

# Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2018-2022 (SICAP)

LDC Annual Progress Report 2020  
LOT – Kildare County (6-1)



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## 1. COVID-19 impact on the needs of SICAP beneficiaries.

COVID 19 has impacted on SICAP beneficiaries most significantly in the most disadvantaged areas where face to face interaction has not been possible and where access to online facilities has inhibited individuals and groups in availing of SICAP supports. The strategic approach of SICAP in County Kildare since 2018 has been to focus on outreach community development work, and this approach contributed significantly to the identification of needs and responses to SICAP beneficiaries during 2020.

As soon as COVID 19 restrictions were put in place in March 2020, SICAP staff moved to remote working and began to contact Local Community Groups and existing SICAP beneficiaries to identify needs and put in place supports. This engagement took place primarily through phone conversations, individuals and groups appreciated and acknowledged the support. It is important to note that SICAP also responded to a significant number of enquiries from groups and individuals looking for assistance as they became unemployed, or where local groups were trying to assist SICAP beneficiary groups.

### ***The following needs were identified through this engagement process:***

- Older people who were forced to cocoon and living alone were a concern for local communities. There was heightened concern for older people who have a disability or have mental health issues.
- Food and medicine deliveries were identified as needed in some areas.
- In isolated rural areas older vulnerable farmers were identified as requiring a check in on their welfare and to assist with farm tasks.
- Food poverty issues were identified through the School Completion Programme, Coordinators, and through contact with the Family Resource Centres in the county. These issues included food poverty associated with loss of employment and children not accessing breakfast clubs or school meals while schools were closed.
- Concerns about the health and safety of Roma living in a disused factory site were identified through contact with Naas Point community group and the inter-agency steering group responsible for the implementation of the Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy.
- The closure of community centres, community shops, resource centres, addiction centres and services, youth clubs and drop-in centres, libraries, sports facilities, and gyms deprived SICAP beneficiaries of social interaction and access to local services.
- Concerns around mental health arose from an early stage in conversation with SICAP beneficiaries.
- Many Local Community Groups expressed a desire to produce face masks to support older people in their community.
- A large number of individuals engaged with, had ceased employment and required support to avail of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.
- Self-employed clients who were contacted were unaware of their entitlements and required assistance to establish their claim.
- As the pandemic progressed during 2020 digital poverty became an increasing issue with concerns for exam students, inability to engage in social interaction or avail of online supports (1:1 meeting on Zoom, participate in education / training etc.). The needs varied from lack of access to technology – equipment and broadband/Wi-Fi- to an inability to use online platforms like MS Teams and Zoom.
- Young unemployed individuals supported through the SICAP Youth Employment Service engaged well online especially on a 1:1 basis. The inability to engage in group work and in face-to-face contact required innovative approaches, which were well received.

## 2. How SICAP responded to the identified needs of SICAP beneficiaries during 2020

The Horizontal Principles of SICAP underpin all of the work undertaken in the Programme in County Kildare. A community development approach is the basis on which the Programme operates with outreach community development work in disadvantaged communities and much of the activity focuses on issues of equality and encouragement for the most disadvantaged to be heard and to be supported to participate. Equally a collaborative approach underpins much of the work that is described within this report and within County Kildare a thematic approach around youth development forms an important part of the delivery of SICAP.

### ***Types of supports***

Due to the inability to engage with individuals and groups on a face-to-face basis, the immediate challenge was to identify ways in which contact could be established and relationships developed to support communities and individuals. While SICAP had specific objectives for 2020 in terms of actions and Key Performance Indicators the initial response was to engage by phone primarily to assess the impact of COVID 19 on beneficiary groups. During the first weeks of the pandemic the main support required by individuals centered around accessing the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). For the self-employed alone over 300 individuals were engaged with many unaware that they were entitled to avail of the payment.

Local Community Groups ceased operating to a large extent and were supported in a number of areas to produce face masks and access grants from the Community Response Fund in due course.



### ***Volunteers from the Kildare subgroup of Masks4AllIreland, and masks ready for distribution***

By the end of the June 2020 the issue of mental health had grown with many individuals anxious about the impact of the pandemic, and in dealing with the restrictions on social interaction. In response, and as a companywide initiative, CKLP developed a series of mindfulness support messages which were made available through the social media platforms. In addition, mindfulness sessions were run by the Company for its clients and other stakeholders, using expertise within the Company. Mindfulness sessions were also established for staff across all programmes and this support remains in place as the pandemic continues.

Once the initial contact had been established with individuals and groups regular check ins were carried out with SICAP staff contacting individuals and groups about supports that were moving to online delivery. Third level community development and youth studies courses moved to online delivery with students requiring support to use Zoom and in some cases the loan of a laptop. Other workshops were organised as webinars for groups with trainers and contractors adapting to the new circumstances. Similarly, employment supports including industry certified courses and CV preparation adapted to supporting clients remotely.

