

INSPIRATION IN EDUCATION

CORK'S PIONEERING MODEL OF

LEARNER-LED COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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Working Paper prepared by the Cork City-Centre /
Citywide Community Education Network

PREPARED BY

Based on submissions received from member groups of the Cork City Centre/Citywide Community Education Network (SHEP Social Health Education Project; The Lantern Community Project; The Good Shepherd Services; The Basement Resource Centre; Altrusa; Welcome English; Cork Simon Community)

Drafted by Liam McCarthy, Colette O'Connor, Norma Roche & Charlotte O'Donovan

SUBMITTED TO

Cork ETB, Cork City Partnership, Cork City Community Education Network Forum, Former Adult Education Board, AONTAS, NALA, CESCA, Probation, HSE Community Work Department and TUSLA, Community Mental Health, DSP, LCDC, City Centre Network member own organisations and others

CONTACT

Norma Roche, Chairperson Cork City Centre/Citywide Network - 086-0236442

Liam McCarthy, Secretary Cork City Centre/Citywide Network - 021-4666180

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, propelled by concerns held by member groups of the City Centre Network that Community Education in Cork City was facing threats, work was done to compile literature and submissions that evidenced the benefits of community based adult education, particularly the BTEI, Partnership and Adult Literacy and Community Education (ALCE) streams. The organisations informing this paper work in mainline provision of essential services and provide community education funded through the Education Training Board and Cork City Partnership. The network members meet on a monthly basis with a remit to

- to plan collectively for the more effective delivery of community education
- to advocate for community education in Cork City Centre and raise the profile of the networks activities
- to lobby to ensure it is adequately resourced

The network members were anticipating changes in the field arising from such process as:

- Alignment and the subsuming of community and local development into the broader activity of local authorities
- Rationalising of the VEC (ETB) structure and the emergence of SOLAS
- Further anticipated resourcing constrains across the community and voluntary sector in addition to the already substantial 35% reduction (Harvey, 2012)
- Corraling of budgets towards a narrowed education focus on back to work initiatives.

The member organisations of the Cork City Centre/Citywide Network provide services for many of the hardest to reach groups, people who

suffer multiple disadvantage (high proportions of unemployed, poor educational experiences, high poverty rates) and particular target groups with specific vulnerabilities. The provision of services to these groups, which includes educational initiatives, is an issue of social justice and not of work based readiness. To apply broad mainstream educational and welfare policy directives (e.g. relating to work place readiness and progression requirements) to these groups, particularly as regards the role of community education:

- Misinterprets the needs of the groups and prioritises high-level policy making as best placed to discern needs over the organisations who work with them day to day
- Further compounds issues of social injustice in that it withdraws further resources from these groups, resources that had been hard won over many years
- Undermines the policy of workplace readiness, by not recognising the needs for educational and other services and activities that address the essential areas of human need related to esteem, confidence, social connectedness and relationship - essential conditions for successful progression on the pathway towards employment
- Stifles the ethos of community education and appropriates for economic ends in the main, a stream of education that is intended for other purposes of social change, empowerment and community ownership

The network members interpret in the policy discourse, and are open to an exploration of the accuracy of this interpretation, suggestions that community education activity was not meeting the needs of groups, was not leading to progression, was not reaching certain target

groups and that evidence of efficacy was not being satisfactorily demonstrated. From the network's perspective each of these suggestions could be directly challenged.

Further there is an obvious collision of world views, and an emerging gap between higher level policy and grass roots practice that is in urgent need of repair. It is towards these ends that this paper was initiated. As time progressed issues related to 'mandatory referrals' within the field of front-line resource provision; implications of proposed tutor contracting arrangements for community group autonomy in choosing course tutors in the City; the place of community education in

representative and participative decision making fora; and responses to continued cutbacks in funding pressed for policy attention and are themes in the paper.

With reference to all the official policy in Ireland related to the philosophy for community education, the City Centre/Citywide Network argues that we must work together locally to address the dilution in practice of the essential differentiating features of community education related to - empowerment, social justice, social change, overcoming barriers to educational disadvantage, self-direction, community based provision and identification of needs and its radical potential for social action and civic engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this paper we addressed the key concerns of our network members and recommend that the ETB, Cork City Partnership & Cork City Community & Voluntary sector:

- Re-affirm the massive benefit to participants, community groups, organisations and institutional partners in Cork City of the approach to partnership and ownership by the different stakeholders involved in community education, by further developing the Cork City education network structures. The uniqueness of this approach is reflected in that UNESCO have identified Cork as one of 12 cities as case studies of good practice in lifelong learning, one of only three case study cities in Europe
- Develop and deepen through a process of dialogue, our shared understanding of principles, theories of actions, values and outcomes of community education
- Take serious cognisance of existing body of evidence related to the place and efficacy of Community Education, exploring further together what are to count as valued outcomes of this work and how these can be 'evidenced' in ways meaningful to all stakeholders
- Increase to pre-2008 levels at a minimum, the resources and reach of community education in the City as a vehicle for social inclusion towards educational attainment serving to build both personal and community capacities
- Recognise that the true cost of providing community education courses extends well beyond the funding of the tutor hours
- Work through a spirit of partnership that harnesses our joint effort to influence national policy and to operationalised it favourable to local circumstances
- Implement a policy agenda centred on the work done by Cork Community Education Network Forum (*Our Priorities for the Next 5 Years 2014-2019*) and Aontas

- Confine mandatory referrals to specifically dedicated groups and courses

The City Centre/Citywide network is seeking the opportunity to develop a dialogue and explore all local stakeholder perspectives on the policy issues. We advocate that the ETB and Cork City Partnership engage with the Cork Community Education Network Forum towards finding the resources to collaboratively advance the work on the priority areas that have been identified. Indeed the re-establishment of the Adult Education Board would be a very helpful step towards the end of developing this dialogue.

