



County Kildare LEADER Partnership: Case Study of SICAP funded Certificate in Youth Work Studies 2018 - 2021

- Thematic Area: Goal 1 Project
- Target Group: Local Community Groups (youth groups and youth organisations)



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

A Case Study on the SICAP funded Certificate in Youth Work Studies

Background

Goal 1 of SICAP 2018-2022 is to “support communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues, developing the capacity of Local Community Groups, and creating more sustainable communities”

The County Kildare LEADER Partnership (CKLP) SICAP Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022 identified the need for specific supports for youth initiatives in County Kildare. In addition to the national SICAP themes CKLP added a fourth cross programme theme to underline the need for a coordinated programme approach to meeting the needs of young people.

Theme 4: Supporting youth development in County Kildare involving collaborative approaches with local and national stakeholders to improve local service provision.

SICAP Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022, County Kildare LEADER Partnership

Specifically, the SICAP strategic plan for County Kildare proposed a more holistic approach under Goal One with supports focusing on the pre-development of youth groups and the establishment of third level leadership training for volunteers on an outreach basis in the county.

One of the most successful SICAP initiatives in recent years has been the offering of third level community education in community development to disadvantaged communities in County Kildare. Arising from the 2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan discussions with youth organisations about youth leadership training led to the establishment of a Steering Group with representation from key stakeholder



organisations, In Sync (formerly Kildare Youth Services), Foróige, Kildare Wicklow Education Training Board and SICAP.

Collaboration

The Steering Group formed by SICAP to develop third level education courses for the youth sector in County Kildare looked at the provision of leadership training in the county and identified a need for accredited third level education and training to support the work of youth organisations and particularly volunteers involved or interested in becoming involved in youth clubs in County Kildare. Included in this prolife were some of the most disadvantaged areas in the county and target groups of SICAP. This innovative and collaborative approach brought together youth organisations, the Youth Officer from the Education and Training Board and SICAP staff to come up with a programme that would meet the needs of Local Community Groups working with young people in the county.

Over some months, the steering group worked on developing a third level accredited Youth Studies Certificate, to run as a pilot programme for two years, from 2018 to 2020. Following a tender process Maynooth University was awarded the contract to deliver the course and this collaboration with the University based in County Kildare added an extra dimension for participants. The Certificate in Youth Work Studies is a Level 7 Youth Studies Certificate programme aimed at supporting members of youth projects, organisations, clubs, and community groups to gain a deeper understanding of youth work.

The steering group publicised the certificate programme to organisations working with young people in Kildare and SICAP managed the recruitment of students for the courses. In 2020, the decision was made to extend the course for the 2020 / 2021 academic year.

“Interaction with volunteer led groups through the administration of the Local Youth Club grants and support for volunteers around the National Quality Standards



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Framework, identified the want to acquire training around a framework and methodology of working in partnership with young people”

Steering group member).

The delivery of the Youth Studies Certificate was a further example of collaborative work between SICAP and Maynooth University. The Department of Applied Social Studies at Maynooth University developed the content for the Youth Studies Certificate to meet the specific needs identified by the Steering Group and delivered the course in the CKLP training rooms in Naas, County Kildare and other locations supported by SICAP. Maynooth University were responsible for delivery of the course and supported students' induction through the processes of registration and library tours, while a dedicated SICAP staff member supported students outside of course hours and responded to needs raised by students or by the tutors.

The close collaboration between Maynooth University and the SICAP staff around this course was fostered through regular meetings. Regular meetings were held involving the SICAP Goal 1 Team Leader, SICAP Certificate Coordinator, MU Academic Director as well as weekly contact between the tutors and SICAP Certificate Coordinator. By doing this, SICAP staff were able to pass feedback from students to tutors, and similarly, Maynooth staff communicated to the SICAP team any additional needs that students had. In this way, the SICAP team could respond rapidly, as was the case for example in organising an extra session for students on writing skills and academic referencing.



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Programme

Participants

The Youth Studies Certificate was directed at people already active in youth work, ideally those with at least one year's practical experience of youth work and who had previously completed basic youth leadership training. This was important because participants were expected to reflect on what was presented on the course and examine it in relation to their own and other students' experiences of working with young people. The course was open to those aged 21 and over and was publicised through Local Community Groups that SICAP works with and also through the networks of youth groups that the Steering Group engaged with.

