Dismantling

Inequality

County Monaghan DisAbility Network

A SICAP Case Study

Goal 1 – Disability Supports

Theme – Goal One Projects

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020"

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"*Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success"*

Hendry Forde

County Monaghan DisAbility Network is a forum bringing disability groups together, to work together, to achieve inclusion, integration and equality for people with disabilities.

The Network is made up of twenty active disability groups from all types of disabilities, from all areas of County Monaghan (See appendix 1). The Network's aim is to 'advocate for the meaningful inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in all areas of community life.' Membership is made up of people with disabilities who work tirelessly to bring about social change to improve the lives of its members and the wider disability community.

The Network's progression has been supported under the previous SICAP programme and continues to be supported under the current programme. At every stage of development, the support provided was underpinned by community development principles and relevant to that stage of development.

This case study charts the Network's progression, its achievements, outlines the role of SICAP in supporting this progression and highlights the key learning.

Background – The Issue:

Prior to the SICAP programme, there was a Disability Network steering committee in the county that consisted of between 7 to 9 members. Most members were paid staff working in the disability sector. The voice of people with disabilities on decision-making bodies was absent in many cases. Where a voice did exist, it tended to belong to paid staff members talking about needs on behalf of the people with disabilities.

Individual disability groups in the county had limited opportunities to come together to network. There were no opportunities to explore issues of common concern, or to develop collective actions to highlight these concerns. This raised the question "How can positive social change happen for people with disabilities, if there is no awareness of what needs to change?" The power of the individual with a disability to influence change was minimal.

What was evident at the beginning of the first SICAP programme was that the people who most needed to be involved in a Disability Network, i.e. the people with disabilities, were not. It was also clear that a long-term plan was needed if those with disabilities were to be empowered to influence the decision making process.

As disabilities vary greatly, from physical to intellectual, it was necessary to build engagement with service users and their support teams to explore their issues. When this was achieved, a commonality of issues had to be identified. Then the Network had to be restructured. This was largely the work of the first SICAP programme. The Arts were found to be a very practical and useful tool for this process.

Engagement through the Arts:

It was important when planning for the first SICAP programme that an accessible engagement strategy was selected so that as many people with disabilities had an opportunity to get involved. Community arts was chosen as the tool to engage with people with disabilities. Once involved, art was also the

means used to explore collective issues that would bring people together. Examples of arts projects developed were:

1. *Include US*, mural and film completed by Steadfast House in Carrickmacross. Steadfast House is a day support services for people with disabilities.
2. *A Space for Everyone,* art exhibition by PaintAbility in Castleblayney. PaintAbility is a new group in Castleblayney, formed as a result of the art project, with SICAP help.
3. *Strictly Come Dancing, a* social inclusion event organised by Cairde Activation Centre. Cairde Activation Centre is a day support service in Clones.

In these three projects alone, over 100 people with disabilities participated.

Project 1 Include Us Film and Mural
By Steadfast House, Carrickmacross Year: 2015

People with disabilities attending Steadfast House completed two complimentary art projects: a 3 D mural 'Include Us' and a film with the same title. The mural depicted a journey to full inclusion, highlighting the barriers that needed to be removed in order for this journey to happen. SICAP facilitated focus group sessions with the service users to identity the barriers. These included:

- lack of accessible transport,
- lack of supports for people with disabilities to engage in recreational and social activities in the evenings and weekends,
- inability to independently access the local town centre due to the absence of zebra crossings at busy junctions between Steadfast House and the main street; and
- the wider communities not being aware of or not recognising the service user's abilities and skills.

People in Steadfast House also made a short film, titled Include Us (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghCMwkMW2QA), which complemented the mural. This helped strengthen the message of what needed to change to support inclusion. SICAP funded a media production company with community development principles to support Steadfast House with the project. This was important. It meant that as well as featuring on the film, people in Steadfast House formed part of the production crew, operating boom mics, clapperboards, etc. Both mural and film were unveiled to the wider community by Steadfast House members at a showcase event in Farney Workhouse. Heather Humphreys, then Minister for the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht officiated at the unveiling. A deliberate choice was made not to launch the project within Steadfast House as this was the first step in raising awareness among the wider community.