While the paper currently stands as a separate submission prepared by the Cork City Centre/Citywide Network, one of the 11 members

networks of the Cork Community Education Network Forum, they are to consider the document imminently.

DEEPENING THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Established within AONTAS, the Community Education Network of over 130 education organisations, has a shared definition of community education as:

“Community education is a process of personal and community transformation, empowerment, challenge, social change and collective responsiveness. It is community-led reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their community. Through its ethos and holistic approach community education builds the capacity of groups to engage in developing a teaching and learning process that is creative, participative and needs-based. Community education is grounded on principles of justice, equality and inclusiveness. It differs from general adult education provision due to its political and radical focus.”(AONTAS, 2011, p.3)

Ally this with the DES (2012) policy statement on its vision for Community Education

“Community Education can transform individual lives and contributes to social cohesion. It enables civil society to play a key role in education with local groups taking responsibility for, and playing a role in organising courses, deciding on programme content and delivering tuition. It provides opportunities for intergenerational learning, builds self-confidence and self-esteem and for those with low skills and a negative experience of formal education, it can provide a stepping stone for further learning, qualifications and rewarding work” (Department of Education and Skills, 2012, Operational Guidelines for Providers, Community Education Programme)

Both these statements emphasise the personal and community transformative potential of education and its contribution to multiple layers of personal and civic life. They suggest challenges to embrace a particular way of organising to be effective, with a biasing towards learner and community leadership and responsibility for programmes. They explicitly suggest an approach with a radical element that redresses imbalances and injustices that have accumulated over time, in that such education acts as a countervailing influence to mainstream societal dynamics.

There is substantial evidence from the international field to warrant an emphasis in community education on those experiencing disadvantage in whatever form. So for example Rubensen (cited in NALA (2011)) asserts that the key to Nordic participation and achievement figures in adult education is the "very demanding equity standard" set by these countries with regard to social justice. What is more, policy emphases on reducing disadvantage are institutionalised – i.e. built into the adult education system – through the existence of structural frameworks that make it easier for disadvantaged adults to participate in adult education.'

"The Nordic welfare states feature structural conditions under which a larger group of adults, as compared to non-Nordic countries, seem to value participation... Furthermore, Nordic welfare states support a variety of targeted policy measures designed to assist adults in overcoming barriers." (2006. p.327)

Key therefore to the expression of valuing community education, as one means towards greater inclusion, is to operationalise policy into the structures of provision.

However, NALA (2011) Literature Review of International Adult Literacy Policies in proposing a:

Broad definition of human capital as "the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being" (CERI/OECD, 2001, p. 18)

- captures the ever present tension between policy expressions of values on the one hand, and operational priorities on the other, driven by resourcing and other (e.g. ideological) constraints:

"For policymakers, though, human capital is often conceived of in much more limited terms, with the focus almost exclusively on the development of skills for the economy." (p. 57)

These different views on priorities in education outcomes and processes invariably leads to tensions as regards choices and valuing of differing options in governance and decision

making arrangements – essentially between top-down approaches or bottom-up. It is worth noting in this regard that Bamber et al (2010, p.49) in their review of the international evidence base into effective community development programmes, with which community education initiatives are significantly associated, that

"There is overwhelming consensus across developed countries with mature community development sectors that the Partnership model favours good outcomes, whereby local groups of stakeholders collaborate through more or less formal structure to agree and deliver community development inputs at local level ..." Further "there is no evidence to suggest that micro-management of local activity by funders produces better results".

That said there is strong support in the review, that to achieve robust and effective programmes they need to be:

"... underpinned by clear theoretical frameworks, which make explicit the expectations around why providing input x should lead to a change in outcome Y ... with reference to existing theory about how community needs arise and how change is achieved".(p.5)

CONCLUSION

While organising arrangements need to be able to demonstrate effectiveness as Bamber et al argue from the international literature, along with this imperative, there is a need to have '...clear theoretical frameworks ...' underpinning all of the developmental activity. We can assume that such 'theories of action' relate to all of the stakeholders. Naturally we cannot assume all actors will come from the same place, but there needs to be sufficient resonance and mutuality between different theories and orientations, for coherence to emerge and to be sustained in programmes involving partnerships!

The City Centre/Citywide Network members view that the governance approach adopted for many years in Cork City, is the right orientation of these arrangements and ought to be maintained and supported institutionally. It is an approach which, in the true spirit and philosophy of community education, empowers local community actors working in partnership with the ETB and Cork City Partnership, to identify needs and plan programmes in response. The purpose here is to present a selection of the evidence of effectiveness to support this claim.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION

– CORK CITY AND WIDER

Amongst the members of our network there is a huge range of target groups – homeless girls, women and men; older people; unemployed; men; mental health recovery; immigrants; offenders; low educational achievement; literacy All organisations within the Education Networks in Cork City attempt to provide opportunities for individuals to make their own choices regarding the route they take to become a learner. In order for an individual to truly embrace such opportunities, they need to:

- have their basic needs met,
- be in a position to see the benefits of engaging in education and
- be able to engage their own capacity to take decisions that affect them.

