were not possible due to Covid19- 19 restrictions on travel and social distancing recommendations. Following a lot of outreach work and careful planning local events such as walks along the beaches and visits to local attractions were organised. These events were well received even though the numbers were restricted to 15 at outdoor gatherings at the time. The rural men expressed a desire for more of these events to be organised as most of their normal social gathering opportunities were now closed or restricted such as marts, pubs, mass, football games etc.



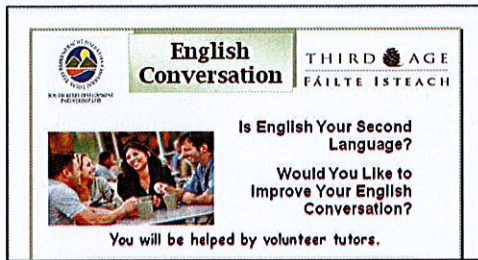
Previous outing to Croke Park – South Kerry Rural Men’s Group

Action - New Communities

In mid-March – just as the country was going into lockdown a Hotel in Cahersiveen town was opened as a Direct Provision Centre. This was a very controversial issue locally due to a number of issues, including the fact that there was an outbreak of the virus in the hotel. By the end of the summer all residents have been moved out of the centre again. In March a letter of welcome was sent to the Centre by the CDO in English, French and Georgian – the three most common languages. Although unable to visit the centre during lockdown the Community Development Officer supported the residents through whatever means possible, regular contact was maintained with the HSE staff working in the centre - hygiene packs were supplied to some residents (6 adults, 1 baby) identified who had not yet received their PPS number and so had no access to a payment. At the same time age appropriate activity packs were delivered to the 16 children in the centre to provide them with colouring books, arts & craft supplies and toys etc.

Since the gradual reopening of society the Community Development Officer linked in with other agencies to make plans for supporting the individuals in Cahersiveen, however now all those plans are cancelled due to the closure of the centre. The CDO arranged a meeting for residents with the co-ordinator of the South Kerry Local Employment Service in July to support those eligible to access their services and advice.

One tutor in Kenmare continued to deliver Failte Isteach online however this proved difficult due to lack of wifi etc. A number of the individuals that were previously engaged with had been moved out of local DP Centres to allow for extra space during lockdown, we don’t know if they will be returning. Also as reported under Action 1, the 15 children in Atlantic Lodge in Kenmare received activity packs through the KCC Covid19 Emergency Respond Fund.



Action – Lone Parents

CDO has a good rapport with participants and this relationship with them ensured honest communication. This time has seen an exponential rise in many social issues, basic needs, poverty, transportation, violence and abuse. Special emphasis was placed on the first 3 stages of our planning framework, basic physical needs, safety, connections and supports. Many participants regressed on the hierarchy of needs, these low income households with all family members at home had need for additional food. In collaboration with Family resource Centre, St Vincent De Paul and KCC food boxes were regularly distributed to our participants during lock down, in some instances including activity packs for children.



Telephone contact was maintained with individuals throughout this period. A small handmade soap and motivational message was included in one delivery again to reassure people that they were doing a great job and that they need not feel alone. The worry for families' members abroad/away was a major concern, in some instances where there was financial hardships and parent didn't want to accept "Food Box" phone credit was purchased for the teenager in the house thereby allowing the parent this money to go towards food. The strain on some households became more of a problem, with CDO receiving an urgent call for assistance where family were in danger. This participant was advised to contact Gardai and immediate meeting arranged with Family support worker who involved the relevant statutory agencies e.g. ADAPT. Gardai subsequently assisted the family to move from the home. Despite contact numbers on our Social Media, TV advertising etc. the call came to someone they could trust, definitive proof of the benefits of SICAP programme.

Action -Voluntary work experience for people with disabilities in community projects and on Social farms.

South Kerry Development Partnership was contacted by Marks and Spencer in Killarney in late May 2020 to see if they could take unsold food and distribute it to low income families. While the distribution of food to low income families has had a very positive effect on the families the project has the potential to provide work experience for people with disabilities. St John of Gods and Kerry Parents and Friends were contacted and both agreed to place people with disabilities on voluntary work experience on the project. Their work will involve sorting the food each morning into the various bags that go out to the families.