The Steadfast House service users were also the principle speakers at the launch and at all subsequent presentations of their work to other Boards and bodies.

Project 2 'A Space for Everyone' Arts Exhibition
By PaintAbility, Castleblayney Year: 2015

Cultural Night, Iontas Centre, Castleblayney
Photo by photographer Donal McEnroe, local photographer

A group of people with disabilities with an interest in art were helped to come together in Castleblayney. SICAP worked with CMETB to secure an arts tutor to work with this group over several weeks. The group decided to create paintings based on galaxy scenes to convey the message 'A Space for Everyone, Universal Accessibility'. The galaxy scenes used as inspiration for the paintings were scenes captured by Hubble telescope as 2015 marked its 25th anniversary in space. At the end of the art course, the participants decided to establish a group 'PaintAbility' and got SICAP help to form.

PaintAbility, exhibited their paintings as an art exhibition entitled, 'A Space for Everyone' Universal Accessibility,' at cultural night in the community arts and resource centre, Iontas, in Castleblayney. On the night, group members spoke of their experience of the project, how they came up with the theme 'A Space for Everyone' based on their experiences of not being be able to access places and encouraged people attending to reflect on the accessibility of their community. This art exhibition was put on permanent display in the Iontas Centre by the Centre management as part of their social inclusion policy. Their decision was informed by the awareness raising carried out as part of the project.

Project 3 Dance to Inclusion - Strictly Come Dancing
By Cairde Activation Centre, Clones Year 2016

Working with the SICAP programme, the Cairde group came up with a novel project to build stronger links and greater awareness of disability issues with their local community, a social inclusion Strictly Come Dancing. Cairde is a day support service providing support to adults with intellectual disabilities in Clones, Co Monaghan. Each person in Cairde asked a member of a local community group, of their choice, to be their dance partner.

Every Thursday morning for ten weeks, the community dance partners joined their Cairde partners to learn a dance, chosen by the dance couples, to perform at a gala Strictly Come Dancing Event.

The weekly classes were relaxed, helping people feel at ease while learning something new together. This environment also was very conducive to people in the community learning more about Cairde and developing links and relationships with the people in it.

The gala Event was held in the Peace Link, a community sports and recreational centre, in Clones with 250 people attending. Through this event, the Cairde Partners were able to showcase their abilities to the wider community. In this project, Dance was the means to bring people together to build connections. An important outcome was that many of the adults in Cairde went on to become involved in the local groups who participated, such as the Clones men's shed.

Strictly Come Dancing Event, Clones 2016 Photographs by Eugene T Hamill, Clones

Capacity Building Support:

The first year and a half under the original programme concentrated on engagement. The final year focused on facilitating the Network to develop its overall aim and key objectives. This process took time as the SICAP support worker wished to ensure that all disability groups had an opportunity to get involved. However, the time spent helped to strengthen relations between groups and provided space for them to become familiar with each other and to develop a common purpose.

The Network decided its aim *is 'to advocate for the meaningful inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in all areas of community life.'*

To achieve this aim, the Network developed four key objectives through the process:

1. To provide a community based networking forum for disability groups throughout Co Monaghan covering all areas of disability.
2. To engage with relevant policy and decision makers to address social exclusion issues to bring about positive social change for people with disabilities.
3. To represent the needs of people with disabilities at relevant local, regional and national fora to highlight these needs and advocate for change.
4. To work collaboratively with decision makers and services to develop and implement initiatives that more effectively address social exclusion and inequality issues.

Current SICAP Programme (2018- 2022):

Having successfully reconfigured the old Disability Network to bring the voices of the service users to the fore and support them to develop a plan with an aim and objectives, the new SICAP programme sought to help it bring about much needed change. In each year, since the new programme came in, there has been an action under Goal 1 to support the DisAbility Network.