Community education gives a space for personal growth and allows adults to make the changes they seek. Adult education changes lives; it offers people a second chance at education and gives people choices to change things for themselves. Often, many adult learners have had negative experiences of education, and this is why we need to engage with them on their level, ensuring we provide them with the tools such as self-confidence, experience of group learning, basic determination, etc. Then they will be empowered to engage at their own pace.

The approach of the network members across the City is reflected in Aontas (2009) ‘Community Education More Than Just a Course’ assertion, that the approaches taken by community organisations to access education are many, as they take into account the specific group they are working with

“[The purpose] is to provide as wide and varied educational opportunities in communities irrespective of the educational levels those people have. There is a focus on people who left school at upper secondary. [It is] aimed at addressing deficits that people would have - would initially focus on building confidence and capacity to engage with further education opportunities.”

This diversity of need and approach is reflected in diverse range of groups to be found participating in the city network. The community education courses offered across these organisations are varied; some are QQI certified while others are in place to offer a stepping stone to mature learners. When an adult makes the choice to begin learning, the organisations mentioned offer support in many capacities to ensure the experience is positive and the learner is successful. There are many other aspects to consider besides the possibility of certification. Many learners struggle with the process and have to be given ongoing support. It is imperative we take into account the knowledge we have about the learner and use this to support their progress.

There is ample evidence available in research and reports as to the efficacy of the work of the members of the Cork City networks in relation to:

- Reaching target groups
- Efficacy of the educational programme for the target groups
- Learning outcomes that have meaningful impact on the lives of the participants

(including progression in education and workplace readiness)

The ETB, Partnership and other institutional reports, based on returns from the City network members, contain the information in support of this claim. Aontas's (2009) research report as an example is a very recent study into the impact and outcomes of DES (Department of Education and Skills) funded Community Education courses. However there is a **multitude** of other research reports, evaluations, literature reviews, participant narratives and other media modes that evidence this claim for efficacy in our work. The short bibliography attached offers a meaningful selection of these. Outlined below are points extracted from such reports compiled nationally and locally, all of which are publicly available or on request.

LOCAL AND REGIONALLY

- a. The Exodea (2014) evaluation of the impact of the Social and Health Education Programme in Limerick, concluded that it showed a significant return on investment with a return of over €11 for each €1 invested (SRoI Network analysis tool)

“The life changing aspects of the Programme have a far-reaching effect not only on the participants but also on the communities and the society of Limerick”

These findings in the Limerick context ring consistently with other evaluations such as Kearney's (2011) evaluation of the SHEP's Core Training Programme and its Community Education Programme for Health and Wellbeing Programme in Cork and Kerry.

SIMPLE, NURTURING, LIFE-CHANGING (2013) from STORIES OF CHANGE (SHEP, 2014)

Simple is the SHEP way for me. Some years ago a friend recommended SHEP to me. 'Mmm... sounds interesting...' was my reply. But I was too busy 'doing'. A frenzy of work, chores, duties, responsibilities, and commitments kept me occupied. An anxiety of 'shoulds' and 'musts' spurred me on and shrouded me in confusion. I was out of touch with me and other people. As luck would have it, SHEP beckoned: a light in the storm. Everything about it was enjoyable. I loved the group space to be reflective and relax in. I felt enveloped in its human warmth. It helped me connect with other people and myself in a deeper, clearer way. Working within a group was powerful. Every group evolves in a special way because of the unique beauty of each member's experience. Within our group I learned to be true to myself and afford others the same respect without fear of judgement or criticism. We were free to try things out another way and see if they worked or not. If they didn't, no matter. Each of us learned by reflecting on our own experience and forming our own theories. This learning was supported by the skilful weaving of knowledge and skills into our group's activities. As my confidence grew in this safe place, so did my self-esteem. I learned to trust myself – my gut, my perceptions, my values. I am more aware about my part in the world around me. I know I can hold steady and calm in stormy waters of challenge and adversity. From my heart I know that my own spirituality grows from truly knowing myself rather than living with fears and rules imposed from outside. I am better able to enjoy other people for who they are and hear their story. As I follow my own path now I'm happy to do it as best I can step by step. Simple, nurturing, life-changing.

b. McNeill et al (2012) in discussing the 'desistance process' so as to better understand how and why people stop offending, surfaced evidence to support amongst other principles, importance being placed on supporting: individualising support for change; building and sustaining hope; recognising and developing people's strengths; respecting and fostering agency (or self-determination); working with and through relationships (both personal and professional); developing social as well as human capital. The work of Cork Alliance evidences that community education properly resourced is a key vehicle through which these principles can be addressed.

c. Bruac Eile of the Good Shepard services, work with the most vulnerable women of Cork City experiencing, or on the verge of homelessness. In their services they also offer a structured programme funded by the Local Training Initiative (LTI) demanding quite a structured approach. There is a constant struggle to make this mainstream programme fit with the reality of the lives of the girls and women they work with. For them, further education and training systems that focus mainly on employment are limited and can suffocate or destroy many other vital aspects of education.