Applicants were interviewed and priority was given to candidates whose motivation to do the Certificate was in order to enhance their participation in youth work in their communities. Students on the Youth Studies Certificate course received an Maynooth University student card to access the library, Writing Centre supports, sports centre and other campus amenities.

Award

The National University of Ireland (NUI) Certificate in Youth Work Studies is a Special Purpose Award at Level 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications and carries 20 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits. Successful completion of the NUI Certificate in Youth Work Studies is not a professional qualification in youth work.

Course Delivery

The course was delivered by a team consisting of the course tutors, and guest tutors who are practitioners in the field, in evening sessions of three hours once a week, and one all-day session a month. The weekly evening sessions were held in CKLP offices and the monthly Saturday sessions were held in Maynooth University. When COVID 19 measures were introduced, the Certificate programme was delivered first as



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blended learning (a combination of online and in-person learning), before moving fully online. The online sessions used Microsoft Teams, and participants went into break out rooms for group work. The Certificate programme followed the academic calendar from October to May each year.

Learning Methodologies

The Youth Work Studies Certificate was underpinned by adult learning principles and sought to replicate some of the processes of youth work by including strong elements of group work and creativity. This was reflected in the delivery of the course, with teaching methods focused on experiential learning, critical thinking, reflecting on what is being learned, creativity, and working as a group.

Learning as a group

The course included in-class group discussions and group presentations. Participants broke into “syndicates” to work together and then present to the entire group. The 2020-2021 cohort met online and so went into break out rooms on Teams to do group work. Tutors consciously fostered group learning, and participants placed particular value on learning from their peers and appreciated the diversity of their groups which gave them a unique opportunity to hear the opinions of people from “all different walks of life” as well as making the classes “great fun”.

“I really enjoyed the format of group/ mini group discussions and using that group dynamic to help analyse and cement the subject topics.”

Course participant

Lectures

The delivery of lectures was designed on the basis of a model of experiential learning to be a dialogue and to take into account the knowledge and experiences of participants and that “they are not empty vessels”. The tutors were responsive to the group and could adapt the delivery of the lecture to work best with the group dynamic.



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Learning from the lectures was achieved with the benefit from group discussions as outlined above. Participants appreciated the notes being uploaded on Moodle to help them with their essays.

Visits to Youth Centres

Participants broke into 'syndicates' to visit different youth centres. As part of the visit, participants met experienced youth workers and had the opportunity to ask them questions they had prepared. After the visit, participants discussed as a group what they had learned and made a presentation together for the rest of the class. Listening to other groups' presentations gave them the opportunity to learn about more youth centres than the one they had visited.

"I really enjoyed the lectures and class discussions, but what I really learned most from was the site visit to a youth project in Dublin. It was the single most beneficial activity in that talking to the staff and volunteers I could put into perspective all of the fundamentals of youth work that we had been learning, reading, and discussing."

Reading

Participants received a reading list at the beginning of the programme. Some readings were distributed in hard copy while most were uploaded on Moodle. Many participants reported that they enjoyed and were stimulated by the reading material. Any participants who reported struggling with the readings said that the tutors helped them by recommending shorter pieces.

Assessments

There were no formal exams associated with the programme. Assessment was 100% coursework. Assignments were designed to engage participants in the process of their own learning and to develop various capacities including critical thinking, reflection, and creativity. Assignments included written essays, presentations, group exercises and projects.



Course content

The course was made up of five modules:

- 1) Youth Service provision and Policy development
- 2) Adolescence, youth culture and social situation of young people
- 3) Youth Work definitions, models, and approaches
- 4) Principles of Social Education in Youth Work
- 5) Role of the Youth Worker

SICAP Team Supporting Participation

SICAP staff made significant efforts to build relationships with the group and to be approachable, which was reflected in feedback from the participants. SICAP staff met students at the start of each session. When sessions were delivered at CKLP offices they met students each week and had informal discussions over tea which served as feedback and a way of identifying any potential problems, as well as building the type of relationships that helped students to feel comfortable to approach SICAP staff with any issues. When COVID-19 was forced to move online, a member of SICAP staff attended the course each week at the beginning of the session and built relationships with students in this way. SICAP staff supported students one to one by encouraging them, talking through any difficulties they had, and as a group by organising training to help with completing assignments for example on writing skills and academic referencing.

“The SICAP team member was on the other side of the phone or email if you had any questions or anything and always very quick to respond. I struggled a bit at the beginning because I actually had never been to college so writing the assignment,



the first one, I talked to her and she said, 'you can do this', that confidence builder, she came across as a great help and a great support."