Year	Action Name	Description	SICAP Role
2018	Goal 1 Action 5 DisAbility Network Support SICAP Budget: €2,390	Support the DisAbility Network to engage with relevant policy and decision makers to address social exclusion issues experienced by people with disabilities to bring about positive social change.	Facilitate the Network to hold quarterly meetings to support sharing of learning to prioritise issues to bring to decision makers. Build the capacity of members to host events e.g. for UN Day of People with Disabilities – 3 Dec. Deliver active citizenship training to support the members to effectively engage with decision makers. Support participatory representation on decision-making bodies.
2019	Goal 1 Action 4 DisAbility Support SICAP Budget: €2,850	Support to the DisAbility Network to enable it to build on its progression along the Community Development Matrix in 2018 and become a recognised forum for service providers and decision makers to engage with around the needs of people with disabilities in the county.	Support the Network to implement its 2019 action plan. Actions included: • Raise the profile of the Network by organising events targeted at service providers • Participate in Make Way Day, national awareness campaign, to build on the Network's participation in 2018 • Work collaboratively with Council to address access issues identified in Make Way Day • Support the Network to access administration support through work placement scheme, e.g. Tús
2020	Goal 1 Action 3 Supporting the Network is part of a wider action Target Groups and Disadvantaged Area Support SICAP Budget for Network: €3,500	Provide leadership development to the Network to help the Network become a self-sustaining, independent Network.	Support the Network with applications for administration support to work placement schemes. Provide governance support based on the Charity Regulator's Code of Governance

Network Progression

This section outlines the Network's progress and achievements against the four key objectives as defined by the Network members who are people with disabilities. It also outlines the role SICAP played in supporting this progression.

***Objective 1*: *To provide a community based networking forum for disability groups throughout Co. Monaghan covering all areas of disability*.**

Since 2018, Network meetings move around the county, are hosted by a member group and chaired by the host group. This helps to ensure members from all areas of the county have access to meetings, particularly important in a rural county, like County Monaghan. The SICAP Development Officer works with the host group in advance of the meeting to build their confidence and capacity to host and chair the meeting. The Development Officer also provides governance support at meetings enabling the members to set agendas, take minutes, follow up between meetings and organise events to help achieve their objectives. Meetings are very well attended with attendance ranging from 30 – 45 members.

NLN has been involved in the Disability Network for a number of years. It gives members an opportunity to discuss and highlight issues that arise for people with disabilities throughout the country.

Learners, National Learning Network Monaghan

The meetings are very interesting. Good to meet people and socialise. Good for advocacy.

Service user, Cairde Activation Centre

Network memebers have organised a series of very successful events targeted at service providers and the wider community. This has helped to raise the profile of the Network and the needs of people with disbilities, as well as building the capacity of the group members and the indivdiual members of each group.

Photo 1 Conversation Tree

Photo 2 Network Member Fiona Duffy, MC

For example, in October 2018, the Network organised a Tea and Talk event for Positive Mental Health week in the Iontas Centre, Castleblayney. The event was open to the public. Its purpose was to have a conversation about mental health in the community and to help reduce the stigma associated with talking about mental health.
SICAP facilitated the Network to design the format of the event and linked them in with the local HSE Mental Health Team. The event consisted of personal stories of recovery and speakers from the HSE gave information about the help available. The SICAP Development

Officer facilitated the Network to work with the men's shed in Castleblayney. The men made them a conversation tree for the event on which those in attendance could post tips and suggestionsabout minding our mental health. This event built greater awareness of the Network and gave the members experience of working with community and statutory groups to organise a successful event.

Another example of a successful event organsied by the Network was the Ability Event in Monaghan Town Centre in 2019. The aim of the event, as developed by the Network, was to showcase the skills and abilities of their members to the wider public. The members felt that their abilities are not always fully recognised or appreciated within communties.