The key learning from 2020 has been that the work carried out prior to the pandemic and in the early weeks of the COVID 19 restrictions was vital in engaging with communities and individuals. Once these relationships had been developed it was possible to introduce appropriate supports as the year progressed.



**SICAP and other CKLP programmes providing information at Jobs Week event in the Intreo Office Newbridge, March 2020**

### **Targeting approach to engage groups who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic**

The greatest challenge during the pandemic has been how to support hard to reach groups that would normally be engaged through outreach work on a face-to-face basis. The SICAP Youth Employment Service has developed in recent years through a youthwork approach that targets young people in disadvantaged areas as well as providing a drop-in service for young people across the county. Without the ability to run programmes for targeted groups of young people or to offer a drop-in service new approaches were required. The group work element of the programme consists of a mixture of personal development and employment supports including industry accredited training. A healthy eating module was introduced with food ingredients delivered to participants and online cookery instruction provided. Participants were also encouraged to upload photographs of their cooking experience, a cookery book €5 for 25 was launched from this initiative. This new approach was very well received and encouraged many participants to engage in other training modules. In general, young people responded well to the online training.

The onset of COVID 19 coincided in 2020 with the implementation of the new Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy. The coordination function for overseeing the implementation of the Strategy is co funded by SICAP and Kildare County Council and during 2020 the inter-agency steering group focused on COVID 19 supports to Traveller and Roma communities. The SICAP funded Coordinator for the Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy engaged with a number of organisations including Naas Point, a local voluntary group and DSP, HSE, Kildare County Council, Citizens Information and Pavee Point to address health and safety concerns for Roma living in a disused factory site in Naas. Funding

was provided by the Department of Justice to assist with the provision of food, medicines, and other essential items over an extended period while efforts were made to repatriate the individuals or enable them to avail of homeless accommodation.

SICAP also coordinated the implementation of the Roma Employment Programme funded by Department of Justice which focused on supporting Roma in County Kildare to avail of income supports and applications for accommodation and health supports.

One of the key actions in the Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy is the employment of a Traveller Community Development Worker co funded by SICAP and Kildare County Council to work on an outreach basis with Traveller groups in County Kildare. Following recruitment, the new worker commenced in September 2020 which will benefit the ongoing COVID 19 response and SICAP engagement.

County Kildare LEADER Partnership is funded under the Asylum and Migrant Integration Fund to assist asylum seekers and refugees who live in Direct Provision. SICAP coordinates the delivery of this programme and collaborates in the delivery of actions.

SICAP staff supported the Older Voices Kildare project by undertaking weekly phone calls to older people living alone across County Kildare. Food parcels were also funded by SICAP and Kildare PPN and were delivered in December 2020 to 150 older people who were identified as vulnerable and who would be alone over the Christmas period. SICAP staff also engaged in grocery shopping and collection of prescribed medications since March 2020 in some cases for the elderly who are living alone and who are continuing to cocoon.

Engagement with people with disabilities during 2020 focused on supporting young people with disabilities aged 16 – 19 years of age and their families engaged through the Ability Programme. COVID 19 has had a serious impact on this target group many of whom already suffer from anxiety and lack social interaction. SICAP support enabled the provision of activity packs to supplement the provision of food parcels for a cookery programme similar to the Youth Employment Service.

Funding was also sourced from TUSLA through the Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) to allow additional activity packs to be provided. A total of 60 young people is engaged by the Ability Programme in County Kildare. SICAP also collaborated with the Ability Programme to identify support for parents and the families of young people with disabilities and an Autism Awareness workshop was organised in November 2020.

### ***County Response Plans***

SICAP engaged actively in the Community Response Forum in County Kildare and provided updates to each meeting of the Forum. In the initial response to support older people and other vulnerable groups SICAP engaged with voluntary groups and other programmes managed by the Company e.g., Older Voices Kildare and provided staff to assist with the befriending service to make phone calls and carry out deliveries where there were gaps locally.



*Left: Ingredients and recipes were supplied to participants on the Youth Employment Programme*

*Right: SICAP Community Development Support Worker, Nicola Hogarty Shopping for Older People during lockdown.*



SICAP linked with Muintir na Tire (Community Champion), Kildare Volunteer Centre, Kildare PPN, the Community Gardai and Kildare GAA on an ongoing basis to ensure that the collective efforts with local communities was coordinated.

As the pandemic continued, SICAP engaged with a wide range of local partners to address food poverty. Support provided ranged from funding of food packs for students at a post primary school to bringing together organisations in Newbridge to address a local need. SICAP engaged with Naas Point, a local voluntary group and other service providers to support Roma who are homeless in Naas. Funding was sourced from the Department of Justice and through the Community Response Fund.

Local community groups engaged in providing voluntary services were also assisted to avail of grants from the Community Response Fund.

Some of the organisations involved in the Community Response Forum came together to focus on digital poverty issues and developed a strategic response by the end of 2020. SICAP has agreed to provide a lead role in 2021 with the partner organisations to implement a number of priority actions.