"Education should develop a person – continually improve on one's life knowledge, personal development, analytical and reflective skills. Education is the route out of homelessness and vulnerability for our women, however, that education must start with where the individual women is at and meet her needs of development and progressions" (Bruac Eile submission)

d. Power et al (2011) qualitative study into the social value of community based adult

education in Limerick City (commissioned by LCEN, LCAES and Limerick Regeneration Agencies) concluded amongst other things that:

"Findings from the research indicate that community-based adult education is having a positive impact on learners in overcoming their negative experiences of previous formal education. The most overwhelming evidence of this is rooted in the personal development of each individual learner, which has increased their self-esteem and confidence levels" (pg. 6)

"The research finds that learners derived a great sense of comfort and confidence from the familiarity of their community ... a recommendation of this research that adult education classes are located within communities in so far as possible in order to address both the logistical and emotional issues which learners may experience ... recommendation that community-based organisations that are currently providing facilities, resources and co-ordination for community-based adult education continue to be supported and funded" (pg.8)

"This research has revealed that community-based adult education is not just a means to an economic end. It also offers a number of positive social impacts for individuals, families, communities and Irish society as a whole, thereby creating social capital, community cohesion and social inclusion. Such findings reveal the significance of all forms of adult learning in the community and as a result it is vital that community-based adult education is actively

supported at national, regional and local policy level” (pg.7)

is linked in the data to community education’s unique role in addressing social inclusion. As the Aontas ‘More than just a course’ report highlights

“Community Education providers facilitate a way into the learning setting by removing institutional barriers to access through flexible course provision and a welcoming environment”

- e. The Lantern Community Project echoes the point made by Aontas (2009) that one of the main reasons in their centre that learners become involved in community education are for social interaction, to become more involved in their communities and to raise their self-confidence. In particular, this finding

CASE STUDY – THE LANTERN PROJECT

Mary was a participant on our SHEP Course in Women’s Health & Well Being , she was in recovery from alcohol for 5 years, had left school early and her experiences of learning had always been negative. She had very low confidence and self-esteem. Mary had heard about the course from a friend and was very reserved and nervous coming on the course, but having sat down with her and gone through the course and her expectations; what she wanted to learn, what she was fearful about etc. she decided to give it a go. Through the duration of the course Mary’s confidence flourished and she was really getting into the group learning towards the latter half of the course. She completed the course and got her Cert.

The course had been an eye opening experience for her, so much so that she came back again 4 months later to explore were there any other courses that she could do within the centre, as she liked the ‘feel of the place’ and felt safe. She initially signed up for an Introduction to Ceramics Course and found this to be hugely beneficial in managing her stress and anxiety as she totally forgot about her life while working with the clay. She produced beautiful pieces. This increased her confidence in herself even more and she found a skill that she never knew she possessed. Mary felt very safe within the centre and started to think about what she else could she do. She really loved the group work element of the programme and working together with other people. She wanted to explore this further so she signed up for an Introduction to Personal Development Course the following term, this was also an 8 week programme and this was also completely successfully, when we sat down afterwards to reflect on Mary’s progression she decided she wanted to take a step towards a more formal route so that she herself could become a group facilitator. So she did a FETAC level 5 introduction to group work skills in Sept 2014 and once this is completed she intends to go on to train in Facilitation Skills with SHEP and hopefully become a community Tutor.

- f. The O’Sullivan (2014) review, commissioned by Respond Housing¹, of the provisions of Adult and Community Education in the Northside of Cork City concluded that

“The report has revealed the extent, range and nature of educational activities on the Northside of Cork City. It highlights the degree of energy, commitment and dedication from statutory, voluntary and community provides. Education is a key driver of social sustainability in the Northside of Cork City. The report illustrates the success of the partnership approach, which facilitates a bottom-up response to local needs in local communities, supported by broader networks, institutions and resources” (pg. 35)

O’Sullivan’s report also references established literature that supports the significant contribution of adult and community education across a range of dimensions; addressing poverty, improving health outcomes, enhancing citizenship and civic engagement and sustained long term impact.

“Both the OECD, and Aontas ... have

reiterated the case for the economic, personal and social benefits of adult learning and community education ...” (pg. 2)

Further O’Sullivan asserts that the long-term dividends accruing from the investment in education have been assessed nationally and internationally. Citing Aontas (2009b) the Respond report notes:

“A cost-benefit review of community education impacts found that it represents value for money in term of savings to state from reduced welfare and health costs, and reduced crime (pg.2)

- g. Welcome English offer an essential service for people from new communities, primarily asylum seekers who cannot access mainstream adult education, who are looking to develop their English language abilities so as to better position themselves to contribute to and integrate into Irish society. As a submission from one of the network members in preparing this paper, one of their participants offered their case study:

CASE STUDY – WELCOME ENGLISH

“Hello” is one of the two words I knew when I came to Ireland for the first time. The second word I knew was “good bye”. To speak English and introduce myself to you in English is the result of the big efforts of my teachers from Welcome English Language Centre.