Once again, the Network secured the support of a local community group, Monaghan Men's Shed, to help erect stalls in front of the Courthouse in Monaghan town centre. These were used to showcase the array of 'Abilities' the Network members have. On display were arts and crafts showcasing members' skills in these areas and examples of a broad range of members' educational, cultural, sporting and educational achievements. The prominent location enabled the members to engage with the general public and local politicians who were invited to attend. The event made front page of the county's newspaper, the Northern Standard.

"I felt that the skills and abilities needed to make these items would be great assets to community groups who are always looking new members. " **Cathaoirleach, Monaghan County Council speaking at the event.**

Cairde attended the Ability event on the 29/08/2019 as part of the Green Spaces Showcase. Cairde found this a very positive and beneficial event. Group members choose a selection of their favourite abilities or skills to showcase. Cairde felt that the aim or theme was very worthwhile - showcasing our ability instead of highlighting our disability. The stand produced a number of very positive comments with many members of the public wanting to buy the crafts displayed. **Cairde Activation Centre**

Objective 2: To engage with relevant policy and decision makers to address social exclusion issues to bring about positive social change for people with disabilities.

Make Way Day is a national public awareness campaign to highlight the barriers and obstacles people with disabilities face in the public spaces we all share in towns and cities across the country. The Network got involved in this campaign in 2018, 2019 and in the 2020 online campaign.

In 2018 and 2019 , over 70 members took to the streets highlighting the barriers and obstacles in the towns across the county. Examples of these obstacles included cars, parked up on footpaths, sandwich boards left in the middle of the footpaths, deliveries blocking the footpaths; uneven footpaths; people misusing disabled parkings bays; ;trees overhanging footpaths; and audio signals for visually impaired not working at traffic lights.

One of the biggest offenders on the day in Monaghan town were sandwich boards left outside premises in the middle of footpaths, beer kegs outside pubs and business owners leaving produce outside their premises on footpaths. Other obstacles encountered were cars and vans parked up on footpaths, uneven surfaces, manhole covers not flush with pavements and wheelie bins left on footpaths. The common factor to all of these is that they prevent people with disabilities accessing and using the public space.

Fiona Duffy, Network Representative on Monaghan Integrated Development's Board

The key role for SICAP in this campaign was to help the Network decide on how to enage with the Council about their findings and support them in this process. Members decided to request to present their findings to the County Council and Municipal District Councils.

In April 2019, they made a presentation to the Ballybay-Clones Municipal District. Cairde Activation Centre, the DisAbility Network member, located in this Municipal District, presented their access issues at the meeting. On Make Way Day in September 2019, Cairde checked to see had any improvements been made but no major changes had occurred. However, after 2019 Make Way Day, the Ballybay-Clones Municipal District conducted an audit of all footpaths in Clones town and based on this, secured funding in the region of €100,000 from the Active Travel Measure to do remedial works on the footpaths to make them accessible. This is a positive outcome for people with disabilities, but also benefits others like parents with buggies and older members of the community.The learning from this for the Network was *if you do not succeed at first, try again.*

At the same time, it was becoming evident that the Network's profile was increasing among decision makers. In early 2020, Monaghan County Council invited the Network to present their findings from Make Way Day at their February meeting. SICAP supported the members to prioritise which access issues to present and to develop their multi media presentation. Visits to the Council Chamber where the meeting would take place were held to allow the members to become familiar with the space, rehearse their presentation and increase their confidence..

The Network's presentation yielded a very positive outcome when Councillors passed the following motion:

"On the proposal of Cllr Conlon, seconded by Cllr O'Hanlon, it was agreed that for the purpose of ensuring issues of accessibility are addressed on a regular basis, that a quarterly inspection is undertaken by designated Council staff persons with the requisite skill set, and that follow up remediation measures are taken to ensure optimum conditions exist in our towns and villages for those citizens faced with mobility challenges"

Monaghan County Council Minutes 3 February 2020

The Network will be reviewing the success of this motion in the time ahead to ensure an accessible environment for everyone.