### ***Support for Local Community Groups and Social Enterprises***

SICAP in County Kildare engaged with Kildare Public Participation Network and other partners to support Local Community Groups to engage in the COVID 19 Community Response. Kildare PPN developed an interactive map of services to support the Community Call phone help line and SICAP worked with Local Community Groups in disadvantaged areas to ensure that groups who wished to assist were registered with the PPN and were available to accept referrals for assistance. SICAP also collaborated with Kildare PPN to fund an advertising campaign on local radio encouraging the general public in County Kildare to support local community and voluntary groups. This campaign highlighted the role that Local Community Groups were playing in the COVID 19 Community Response and given their lack of fundraising capacity, the general public was asked to contribute / fundraise for local voluntary groups. This campaign was supported by Kildare FM who featured community efforts throughout their regular programme schedule.

SICAP Outreach Community Development Workers assisted local community groups across North and South Kildare in planning activities and used the social media platforms of CKLP to publicize local initiatives and good news stories during COVID 19 last year. A number of groups were also encouraged to apply for grant assistance for COVID 19 initiatives and to source health and safety materials to enable community services to operate safely and in line with public health guidelines.

As part of the Kildare Social Inclusion Week activities CKLP hosted an event to highlight the community efforts during COVID 19. This online event featured a number of speakers from community organisations who were engaged in various activities to support the most vulnerable. As well as recording the efforts of local community activists the event also allowed a sharing of information and opportunity to reflect on some of the learning gained from the experiences to date.

### ***Collaborations and joint initiatives with local partners***

SICAP engaged in a number of collaborations with local partners in response to identified needs during the pandemic in 2020. These collaborations involved engagement with a number of other organisations that SICAP works with on an ongoing basis and the relationships already in place assisted greatly in responding quickly to emergency needs that were identified.



***Cooleragh Men's Shed Staplestown at work in their polytunnel during COVID 19***

Throughout this report various collaborations are referred to in addressing the needs of specific beneficiary groups and in relation to issues like food poverty and digital poverty. The following two initiatives are examples of how SICAP has engaged with other organisations in relation to the Government's Keeping Well Initiative:

#### ***Older Persons Winter Initiative***

An inter-agency group came together in October 2020, to look at directing additional supports to vulnerable older people across the County during Level 5 restrictions. The initial idea was to compile 1,000 resource packs with information on a range of supports based around the themes of the Keeping Well Campaign. This collaborative effort included An Garda Síochána, Older Voices Kildare, County Kildare LEADER Partnership (SICAP and TUS), Kildare PPN, HSE Suicide Prevention Office, Kildare Age Friendly Alliance, and Kildare Sports Partnership. The resource packs had a theme of the twelve days of Christmas and contained a twelve day exercise programme, a twelve day Christmas song book from Embrace Music (local social enterprise), Christmas cards from Older Voice Kildare, mental health information and support phone numbers from HSE, mindfulness mental health information from County Kildare LEADER Partnership, an art pack and information on the Small Jobs Scheme and the Befriending Service.

Separately SICAP collaborated with Kildare PPN to provide the funding for 150 food hampers for the most vulnerable older people living alone across the county. Three and a half tonnes of food were

sourced and stored in the CKLP offices at Jigginstown in Naas where staff across all programmes volunteered to package into 150 hampers for those older people most at risk, who were identified by the frontline staff in Older Voices Kildare, HSE Older Person's Services, and the Older Person's Council.

In addition to proving materials for the resource packs funding was received from the Age Friendly Programme and Newbridge Silverware donated 150 decorations to include in the food hampers.

The food hampers were distributed by CKLP staff led by the TUS Programme Team Leaders with the assistance of SICAP staff and Older Voices Kildare.



***Christmas Food Hampers and Art Creativity packs for Older People cocooning over Christmas due to Covid 19 Restrictions***

### ***Community Outdoor Walking Leader Programme***

SICAP and Kildare Sports Partnership collaborated towards the end of 2020 to develop an Outdoor Walking Leader Programme. The purpose of this initiative is to promote personal and community wellness by providing an outdoor alternative to online training and to encourage community interaction in a safe environment. Twelve Outdoor Walking Leaders are being trained on each course and will be expected to act as local facilitators to encourage walking groups during COVID 19. The training involves a blended learning experience and includes modules on safeguarding, disability inclusion, mental health first aid, CFR, and defibrillator as well as certified leadership training. A total of thirty-six Walking Leaders will be trained and the first group commenced training in December 2020 during Level 5 restrictions.

#### **2.1. SICAP cross programme integrated approach**

SICAP worked closely with other programmes managed by County Kildare LEADER Partnership during 2020 to provide a companywide response to the emergency situation and also worked with other agencies in County Kildare around specific thematic issues including food poverty, digital poverty, and support for older people.