I am from Georgia. My native language is Georgian but I am able to speak Russian well too. After I came to Ireland in 2006 to look for political asylum I felt awkward because I couldn’t speak English and it was necessary to learn how to converse in that language. I went to Welcome English and started first to learn my A B C with my first teacher. At this moment I am studying at Intermediate level. I am not perfect in English and make some grammar mistakes and I don’t have enough vocabulary but I’m trying to improve my English and learn new expressions. In spite of my age and health problems, I have made a little progress in English and with my level of English I can solve any day to day problems that come up in my life. I suppose if I were proficient in English I could find a good job, therefore I want to improve my English. I worked as a Civil Engineer in Georgia and would love to get work in this area again. I am grateful to WELC. I have am grateful to Ireland, the Irish people and the Irish Government who gave me shelter,

¹ Blackpool Village Regeneration Strategy Education Report

accommodation, education and finally, citizenship. I don't know how long I'll stay in Ireland but I'll never forget this stage of my life. I've lived here in a beautiful country, among kind and interesting people, both locals and people who have emigrated from different countries.

NATIONAL

- h. The NALA (2012, p 19) report on participation rates in three adult learning settings, with a comparative examination of data from 2010, showed that the majority of adults engaged in literacy and community education were those with low or no formal educational qualifications. Adult learners are almost three times more likely to have no formal education qualifications compared to the national average of 11% (CSO, 2010). Seventy-four percent of adults engaged in the ETB adult literacy service left school with less than a Leaving Certificate qualification.
- i. CEFA's (2014) literature review towards addressing the questions as to the ways in which community education contributed to addressing the unemployment challenge facing Ireland through activation and enhancing employability found that:

"At a policy level, it is clear that there is a strong recognition at EU level for the contribution which non-formal and informal learning makes to participants' employability and labour market readiness as well as their involvement as active citizens in shaping a social Europe" and that "Irish policy makers are somewhat behind the curve compared to the EU when it comes to recognising and valuing informal and non-formal learning such as community education" (pg.56)

While acknowledging that Irish policy efforts are endeavouring to address this gap, and also the need for community education to 'pay

heed to the current reality' in relation to the economic imperative the paper asserts:

In the midst of the current economic crisis, governments across Europe including Ireland could make the mistake of reducing education down to a purely economic purpose, job-driven focus. European lifelong learning policy and Irish lifelong learning policy would suggest such a choice would be a mistake. Community education is not anti-jobs. If anything community education is actually quite effective in supporting people to grow in confidence and self-esteem and gain skills which support their access to labour markets in the future" (pg. 57)

CEFA (2014) reasserts the strong evidence for the connection between social exclusion and labour market vulnerability -

"... issues of low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence are clear barriers to people from disadvantaged groups and communities entering the labour market" (pg.57,58) and "the first steps for disadvantaged learners in returning to learning and engaging with the world of work are often first taken in local community education centres".

CEFA (2014) acknowledge the need for more research particularly in relation to documenting 'good practice' in community education related to employability, activation and active citizenship:

"Whether we accept or resist the box-

ticking in education and training, the demand for evidence of the impacts of interventions such as community education is unlikely to dissipate. Some of the tools being developed by the sector, such as social return on investment (sroi) are illuminating the wider benefits of non-formal and informal learning” (pg. 57).

- j. Each organisation in the network is there to offer guidance and support within the remit of the group they are funded to work with. Community education is rolled out to offer opportunities to learn but is facilitated in different ways depending on the needs of the specific group. The Basement Resource centre as an example ran taster creative writing groups for between 4-6 weeks. Here people learn the basics and build self-confidence. After completion of the group the participants are given information on where to access creative writing groups and support in accessing them. It’s a starting point for an adult learner and this progression would not happen without the staff support. The outcomes are evident in that from the groups

the Basement ran in 2014, nine individuals went on to link with courses outside our community.

- k. Aontas (2009) in its research into the outcome and impact of Department of Education and Skills (Des) funded community education found that:

“DES funded community education achieves significant outcomes in relation to personal development for learners. According to the qualitative data these outcomes are a specific focus of providers who set a high priority on learners increasing, in particular, their self-esteem and confidence, but also their ability to communicate and their assertiveness. These outcomes are deemed important in the literature, because members of disadvantaged groups, such as early school leavers have lower self-esteem than their more educationally advantaged colleagues and require the development of self-esteem as a foundation to believe in their academic efficacy.” (pg.156)

CASE STUDY – THE BASEMENT RESOURCE CENTRE

Jane is a 32 year old female from the Cork City area. Jane became a member of the Centre six years ago. Jane had been attending UCC for the second time, on a full time course when she first became unwell and was admitted to the GF unit in the CUH where she spent a lengthy stay of nine months. It was Jane's second time in 18 months experiencing psychosis. She had been referred to The Basement Resource Centre by her parents, whom described her as a bright individual, but one who was not availing of support; they did not know where to turn. When Jane initially began attending the Centre, she would have a cup of tea and was very quiet, shy and she said that she felt paranoid. Slowly Jane started to take an interest in what was going on in the Centre. She began to partake in catch-up meetings, attending choice-based recovery groups and learned to be part of the supportive community the Centre offers. Eventually, Jane started in the mentoring programme in order to explore what her needs are and to goal-set for the future. Jane’s mentor linked her into the ‘City links’ programme in St John's Collage, which gives participants an opportunity to sample a variety of skills before they pick a course which they feel best suited to. Jane completed the programme and went on to do a one year full time

Arts course in same collage. Our role is to give a recovery space to members where they can choose to participate in the activities which suits their individual needs. The long term support offered by the Centre allowed Jane to make her own decisions and provided the space in which she was able to nurture her own staying power. This provided Jane with the experience of attending and participating in groups, which she built on upon herself to further her education. Essentially, Jane was empowered to do her own recovery work and take control of her own life, eventually going on to complete a degree at Crawford Art Collage.