Impacts

Personal development and empowerment

Participants reported that the course pushed them "out of the comfort zone, but in a good way". The experiences of doing the Certificate course facilitated an increase in confidence, participants felt empowered by the knowledge and skills they gained and the experiences they had on the course. Participants made connections between their personal development and their work in their communities

"The biggest draw for me was confidence at the end and that can only be good for whoever you're volunteering with".

Participants developed critical awareness of the nature of youth and youth issues in contemporary society and the social context of young people particularly in relation to disadvantage.

"The course made me more aware of issues people might be going through that we don't see on the surface".

Learning about adolescent development, mental health, inequality, class structures and culture led to participants having a new level of understanding of the context of youth work. In some cases, this meant that they interpreted certain behaviours of young people in a more 'understanding' way and reached out more to young people as a result.

"The understanding was huge for me. To see the wide varieties of challenges was eye opening for me. That is what I take forward most."



“It made me very sad but determined to be part of the change/solution.”

Participants gained a deeper understanding of youth work principles and practice and enhanced experiences of and commitment to youth work

“I had a much better understanding of the importance of my interaction and facilitation of programme for our young people.”

Participants reported that through this course they gained “more understanding of the role” of a youth worker, better working relationships with other volunteers in their projects, more confidence in themselves as youth workers and “an enhanced perspective on the relationship between young people and youth workers”. A number of participants reported feeling more motivated and committed to youth work. Participants also described applying what they had learned in the course to their youth work, including methodologies of ice breakers, film-making, and group work, and being more open to giving young people a lead.

While the course was designed to improve the leadership skills of the participants for the benefit of local community groups, many of the participants also benefited personally in helping to improve their own career progression.

“It was a real light bulb moment for me - I knew I was finally where I was supposed to be - working with young people. It spurred me onto college application and finally starting a degree in education and training. I want to work in youth work in education (non-formal/community based education). I became even more committed to my young people and indeed the young people who I have yet to work with.”



“This course showed how youth work could alter the lives of young people by influencing their choices, making them aware of opportunities and offering support, positivity and respect. The role of youth worker was shown to be broad and beneficial. The responsibility of the youth worker in a given situation was clarified and this was really valuable.

I think that people left this course feeling more confident about their role and with new ideas for implementing programmes that could further benefit the young people they work with.”



Conferring Ceremony Maynooth University - Youth Studies Course November 2019



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Participant Perspectives

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. Participants enjoyed and valued the process of doing the course, *“I looked forward to the Tuesdays, loved doing the readings and the people I met”* and felt it impacted positively on them personally and on their youth work. Participants particularly valued the lectures delivered by the tutors and guest tutors, learning as a group, and hearing the perspectives of their peers, the assigned readings, and visiting youth groups. Participants were happy with both the content and the delivery of the course, and with the support they received from SICAP staff members. Participants said, *“I loved every minute of it”*, *“It was a fantastic experience for me”*, *“In general I couldn’t praise it highly enough, it was top class”* and described the classes as “brilliant”, the support as “super” and the tutors as “out of this world”.

Learning

The SICAP Strategic Plan identified a need for accredited youth leadership training which the Certificate in Youth Studies addressed. The continued demand for the course has demonstrated that the growing youth population in County Kildare needs an ongoing investment in youth leadership training to support volunteers and youth organisations to provide club activity and youth services. SICAP has responded to the need that has been identified by contracting Maynooth University to continue to provide the Certificate in Youth Studies for a further two academic years.

SICAP has also benefited from the engagement with youth organisations and youth clubs in some of the most disadvantaged areas in County Kildare and offered other supports to these local groups.

The investment in the Certificate in Youth Studies by SICAP had the added impact of assisting with the career progression for many participants and encouraging them to take up employment in the youth sector.

Elements that were important for making the course successful included:

- Strong collaboration between SICAP, InSync, Foroige, Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board and Maynooth University



- SICAP funding to make the course available to participants on outreach basis
- Varied teaching methods that adapted to the group
- Content that achieved a balance of being challenging yet accessible
- SICAP support for participants outside of course hours including study supports

Recommendations

1. Organise a graduation each year, even if health measures restrict this to being an online event.
2. Carefully consider the impacts of blended learning on this type of a programme, where group work is so integral to the learning process and to bringing about positive outcomes.
3. Maintain a process of checking in with guest speakers to ensure that their talk resonates well with the more theoretical material covered in class.