Within County Kildare LEADER Partnership SICAP worked with all other programmes which include the Asylum and Migrant Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Roma Employment Programme, (both funded by Department of Justice), Older Voices Kildare (HSE), the Ability Programme (DSP/Dormant

Accounts), TUS and RSS schemes (DSP), Social Enterprise Training and Mentoring (DRCD/Dormant Accounts), Heads Up Programme (HSE), DARA Project Drug Rehabilitation CE Scheme and Enterprise Skills Programme CE Scheme. County Kildare LEADER Partnership also hosts the employment of staff for the Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force, Kildare Sports Partnership, and the Public Participation Network.

The line managers from each of these programmes form the Coordination Staff team within the company and have met on a weekly basis during COVID 19. The Team Leaders from Goal One and Goal Two are members of this team. In addition to monitoring the COVID 19 business continuity plan the Coordination Staff team also coordinated the cross-programme response to local needs, and each of the initiatives described in this report demonstrate the integrated approach that has been taken since the COVID 19 restrictions commenced.

On a wider basis SICAP has collaborated closely with other programmes funded by Government to maximise support for the most vulnerable in County Kildare. In addition to the programmes managed by County Kildare LEADER Partnership, and collaborations included elsewhere in this report, there are strong working relationships at an inter-agency level that have supported the COVID 19 response in County Kildare. These include the collaboration of agencies involved in the Children and Young People's Service's Committee (CYPSC), the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), effective linkages through SICAP staff with the School Completion Programme clusters and cooperation with the Family Resource Centres in Athy, Newbridge, Curragh, and Kildare Town.

## **2.2. Work undertaken by Local Community Groups and Social Enterprises (supported by SICAP) in response to COVID-19**

### ***Community Face Mask Initiative***

One of the most significant initiatives undertaken by Local Community Groups in County Kildare was the Community Face Mask Initiative. Local community activists identified the need for face masks through engagement with the Outreach Community Development Workers and identified vulnerable groups in their community including older people and nursing home visitors and residents of direct provision centres. It was also identified that cost of masks was an issue for some groups and would also encourage individuals and families to use masks even though at that stage the use of masks was not obligatory.

An additional initiative in some areas also included aprons for older people to hold mobile phones and panic devices for those who were cocooning.

SICAP purchased the materials for the face masks, printed an instruction leaflet and assembled approximately 400 face mask packs initially. These packs were distributed to Local Community Groups and social enterprises in disadvantaged areas and the volunteers involved in the groups sewed the masks and distributed within their local communities to older people and front-line workers. Through this initiative over 3,000 face masks have been produced and distributed within disadvantaged areas of County Kildare.



***Masks being delivered to Athy College, by Aine Byrne, Youth Education Development Worker, SICAP***

### ***Naas Point***

Shortly after the initial COVID 19 restrictions in March 2020, County Kildare LEADER Partnership was alerted to the plight of a group of Roma living in a disused factory in the Naas area. Any income raised by begging or casual work was suspended as a result of Covid 19, leaving the individuals destitute. There were also concerns that the group may not be aware of the pandemic, of safety precautions necessary or of the early symptoms of Covid 19.

Through the SICAP funded Coordinator for Inclusion Strategies, CKLP made initial contact with emergency services and local charities and convened a meeting of the Kildare Traveller & Roma Interagency Group. A member of the Community Garda team visited the site to provide hand sanitiser and assess the situation.

Swift responses by An Garda Siochana Community team and Citizens Information Service, the Civil Defence, and the Red Cross, coordinated by SICAP secured short term food support, hand sanitiser, water etc, which was delivered to the site by the Civil Defence.

A more sustainable response was required, and longer-term arrangement were made with a local Naas based charity, *Naas Point*, who continued to support the individuals until they returned to Romania in late December 2020. *Naas Point* first responded to the group on April 1<sup>st</sup> by delivering a hot meal to the group.

Initially, *Naas Point* provided hot meals each day and additional food supplies from their own resources. As a local charity, responding to the needs of many individuals and families at this level of daily support was unsustainable and additional funds were required. CKLP secured emergency funding from the Department of Justice & Equality, which in turn was grand aided to *Naas Point* to enable them to regularly purchase food, clothing, medication, and heating for the homeless group. Daily contact took place between *Naas Point* and the individuals on the site with a very high level of support provided.

*Naas Point* also liaised closely with CKLP's Roma Employment Support Worker in supporting the individuals to apply for PPS Numbers and medical card.

*Naas Point* has also supported Roma and Traveller families living in their catchment area with food & clothing supplies, emergency accommodation and additional needs. The most recent intervention took place prior to, and during Christmas 2020.

When the Department of Justice funds were spent, CKLP supported *Naas Point* to secure two small funding grants from Kildare County Council, to offset some of the ongoing cost incurred by the charity.

During Level 5 restrictions the group is continuing to offer a telephone and practical help service. This consists of a telephone call service to those who have expressed their wish to receive a comfort/buddy call and a practical service whereby volunteers from the parish will collect and deliver products (i.e., groceries, pharmacy products etc) and help with any home needs (i.e., putting out the bins, dropping letters to the post-box etc), for people who request such a service in the Naas Parish area.