In summary, reports like the SOLAS publication, *'Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019'*, the Department of Education and Skills (DES, s.vi) highlight the critical importance of community education as an access point to employability, labour market activation and active citizenship. The City Centre/Citywide network members and others provide this necessary strand of education which is an access route to many as we support the personal development of the learner. There exists a process of engagement, understood by the staff working in the front line service, which allows for the slow process of learning that gives individuals

the confidence to move into recognised FETAC level learning when ready. The City Centre Network is offering real opportunities for adult learners to link into community education setting and choose the correct path for themselves. We consider that the material presented here demonstrate the educational efficacy of programmes. There is also much other evidence (written evaluations and in other modes such as recordings, crafts, testimony ...) in relation to learners that is maintained within the groups but not necessarily routinely sought or seen as interesting or valued as learning records.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, each of the network member organisations accounts to many funders and demonstrates successfully on a continuous basis (though annual reporting, audits, research ...) evidence of the impact of their work. None of the organisation is shy of investing effort to show this efficacy. However despite the evidence that is available we are left concerned as regards what is to officially count as valid 'evidence'. As one network member noted:

"Our concern is that if we do not look successful in the metrics required by government specifically labour market entry or progression to further education than we will not be funded to provide the service we do"

There is a legitimate requirement to demonstrate effectiveness and value for money in the deployment of public monies. The network and member organisations have been supportive of reporting requirements and welcome input and a dialogue as to how best we can document the benefits of the work being carried out. However, our concern is that these benefits of community education are seen as 'soft' skills and that their achievement may not have the same value as other goals. Arguably skills like for example critical reflection are actually harder to acquire!

This is a perennial and system wide issue and concern when outcome 'measurement' is explored in the context of funding dynamics. There is the old adage to be aware of in this regards that 'what gets measured gets done'!

We support CEFA's view that the community education sector needs dedicated resources towards strengthening its research capacity, so as to be on a par with the research capacity in other areas of the educational system. It will then be better positioned to demonstrate in an ongoing way its achievements through modes and methods validated by research that meet sufficiently the need of all stakeholders for information.

RESOURCING PRESSURES ON COMMUNITY GROUPS

There is ample evidence, again in reports publicly available, as to the impact and implications of continued resourcing cuts.

- a. Many of these groups are extremely pressed. Harvey (2010, p.3) examination of the effects of government spending cuts on the community and voluntary sector has resulted in a contraction of the order of 35% in the sector.

“This study was complemented by a ground truth survey, which identified hugely increased pressure on voluntary and community organisations, the reduction and closure of services, staff reductions and dis-improvements in terms and conditions for staff.”

The context in which this massive resourcing impact on essential services has been enacted is one of sharply increasing needs in the community. The EAPN (2015) reports (using CSO SILC data from 2008 to 2013), that nationally the proportion of the population experiencing deprivation has risen to 30% from 14%, with particular hard impacts on children, one parents, unemployed and on illness or disability. Consistent poverty has risen from 4.2% to 8.2%.

At a local level there is a geographic spatial difference as to how these impacts are distributed. Picking out here the educational dimension of disadvantage, Kelly & Hayes’s (2014) Cork City Profile data notes the

‘... distinct spatial component to educational disadvantage ...’ (vii)

in relation to educational and skills attainment in Cork City. These two influences, increased deprivation and a spatial differentiation as to how this is experienced, imply a **compelling case for increasing the resources and reach of community education in the City as a vehicle for social inclusion towards educational attainment serving to build both personal and community capacities.**

- b. Altrusa create a culture of learning so the adult learner is immersed in a level which best meets their needs, the tutors role is to find a strategy which works well in the learning environment while they work towards meeting the needs of learners in their everyday lives. Is it possible to enter into adult education if you experience difficulties with literacy? The impact of reduced hours has been major and felt by all organisations in the network. **While the overall money in relation to ESOL did not go down, the way the allocations have been made to centres changed, which had the effect of reducing the fund available to some already marginal groups.** Altrusa is the first place adult learners are referred to begin their journey of learning. Adult learners need to have a decent grasp of literacy before they can avail of educational opportunities or employment as concluded by the findings of the Cork ETB ESOL working group. Such work directly minimises the inter-generational impact of low parental literacy levels.
- c. While network members experience huge support though the community education facilitators and institutional supports of the **ETB and Cork City Partnership**², it is nevertheless essential to make clear the impact of resourcing cuts on the educational

²In 2012 Cork City Partnership (CCP) supported the City Centre Network with €13,990 through 302 CCP funded tutor hours, benefitting 73 learners. For 2013 this was €16,560 through 368 CCP funded hours benefitting 115 learners (Source: IRIS). The € sum figures include tutor hour cost and support/admin assistance costs)

work. The network perceives that we have received a 30% cut and this is evident from the reduced hours some organisations have received. The organisations applying for funded hours through the ETB and Cork City Partnership are increasing yet the funding is reducing. This results in the reducing resource being allocated to an increased number of groups with the obvious implications. Individual organisations know their own story about allocations and the ETB or Partnership can readily produce the year on year group allocations which demonstrates the trend. Expansion of the City networks has had positive results in that there is better communication between organisations and interagency support, however this growth needs to be recognised and more resources made available. The organisations are dealing with an increased demand for courses but the resources to provide these are being cut on an annual basis!