In Carrickmacross, tangible changes already have happened, which have made a real difference to the lives of Network members. Engagement work under the first SICAP programme identified that due to there being no zebra crossings at the busy junctions at the entrance to Steadfast House, service users could not access the town independently because it was too dangerous.
The DisAbility Network supported Steadfast House to highlight this issue and others to the local Municipal District. The Municipal District sought funding from the Department and have installed three zebra crossing at this busy junction.

Steadfast House service users can now access the town centre independently. This really supports their inclusion in the local community, as many facilities and community activities take place in the town.

Before

After

2 of the 3 new Zebra crossings near the entrance to Steadfast House

Objective 3: To represent the needs of people with disabilities at relevant local, regional and national fora to highlight these needs and advocate for change.

Key to the support to the DisAbility Network under the current SICAP programme has been developing the capacity of the members, people with disabilities, to represent their needs at relevant fora to advocate for change.

- Under LCDP and the first SICAP programme, the Network was represented on the board of Monaghan Integrated Development (MID) by paid staff members working in the disability sector. In 2018, when the initial restructuring was complete the DisAbility Network, nominated member Fiona Duffy, a wheelchair user from the PaintAbility group, to the MID Board. Fiona still represents the Network on the MID Board presently.
- The DisAbility Network has actively participated in Disability Federation of Ireland's national advocacy campaigns – Disable Inequality and Make Way Day.
- The Network has developed links with the other Disability Networks in the northeast region. Network members have participated in Cavan Disability Network's annual conferences and events, the most recent being their Employment Matters event in September 2019. The Monaghan Network had planned to host a 'Networking Event for Networks' in 2020 to make these links stronger between the networks in the region and explore the development of a regional forum for highlighting issues of common concern. This plan is currently on hold due to Covid.

Objective 4: To work collaboratively with decision makers and services to develop and implement initiatives that more effectively address social exclusion and inequality issues.

The Network's achievements under this objective are a continuation of their achievements under *Objective 2: 'To engage with relevant policy and decision makers to address social exclusion issues to bring about positive social change for people with disabilities'*

- Following the passing of the County Council's motion and the Network's participation in 2020 Make Way Day which was virtual this year, the Network are working with the County Council on devising the accessibility template for the quarterly access inspections of each town.

Some Network members, PaintAbility and Monaghan Visually Impaired Group taking part in virtual Make Way Day with the Council and Gardaí

- The DisAbility Network are supporting Monaghan Comhairle na nÓg with their 2020 project, to support the inclusion of young people with hidden disabilities. As part of their project, Monaghan Comhairle na nÓg is producing a booklet to raise awareness of hidden disabilities and through this awareness, support the inclusion of young people with hidden disabilities. DisAbility Network have helped them in compiling this booklet.

Recognition of Network's Achievements:

The DisAbility Network received recognition for their work to date early in 2020 when they won Monaghan County Council's 2019 Community Development Group of the Year.

Challenges:

Undoubtedly, there have been challenges along the way. These included:

- In some disability groups, staffs' support to their members was embedded in the medical model of disability. The focus of this model is about providing care. It was difficult for them to transition their support to align more with the social model of disability. The social model of disability includes enabling and empowering people with disabilities and supporting their inclusion.
- Buildings not being accessible was another challenge and still is. Some member groups have their own premises and hosted Network meetings in these. Some members, who do not have premises, hosted Network meetings in their local community building. For others, this was not possible due to some buildings not being accessible.
- Some buildings that appeared to be accessible turned out to have other issues. At one Network meeting held in an upstairs room in a community building, Network members who are wheelchair users could not evacuate the building when the fire alarm went off accidently. The reason for this was that there was no fire evacuation chair at the top of the stairs for wheelchair users and lifts cannot be used in cases of fire.
- Network members worked with this group, who prior to this were not aware of fire evacuation chairs, and have since installed them. SICAP staff member worked with the local group to help them secure funding for this equipment and training on its use.