*Naas Point* is a voluntary group in the Naas area which offers welcome, hospitality, respect, and encouragement to promote the dignity and fundamental rights of people in need.

### 3. Changes in work practices following the outbreak of COVID-19

As a company, County Kildare LEADER Partnership moved to remote working as soon as the Government issued guidance with a request for employers to do so. This involved providing all staff with the equipment and supports to work effectively from home.

Support has been provided through weekly team meetings via Zoom and WhatsApp groups. SICAP staff meetings have been held on a monthly basis via Zoom and SICAP Team Leaders engage on a weekly basis as part of the Coordination Staff group which monitors implementation of the company business continuity plan.

On an operational level, the Company has operated strictly in accordance with the Government's Mid Term Plan and as restrictions have been eased or reintroduced. This involved the reintroduction of classroom-based courses and small group engagement from July 2020, until Level 3 restrictions were reintroduced in September 2020. While restrictions have operated at Level 3 or higher supports have been provided on an online basis or where possible outdoor activities were organised.

For example, Maynooth University Level 7 Certificate courses for the 2019/2020 academic year went online from March 2020 and the students completed their course work online. Three Level 7 Certificate courses for the 2020 / 2021 academic year commenced in October and November 2020 online, with one face to face class taking place in Maynooth University Campus for each of the three courses. When restrictions were increased again the classes returned to online delivery.

While outreach community development work was impacted by a lack of face-to-face contact with community groups, food and medicine deliveries have continued throughout COVID 19 in some areas as well as supporting older farmers in isolated rural areas.



***SICAP encouraged young farmers to help neighbours in North West Kildare during lockdown***

The Youth Employment Service delivered food parcels and checked in with young people engaged with the service. Similarly, funding provided by SICAP to School Completion Programme projects in the county for breakfast clubs and homework clubs was reallocated to provide food packs and activity packs. One school that does not have DEIS status was assisted with the provision of food parcels where food poverty had been identified as an issue.

The onset of COVID 19 coincided during the year with the launch of the new CKLP website and established the social media platforms as very important communication tools, as remote working became established. The SICAP Monitoring and Communications Officer coordinates the website and social media platforms and ensures that all information from Government agencies and other sources is disseminated through our communication channels to SICAP beneficiary groups and other stakeholders. This proved to be an invaluable resource during COVID 19, as witnessed by the level of activity. During 2020 the new website was updated regularly - each day with blogs, article pieces, job vacancies for the unemployed and updates from each programme. A weekly Job search section was shared each Monday and good news stories on SICAP, and other programmes were added on a daily basis. There have been over 17,000 regular visitors to the website with almost 41,000 views since its launch in March 2020.

The Facebook page includes videos on SICAP activities, updates on Covid19 from gov.ie and has had a reach of over 42,500 which has remained consistent. A Twitter account and Instagram Page, @cklpkildare5, has been in operation since May 2020, and is linked to our Facebook page and our ten infographics on mental health and well-being were shared extensively across social media.

#### **4. Challenges faced during 2020, as a result of COVID-19.**

The Key Performance Indicators for SICAP in County Kildare were exceeded for Goal One, with 67 Local Community Groups engaged with during the year. The Key Performance Indicator for Goal Two was amended by agreement with Kildare LCDC with a reduction of 10% of the original target. The revised target was exceeded by year end.

The main challenge faced during 2020 has been the difficulty in engaging with SICAP beneficiary groups in the most disadvantaged areas due to COVID 19 restrictions. The Key Performance Indicator for working with individuals in disadvantaged areas was not fully achieved. This challenge was overcome to some degree by innovative approaches to engaging with individuals and groups online and outdoors when COVID 19 restrictions were relaxed during the summer months. However, a number of actions had to be cancelled at various stages, including basic computer classes in one of the most disadvantaged areas and a personal development programme that was to be delivered in four locations. This was not possible as the programmes centred around the facilitation of the group and support for the participants to engage and deal with personal challenges.

Similarly, some of the most disadvantaged beneficiary groups experienced difficulties in trying to engage with public services that were only available on a remote basis. SICAP staff working with these groups provided assistance in downloading and completing forms, sourcing interpretation services, and engaging with service providers.

While some courses went ahead through online delivery, challenges also arose during the year. One of the main issues was in monitoring the COVID 19 restrictions to ensure that the course could proceed safely and that sufficient numbers could be recruited.

As the Traveller community development work has commenced since restrictions have been increased face to face and group work has not been possible. This has been a significant challenge

in building relationships with individuals and groups. A number of approaches were taken to engage with the Traveller Community during this time, predominantly using the internet. A Facebook page was established for Kildare Traveller Action which will focus on engagement with the community around events, work opportunities, training, and other information. A WhatsApp group has been set up to link the Community Development Worker with the Primary Health Care workers and their Co-ordinators. Together, with planned Zoom meetings in 2021, this will allow for sharing of information and collaborative work while the current restrictions continue.