SKDP purchased fridges and freezers to store the food and linked up with the Ballydribeen residence association who agreed to provide the base for this daily project. Food is collected 5 days a week from M&S in Killarney at 7.30pm in the evening. It is stored overnight and bagged and distributed the following morning. All SICAP officers have identified people for the food, based on their knowledge of the family income situation, the HSE locally have also identified other families and individuals who now avail of the food. The food is very well received by all and the full spread of the SICAP target groups are reached by the project including low income families, one parent families, members of the traveller community, long term unemployed, and people suffering from poor mental health.

We are currently working with St John of Gods and Kerry Parents and Friends around the placement of people with disabilities on voluntary work experience in this project. This work has been difficult due to the Covid19- 19 lock down in the spring and the ongoing restrictions which have affected the services provided for people with disabilities. The current participants on voluntary work experience and on social farms are starting to look at getting back on the farms. Some have resumed their voluntary work experience on the farms and it is hoped that more will return before the end of the year.

Action -Support the development of Social Enterprises in South Kerry

Prior to Covid19, in January 2020 an additional allocation of €15,000 under the DRCD small capital grants scheme for social enterprise was approved for Listry Community Council CLG. Grant documentation was prepared and site visit to Listry Community Council was undertaken on 2nd March 2020 to conduct inspection of the premises and arrange completion and signing of contract documentation. All initial contract payments for the successful SKDP applicants under the DRCD small capital grants Scheme for Social Enterprises were completed. This provided an initial drawdown of 50% of the grant approved and was a significant assistance with group's cash-flow requirements, which were strained and significantly negatively impacted by Covid19. Activity under the DRCD Small Capital Grants Scheme for the successful SKDP applicants – ceased during Covid19 restrictions. However an extension was granted under the DRCD Small Capital Grants Scheme – with a final date for reimbursement up to November 1st 2020. Contact was maintained with all SKDP successful applicants through the Covid19 crises and all existing contracts were amended to provide for the additional extension period.

Goal 2

Action – Self Employed Capital Supports & Information & Networking

Those on the BTWEA Scheme were shepherded greatly during this uncertain time to pause their self-employment and relevant payments and access PUP from the Dept. of Social Protection. (Emergency Pandemic Payment). This was successfully achieved by SKDP Enterprise Officers liaising directly with Case Officers in Social Protection and completing relevant forms.

A change in the delivery style of the SKDP Enterprise suite of supports whereby the SYOB Courses became available online with the Mentor via Zoom. This allowed existing and potential clients to continue with their Business Planning Process. This course is a prerequisite in order for clients to access the BTWEA Scheme. The new delivery medium enabled the clients to continue to plan and prepare properly with expert advice for their new business proposal

All clients were informed and advised to positively approach their “downtime” and upskill so as to strengthen their offering on their return. This was achieved by liaising with South Kerry Skillnet directly and imparting information pertaining to their relevant “Fit2Work” courses etc.

Attendance each Friday by SKDP Enterprise Officers on the KCC/Kerry LEO Business Support Line enabled the SKDP Enterprise Officers to provide our own clients as well as county wide businesses with useful information pertaining to various Supports such as Grants, Mentoring Avenues etc. available to businesses during and post lockdown.

Action – Employment Engagement

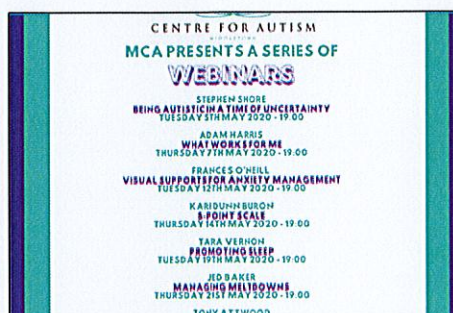
Over the last few months all clients met with have been contacted to ensure where they could access PUP – Emergency Pandemic Payment, that they had done so.

Similarly the Employer Liaison Officer liaised with South Kerry Skillnet in relation to their “Fit2Work” courses in order to help offer these to both the unemployed and the clients whom accessed PUP during lockdown in order to encourage them to improve and strengthen their skillset offering to potential employers.



Zoom Networking was established with County wide employers in order to try to develop mutual beneficial relationships whereby they could learn from each other during this uncertain time but also form potential contacts and networks that may perhaps enable future collaborations and offerings post lock down.

Many day activities and training opportunities were closed and therefore parents and carers had young people at home with them without any respite and this caused additional stress in lots of homes. The education officer liaised with Middletown Autism to access a suite of workshops for parents and professionals delivered online and through local services ensured that this information was sent to those who could benefit.