Unsurprisingly, Covid is a current challenge to the Network and its work. Network meetings are unable to happen in the way they use to with groups coming together and Network events are postponed, e.g. UN Day event. SICAP consulted with all members of the Network to identify any new emerging needs as a result of Covid. With everything now online using online platforms, Network members feel they are being left behind because of lack of skills in this area. SICAP is organising online platform training for the members to ensure inclusion of the Network in this new online way of working.

Key Lessons:

- Before SICAP support, the Network was made up of a small number of people, mainly paid staff working in the disability sector. The arts successfully engaged people with disabilities, helped bring disability groups together and helped groups to explore common issues of concern.
- The DisAbility Network has progressed because it is now a made up of the people it represents, people with disabilities. It is questionable whether the old network structure prior to SICAP intervention, would have lasted, when its membership was mainly paid staff.

- It is important that all SICAP support to community groups and community networks is underpinned by community development principles for group/network progression to take place.
- This kind of support takes time and is resource intensive particularly in the early stages of engagement and capacity building. The support to the Network has spanned the two SICAP programmes.
- The collective voice of the Network is stronger than a lone voice calling for change. Changes have happened because of the twenty members coming together to advocate for change.
- The profile of the Network has increased as a result of the Network's participation in awareness campaigns e.g. Make Way Day. This rise in profile has now put them in a position where service providers are requesting input from them on social inclusion issues.
- SICAP support needs to be flexible to meet emerging needs as they arise. SICAP is responding to emerging needs presented by the current pandemic by helping members develop the IT Skills necessary to be included in this new online way of working.

Conclusion:

The DisAbility Network's progression and achievements has been supported by SICAP, under previous and current programme. The DisAbility Network is now made up of people with disabilities who work tirelessly to achieve their aim to achieve meaningful inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in all areas of community life.

Key lessons from support provided highlights the importance of the support being embedded in community development principles so that the help provided is beneficial to ensuring a sustainable structure going forward. The community development model used – engagement, capacity building, participation in decision making and collaboration has resulted in the DisAbility Network representing the needs of its members, highlighting these needs to the relevant decision makers and services and working with them to develop tangible results to bring about positive changes for people with disabilities.

Appendix 1

County Monaghan DisAbility Network Membership

Member Group:	**Group Description:**
Cairde Activation Centre Clones	Day support service for adults with intellectual disabilities
Camphill Community Ballybay	Residential service for people with disabilities
Clogher House Monaghan	Day support service for people with disabilities
EmployAbility Cavan Monaghan	Supports people with disabilities to secure and maintain employment
Errigal Truagh Special Needs	Day support service for people with disabilities
Grow	Provides peer led support to help people recover from mental health problems
MISE	Day support service for people with disabilities
Monaghan Arch Club	Provides recreational and social activities for people with disabilities
Monaghan Down Syndrome Association	Provides services and social opportunities for children, young people and adults with Down Syndrome and their families.
Monaghan Special Olympics	Provides sports training and competition opportunities for children and adults with intellectual disabilities
Monaghan Sports Partnership	Provides activity programmes to encourage and support the inclusion of people with disabilities in sport
Monaghan Visually Impaired Group	Provides emotional, social, upskilling and networking support for people with a visual impairment from birth or acquired
National Learning Network	Provides flexible training and support services for people who need specialist support
PaintAbility	Arts and craft group supporting the inclusion and integration of people with disabilities
Parents and Friends Association	Provides services for adults with intellectual disabilities
Rehab Care	Provides services for adults with disabilities championing inclusion and diversity
Solas Drop in Centre	User led, user run drop in service for people with mental health problems
Slí Nua	Day support service for people with disabilities
SMART (South Monaghan Autism Resource Team)	Provide support and socialisation for children with autism, parents / guardians / siblings and families
Steadfast House	Day support service for people with disabilities