Similarly support for the Roma community has been hampered by the lack of face-to-face contact, which is essential as much of the work is around supporting individuals and families with difficult issues related to Habitual Residency, accessing income and medical supports as well as issues related to homelessness. SICAP was assisted in overcoming these issues to an extent in 2020 through the assistance of local voluntary groups, the Garda Siochana and other service providers as well as using the postal service for forms and other information.

For unemployed individuals, industry certified courses delivered online included HACCP, Manual Handling, First Aid, and Infection Control. Safe Pass courses were allowed to recommence on a classroom basis when restrictions were relaxed but with tight restrictions on numbers. Some courses required significant additional administration to deal with accreditation requirements e.g., issue of licences to potential participants and subsequent follow up work.

As the focus was on income supports and emergency assistance there was a significant reduction in the number of referrals for education, training and employment supports. This challenge was overcome to a large degree by further collaboration between programmes managed by County Kildare LEADER Partnership and a prioritisation of supports to beneficiary groups most affected by the COVID 19 pandemic.



***One of the Safe Pass Courses that went ahead during restrictions – CKLP Training Rooms, Naas***

## **5. Gaps in programme design highlighted through the experience of implementing SICAP in the context of COVID-19**

A national emergency situation like the COVID 19 pandemic focuses attention on publicly funded programmes and as the Government's main social inclusion programme, SICAP has a key role to play in supporting the most disadvantaged groups in each LDC area. One of the learning points from 2020 may be that the role of SICAP could have been more explicitly established nationally as it took some time to clarify how SICAP could add value to the efforts of other publicly funded and voluntary organisations within the Programme Requirements. It is fair to say that roles established by Government around the community response did not explicitly include SICAP and LDC's until the Irish Local Development Network engaged at a national level.

The delivery of SICAP in County Kildare has shown how collaboration with other organisations has enabled key strategic initiatives to be developed including the Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy, the Integration Strategy and SICAP Youth Employment Services. Gaps that have been identified during COVID 19 in County Kildare include concerns around the coordination of food poverty initiatives and the need for the implementation of a strategy to tackle digital poverty. While programme design should not be prescriptive and does allow for local priorities it would be useful to reflect if SICAP should be recognised to a greater extent when national emergencies like COVID 19 arise. It would be useful also at an inter Departmental level to recognise the capacity that SICAP can play in facilitating and coordinating local responses in relation to social inclusion, acting both as a catalyst and a leverage for drawing on other resources.

## **6. Potential programme supports that DRCD and/or Pobal could deliver to LDCs in 2021.**

Both MS Teams and Zoom were used by SICAP in Kildare during 2020 to:

- Host the launch of the SICAP Youth Employment Service Review,
- Hold a Seminar on the role of Community Groups during COVID 19 as part of Kildare Social Inclusion Week. Most of the Social Inclusion Week events were delivered as webinars and as in previous years the Social Inclusion Week was a collaboration between SICAP and Kildare PPN.
- Hold a Briefing Session for Oireachtas Members on SICAP and other programmes managed by County Kildare LEADER Partnership
- Carry out the consultative process for the Kildare Integration Strategy. The development of the Strategy is a collaboration between Kildare County Council and SICAP

These are examples of how these platforms have been used and how they have added to the capacity of SICAP to engage with a range of stakeholders.

The move from face to face contact to online delivery of SICAP supports is being developed on an ongoing basis. Similar to many other programmes the move to online and blended supports has been carried out during 2020 with little formal training or experience in the use of technology such as MS Teams or Zoom for group based capacity building and education / training. Research carried out during 2020 identified training modules developed by third level education providers around groupwork and facilitation skills that would be very useful for community development workers

engaging with local community groups as well as employment support specialists delivering training workshops to SICAP beneficiaries. From discussions with other local organisations there is a clear need for staff to be upskilled in using platforms like Teams and Zoom not only for work with clients but in also maximising the benefits for engaging in collaborative work, hosting workshops and focus group discussions, developing local action plans and publicising their work through webinars, online launches, and briefing discussions.

It is suggested that technical support should be provided on a national basis to support the capacity of Local Development Companies to provide blended learning approaches and improved online offerings to strengthen the capacity of SICAP to overcome emergency situations like the current COVID19 pandemic.



***Educating our educators, the new way – over ZOOM – LGBTQ Awareness Training, SICAP 2020***

## **7. Non-COVID related actions or projects that took place in 2020.**

While COVID 19 impacted on how actions were implemented during 2020, and involved a refocusing of some resources, many of the actions planned for 2020 continued to be implemented especially from a strategic perspective.

Key strategies for 2020 included:

- The implementation of the 2019 – 2023 Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy
- The development of the 2020 – 2024 Kildare Integration Strategy
- Kildare Social Inclusion Week 2020
- SICAP Youth Employment Service Review
- North West Kildare Initiative

### **Supporting Communities (Goal 1)**

#### ***Local Community Groups***

Community development outreach work during 2020 concentrated to a large extent on COVID 19 supports to local communities. A significant amount of work was undertaken in both the North West Kildare and South Kildare areas prior to COVID 19 to establish contact and discuss work plans for

the coming year. This initial contact assisted in supporting groups when COVID 19 restrictions occurred and has also provided the basis for plans in 2021 when it is hoped that groups will return to activity.