Action – Supporting Families Supporting Education

Children and young people in education had their normal delivery of lessons abruptly interrupted and the structure, safety and interaction of every day schooling changed drastically. It is as if Covid-19 ripped off the bandage and all the gaps and inadequacies became visible. Where children attended a breakfast club, had their homework checked, got a meal at lunch time in School and attended after school clubs where a hot meal was given they were ensured of their needs being met. When Covid-19 meant that all these supports were taken away, the families involved experienced both a food poverty and educational poverty. The education officer was inundated with requests for food, laptops to access school work, printing to enable children complete school work and access to additional tutoring. Children and young people who had access to additional resources in School were dependent on parents to provide for their educational needs and this increased stress and pressure in homes.

Building on previous years delivering homework support programmes the education officer was able to ensure that those most disadvantaged could have access online or on the phone to supports from the bank of tutors available. Local businesses were canvassed for any additional pc's or laptops which could be given to families. The education officer liaised with TUSLA and the local FRC's to ensure families had regular delivery of food boxes and had the know how to enable them cook nutritious meals.

Lessons Learned

The impact of Covid-19 will be seen for a long time to come and there are crucial lessons to be learned from this time. The principles underlying social inclusion and community development were put into play to ensure that those most impacted got supports and that a bottom-up approach was used to meet the needs in local areas. Officers ensured that any eligible group or individual applied for Covid-19 supports through the many payments and grants given at national and county level. The work carried out throughout previous programmes which built trust in local communities made it possible to put timely supports in place to ease the burden of Covid19.

Acting as a sounding board and a signposting guide for individuals, although part of our working day typically was really welcomed during lockdown – being able to refer people for Foodshare or to the KCC phone line – linking in with people who we would have worked with previously. Our days consisted of getting enquiries about fixing leaking taps and how to use WhatsApp video calling so people could keep in contact with their families who live further away to making sure families weren't going without food. Our ability to adapt to situations has always been an important aspect of our roles, but this has been proven during the last few months as a necessity. To be able to change gears quickly and adapt to our surroundings is an important skill for SICAP Officers. We have adjusted our ways of working, of linking in with groups and encouraging them to link in with others – the stronger sense of community and togetherness (although apart) has been encouraging to witness across this pandemic. The CDO called people up for a chat rather than about a specific fund or activity which was welcomed and brought us all a little bit closer.

The SICAP Team continue to monitor the Government guidelines to see what sort of activities we can do moving forward. The lack of social outlets for us all during lockdown highlighted the importance of the programmes that we run – our programmes can sometimes be an individual's only social outlet during the week through which people can build their connections and networks. People's lack of access to technology which proved vital for us all in staying connected throughout 2020 was a massive issue our team had to overcome – to address this we applied for funding to deliver a laptop loan scheme through the Community Enhancement Programme. The impact on individuals cannot be quantified, it has the ripple effect of benefiting those around them. The massive impact Covid19 has had on people's health and wellbeing, the appetite for social interaction outweighs the safety fears or strict adherence to guidelines. The digital skills shortage and dislike of online activities excluded some participants has led CDO to arrange with KETB that our first workshop will be on digital skills. The overall impact of activities and initiatives such as those outlined in this case study that seek to improve 'quality of life' for individuals should not be underestimated and further resources are required to continue the excellent work that has been done in establishing and working with these marginalised groups to date. SICAP's adaptation of their approach to Community Development work and in particular Group work has been pivotal to the success of the programme during Covid19 and lockdown, ensuring we are emerging with our groups not only maintained but with an appetite for building for the future.

Mental health and wellbeing needs of SICAP target groups were emphasized during Covid-19 and in particular during the strict lockdown period. Many of the SKDP initiatives being rolled out over this current and the previous programme enhance people's wellbeing and we are now challenged with ensuring the delivery of these initiatives into the future taking into account any restrictions which

may remain. There are many lessons to be taken from this trying time but SICAP has proven to be best placed to support the most vulnerable at a local level and be an adaptive programme to meet people's needs in collaboration with partner agencies and support networks. We have found new ways to deliver our message and strengthened the existing networks prioritizing people's most basic needs of food, education, employment and social contact.

As emphasized by the United Nations Secretary-General, during the launch of a COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan on 23 March 2020 *"We must come to the aid of the ultra-vulnerable – millions upon millions of people who are least able to protect themselves. This is a matter of basic human solidarity. It is also crucial for combating the virus. This is the moment to step up for the vulnerable."*