administered in a standardised manner with clear guidelines for application, data collection and reporting purposes. We also note the DES (2000) funding challenges highlighted in the White Paper on Adult Education:

“As part of the consultation in preparing the White Paper, community-based groups drew attention not only to the inadequacy of the financial and other resources at their disposal, but also to the short-term nature of much of their funding; the multiplicity of funding sources; the differing demands of the respective funders and the fact that many of these groups were the indirect beneficiaries of funding allocated to other bodies rather than allocated directly to the groups themselves” (p. 115)

- d. The network members note the Aontas (2011, p.16) position paper on creating an effective funding mechanism for community education conclusion that:

This case study demonstrates the value of community education and the need to provide a distinct funding stream for community education which is

As Aontas concluded the true cost of providing community education courses extends well beyond the funding of the tutor hours and supports the need amongst other recommendations for a more effective funding mechanism that supports both vocational and non-vocational learning as well as accredited and un-accredited learning.

CONCLUSION

There is a particular context in which the work of the network member groups is undertaken – in the main the member groups across Cork City are both providers of essential services as well as providers of educational opportunities as part of their programmes. In essence they contribute as partners with the ETB and Cork City Partnership in facilitating access to education for groups (recruiting, organising, tutoring, providing venues, back up support ...) but are also orientated to providing their other programme services and activities. Resources are needed to both these ends and they have become extremely stretched, a point sometimes not heard in the places decisions are made.

In conclusion, it is the assertion in this paper by the network members that the resources applied to Community Education needs to be increased and restored at a minimum to pre-2008 levels in the near term.

DEVELOPING LOCAL POLICY IN PARTNERSHIP - THE CASE OF MANDATORY REFERRALS

Network members face significant resourcing constraints and are working to provide education opportunities to many disadvantaged groups in a very challenging environment where needs are pressing. **Much of what happens in community education is delivered through meaningful and respected collaboration and partnerships which leverages resources and expertise and significant contributions and investment by everyone.** The relationship in the City has not been one of funder and provider but one of a far deeper type – a relationship that values trust, expertise, local knowledge, joint ownership and working together. The various stakeholders endeavour to agree a balance between competing priorities and respect a process of dialogue through which social policy is negotiated with on-the-ground delivery.

MANDATORY REFERRALS TO COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The subject of mandatory referrals from DSP to community education courses first came to light at the monthly meetings of the Citywide Education Network in October 2014. Here was an example of a policy initiative that in our view needed to be informed by the perspectives of the groups delivering courses and indeed was one of the early motivations for this paper. As organisations with many years' experience working with adult learners, we considered we had a duty to safe-guard the right to self-determination of learners. The submissions we received in preparing this paper conveyed the individual organisations' concerns regarding mandatory referrals and outlined below are the salient features of the concerns expressed, there being unanimity of view.

a. While each organisation has a different focus

for their work, all the Network's organisations share a common experience of engaging with vulnerable people who occupy the fringes of Irish society. Each of the organisations contributing to this document provides a starting point where an adult learner can participate on his/ her own terms. It has to be on a voluntary basis for it to be meaningful. Mandatory referrals create significant problems in providing a learning environment based on respect, equality and the value of the adult learner. In the individual submissions provided it is evident that each organisation has an emphasis on:

- voluntary participation where the learner is central to their own education,
- the best interests of the individual participants
- promotion of involvement in a group/ team/community environment
- development of skills and interests and focus on strengths
- advancement to other centres of Education or Training and realisation of full potential

"In Cork Simon we tried within the ESOL classes to make attendance mandatory and it had a very negative impact on the wider group. The tutor's role became one of class management as opposed to English tutors, and it had a negative impact on all present. In my opinion if classes become mandatory then they need to be facilitated outside of existing classes and structures."
Cork Simon Community (personal communication)

- b. Providers encourage learners' persistence by dedicating significant resources to ensuring that their interactions with learners: are positive, frequent and helpful; their spaces are welcoming and inviting, and they ensure an experience of dignity and respect for the learner. Likewise, learners deem these supports to be important (this would not be achievable where mandatory referrals are imposed, as often participants do not want to be in the group and are only doing it to avoid negative consequences). We consider that mandatory referrals may not be in the best interest of the individuals. While the organisations are open to meeting any potential learner referred to their project/s, the suitability of this course should be decided jointly between candidate and provider.
- c. Sweeney's (2012) review highlights the benefits of guidance in helping to match and refer unemployed people to relevant courses. They argue that the role which good guidance plays in ensuring that unemployed people identify courses they are motivated to undertake, capable of completing, market relevant and delivered with the necessary supports, was emphasised by all stakeholders during the preparation of their review – those working for the unemployed, the Department of Social Protection (DSP), employers and Further Education (FET) providers of different sorts.