In supporting established groups SICAP organised a range of thematic workshops in conjunction with Social Inclusion Week including Intercultural and Anti-Racism, Gender Equality, Disability Awareness, Understanding Cultural Adaptation, and Intercultural Communications.

GDPR Workshops were also organised in February 2020 and June 2020 for local community groups.

Non COVID 19 related activities also included continued support for the Strengthening Families Programme with a SICAP staff member seconded to assist with the delivery of the project and funding provided for food.

### ***Inclusion Strategies***

SICAP supported the implementation of the 2019 – 2023 Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy through:

- Co funding of the Coordinator role to oversee the implementation of the Strategy
- Co funding of the Traveller Community Development role seconded to Kildare Traveller Action
- Co funding for Kildare Traveller Action as the Traveller community development organisation in County Kildare

The Coordinator worked with the Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy Steering Group which met on a number of occasions during the year to monitor implementation of the actions. The Community Development Worker role was finalised, and a recruitment process completed by September 2020 when the position was filled. Funding for Kildare Traveller Action has enabled KTA to implement actions in the Strategy where the organisation is the lead implementer.

The Coordinator is also responsible for supporting the development of the Kildare Integration Strategy 2020 – 2024. During the last twelve months a tender process was completed for a consultancy to assist with the development of the new Strategy. The Integration Strategy Steering Group led by Kildare County Council and supported by the Coordinator worked with Sara Stephens, the consultant to develop a consultative process which was undertaken in the final quarter of 2020. Despite the limitations of COVID 19 significant progress was made and it is expected that the new Strategy will be completed in the first quarter of 2021.

### ***Family Support Services***

During 2020 SICAP continued to support the development of family support services for families affected by drug and alcohol addiction through the ongoing secondment of a SICAP staff member to the Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force as Regional Family Support Coordinator. The family support service is based in Hope Cottage, Kill and once COVID 19 restrictions commenced the services moved to working remotely.

SICAP funded a five week Art & Mindfulness Programme from February to March for family members at Hope Cottage. The Family Support group moved to online meetings and a weekly drop in service via Zoom commenced in May on Friday mornings. Both groups have been well attended. All one to one support was offered by phone and older people within the group were especially supported with weekly check-in calls and texts. Family members linked in with mental health online supports offered by CKLP & HSE during Covid 19 and Hope Cottage service users participated in the community face mask initiative with over 200 masks assembled and given to the local community.

## ***North West Kildare***

Arising from a review of the data analysis provided by Pobal in 2019 it was agreed that the North West Kildare area should be prioritised in 2020 on a cross programme basis. Substantial work was carried out during the early part of 2020 through outreach community development work to establish contact on the ground with local community groups and service providers. It was agreed that a briefing would be held for agencies and service providers and that separately three community engagement events would be organised. Before COVID 19 intervened, a briefing session was held in February 2020 with service providers in Allenwood and a community engagement event was held in Rathangan also in February 2020.

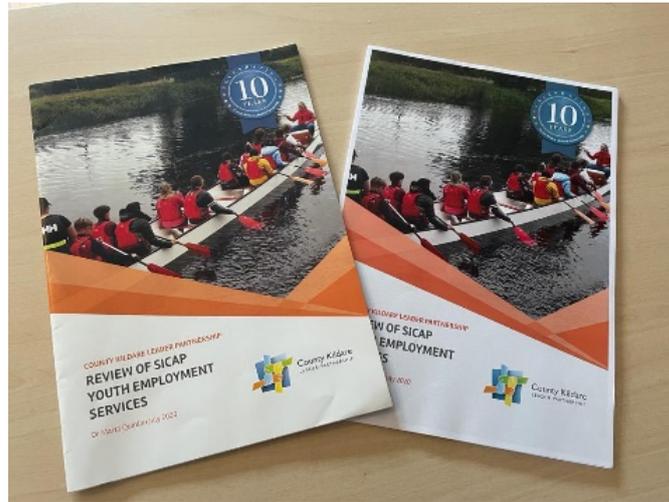
While further community engagement events have not been possible, the contacts established with service providers has been of assistance in broadening local knowledge about SICAP services for individuals, maintaining contact with local community groups and strengthening plans for 2021 when the opportunity arises.

## **Supporting Individuals (Goal 2)**

### ***SICAP Youth Employment Service***

While the SICAP Youth Employment Service adapted to COVID 19 and is documented elsewhere in this report a key action for 2020 was an external review of the Service which has grown over the last three years and now employs two Employment Support Workers. During 2020 an external review was commissioned and was undertaken by Dr. Maria Quinlan. A total of 13 young people participated in the research which was carried out through focus groups and 1:1 engagement. All the young people had engaged with the Service either through group engagement or on a 1:1 basis. A total of ten local stakeholders (service providers) also participated in the research which found that a total of 394 young people had engaged with SICAP over a two year period. The research found that the average length of engagement was between five and seven months and that the average number of interventions was five interventions per young person.

The recommendations from the Review included a proposal that a Youth Employment Strategy should be developed at a county level to ensure that youth unemployment is prioritised on an inter-agency basis and that the lessons from the SICAP Youth Employment Service experience should be disseminated to all employment support agencies. The report was launched online by Minister of State Martin Heydon T.D. on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020. A video was also produced about the Youth Employment Service and involved some of the young people who are clients of the service. A follow up event was held on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020 to disseminate the findings from the report and to discuss the recommendations with key stakeholders including a number of young people who had progressed through the Youth Employment Service. A presentation was also made to Kildare LCDC on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and a follow up meeting was held with DSP and KWETB to discuss how a strategy for improved collaboration around youth unemployment could be implemented.



*Review of SICAP Youth Employment Service launched online in July 2020.*

### **Supports for Young People and Parents**

While education supports during COVID 19 were reallocated to assist schools and families with food and activities other preventative actions continued to be implemented prior to and during COVID 19. The Better Basics reading programme ran from January to March 2020 until COVID 19 intervened. A series of videos for parents around Cybersafety were developed in conjunction with CYPSC and other agencies. The five videos on separate topics were hosted on YouTube and launched on social media in May 2020. The short videos address topics of interest to parents with a view to assisting them help their children navigate the online world safely. A press release was issued and published by the Kildare Nationalist.

Considerable work was carried out with a school interested in trialling the Non Violent Response approach to improve inter student relations within the school. SICAP collaborated with the school and Kildare Youth Services to issue questionnaires to students and staff regarding their attitudes around their safety and sense of belonging within the school. SICAP and KYS subsequently data entered over 400 responses. Training was being scheduled when the lockdown occurred. SICAP is continuing to link with the NVR trainer and the school to reschedule the training for 2021.

During 2020 a total of 4,456 children availed of SICAP supports with 2,234 female and 2,222 male participants.

### **Mental Health Wellbeing and Resilience**

SICAP reviewed its support for disadvantaged men during 2020 and developed a new approach which was implemented by the end of the year. In previous years SICAP had collaborated with the Heads Up programme to support men who had engaged in the 12 week Heads Up Programme. Separately SICAP had also been supporting men's outreach work in disadvantaged estates in Newbridge in collaboration with Newbridge Family Resource Centre.

During the past year concerns had been expressed around mental health issues in the North West Kildare area and the need for a rural mental health initiative. SICAP engaged with Newbridge FRC and the Heads Up Programme to establish a new full time position of Mental Health, Wellbeing and Resilience Coordinator co funded by SICAP. And HSE. This new position strengthens the wellbeing and resilience work with men and will enable the development of a new initiative in the North West

Kildare area. Following recruitment, the new Mental Health Wellbeing and Resilience Coordinator took up employment in October 2020 and has been researching the North West Kildare piece of work for implementation in 2021.

### ***Employment Support***

Employment support actions were significantly impacted by COVID 19 in 2020 but despite the lack of new referrals SICAP staff continued to engage with clients originally referred in previous years and collaborated with other CKLP managed programmes to assist unemployed and disadvantaged individuals and groups. An example of collaboration was the cooperation developed between the Enterprise Skills Programme, a CE start your own business course and the SICAP enterprise and employment support services. Through close working relationships the two programmes were able to ensure that participants on the CE scheme were supported to prepare for the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme, thus ensuring that there was improved progression from the CE scheme into self-employment. Where participants chose to take up employment instead of self-employment or to defer self-employment due to COVID 19 SICAP staff were able to assist with other employment supports.

SICAP also engaged with DSP around a review of the Memo of Understanding for the referral of clients for the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme and the Short Term Allowance Scheme and the Local Enterprise Office provided funding for pre enterprise courses for enterprise clients.

Prior to the commencement of COVID 19, SICAP collaborated with DSP and participated along with other CKLP managed programmes at an information fair organised as part of National Jobs Week. From this event and other smaller information events a total of 530 individuals availed of information provision (292 male and 238 female). A further 130 individuals were referred by DSP and other agencies for CV preparation during 2020, and 521 individuals availed of training courses. This consisted of 392 individuals attending courses for progression to employment as well as 68 attending courses for self-employment and 61 attending lifelong learning courses.

The Kickstart programme is a work placement programme which is suitable for clients who have skills and experience but are having difficulty in securing employment. The programme includes a training element with four weeks work placement with an employer and attempts to match the client's skills to the types of employment that they are seeking. During 2020, two Kickstart programmes were run with a total of 25 participants. SICAP collaborated with DSP employer liaison services to identify employers who were recruiting and placement opportunities. The main challenge during COVID 19 has been the difficulty in placing clients at a time when unemployment is growing, and employers are having difficulty in retaining their existing staff. Despite the difficulties experienced nine participants gained employment and a further six participants engaged in further education and training.