“The role which good guidance plays in ensuring that unemployed people identify courses which they are motivated and capable of completing, and that are market relevant and delivered with the necessary supports, was emphasised by all stakeholders. Within even tightly defined priority cohorts on the Live Register (LR) significant heterogeneity exists in individuals' aptitudes and capabilities” (p. 71, 82-83)

- d. The need for appropriate guidance by suitably qualified professionals, of which there are too few, is a point supported by ETBI (2014) in its policy submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection. Writing in regard to the referral processes between ETB, Intreo, DSP and SOLAS towards optimising the effectiveness of Vocational Education and Training (VET) the submission notes:

“the proper identification of the skill needs of adult learners and job seekers must be done by qualified professionals to ensure that vulnerable adults seeking new skills in line with their personal aptitude are directed to the most appropriate course. There are currently far too few ...” (Pg.5)

- e. ETBI (2014) writing in respect of the place of community education, comments that in Ireland there is a constant focus on our financial and economic resources

“... often failing to recognise the potential wealth of our social capital. Community Education can be the tool by which we may cultivate this valuable resource.” (pg. 7)

To summarise the perspectives of the network members in relation to mandatory referrals to community education type courses:

- Inclusion of reluctant learners in a class does have a significantly detrimental effect on the conduct of the class and educational time is lost in dealing with inappropriate referrals.
- Voluntary participation is seen by the network as vital to the engagement of the adult learner.
- All community education settings are equal

in their ethos of empowering people to progress to more formal education, however the supports offered by each setting are tailored to suit the needs of its participants

- We understand that life skills (confidence, esteem, communication ...) which learners develop are necessary as underpinning skills you need to secure employment or in other meaningful activities. However it is our experience that these 'harder' skills to develop need the voluntary investment of participants.
- We understand the rationale and perhaps imperative from the DSP perspective that

some of their clients develop such skills, but consider the mandatory referral proposition, to open access courses that focus on such development work problematic for the reasons we have outlined

- We consider that it would be helpful for the Department of Social Protection and Intreo to be fully up to date with the ethos and remit of each organisation before they refer individuals, but that in all referrals for educational purposes it is done with the support of the Adult Guidance Service and voluntary consent of the participant.

CONCLUSION

The network is in agreement that an implementation of mandatory referrals to community education groups would not be in the best interest of the learners or any groups to which they were forced to integrate and there would be significant impact on the learning of other learners in mixed groups - mixed in the sense of participant being there voluntarily and some being mandated. Further there would be a significant implication for the educators in mixed groups. We welcome what we understand to be the direction of this policy for now - confining of mandatory referrals to specifically dedicated groups and courses, and consider this to be the better outcome than that which was earlier proposed.

City Centre Network members are open to exploring how they can contribute to supporting referring agencies and the people on referral pathways in ways consistent with values discussed in the paper (e.g. briefings about services ...)

In broader terms we assert there is massive benefit to participants, community groups, organisations and institutional partners to sustain and fight for a local approach of collaboration, partnership, mutual respect and valuing of the strengths and the legitimate perspective of everyone. It is through operating with such a spirit to our joint effort that national policy can be influenced, adapted and operationalised favourable to local circumstances. The network members welcome the opportunity to continue to develop the working relationship in this style.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS - AGREEING A LOCAL POLICY AGENDA

With reference to all the official policy in Ireland related to the philosophy for community education, the Citywide Network argues that we must work together locally to address the dilution in practice of the essential differentiating features of community education related to empowerment, social justice, social change, overcoming barriers to educational disadvantage, self-direction, community based provision and identification of needs and of its radical potential for social action and civic engagement.

Much work has been done within the Community and Voluntary sector, locally and nationally, to identify policy issues of relevance to community education.

- The Cork Community Education Network Forum (CENF, 2015) document sets out its

agreed set of priorities for community education in Cork City for the period 2014-2019. These were collaboratively generated in workshops in 2012 and 2014 by representatives from a wide range of community education groups across the city. **Seven priority areas are identified related to learners, tutors, courses, resources, contribution to the community, network activities and certification.** As a contributor to framing these priorities the Cork City Centre/Citywide network fully endorses these.

- AONTAS (2011a, pg.126) surfaced numerous recommendations for policy and practice issues towards enhancing the impact of community education that the City Centre/Citywide Network proposes could be engaged with and worked on collaboratively by the relevant local stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion this paper has surfaced key concerns of our network members related to developing a shared understanding of principles, values and outcomes of community education; what counts as 'evidence' of the efficacy of our work, offering significant material in this regard.

Derived from the various materials referenced in this paper (AONTAS, CENF ...) we would select as critical policy development issues for the local agenda:

- Create a clear vision amongst all the stakeholders for community education, flowing from which will be a greater consistency of approach, shared principles, outcomes and priorities.
- Create a position for community education with structures and resources, that preserves its unique role and processes within an integrated adult education services.
- Articulate and preserve in institutional and provider practices, the essential conditions found to be the essence of community education and valued by the learners – creating a collaborative, open learning environment that values learner experiences as the starting point for learning; facilitated by tutors with flexibility and skills to support this type of learning and in using the group as a significant resource for the learning environment.

- Adequately resource Community Education
- Deflect the risk that economic related outcomes will be prioritised in assessing the contribution of community education, by stakeholders engaging in a dialogue as to methodologies that will both, appropriately satisfy as evidence (of different types) the impact of the work, while also preserving (and been acutely attentive to the dangers of measurement processes and the fragility of personal learning processes) the ethos of self-direction and learner empowerment

The City Centre/Citywide network would welcome an opportunity to develop a dialogue and explore all local stakeholder perspectives on the policy issues. We advocate that the ETB and Cork City Partnership engage with the Cork Community Education Network Forum towards finding the resources to collaboratively advance the work on the priority areas that have been identified.

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