

CORK CITY PARTNERSHIP SICAP CASE STUDY 2018 – FAIRHILL MEN’S ART GROUP



1. Context

In the summer of 2013, several local men expressed an interest in participating in an art course at the Community House, 26 Bridevalley Park, Fairhill. This was a newly opened office for CCP in a local authority estate in Fairhill on the northside of Cork city (see appendix 1 pg.15 for profile of the community). In response to this interest Cork City Partnership funded a local artist to run a six week 'Art for Men - Beginner's Course', which took place at the Community House in October and November 2013. Five local men took part in this initial course and really enjoyed it, over the six weeks their confidence and skills in art/painting increased and all successfully completed a painting. The men also experienced the added social benefits of coming together each week. Since that time the course participants have gone on to form the Fairhill Men's Art Group which is the subject of this case study.

The group started with us at the pre-development/group formation stage and is now at the capacity building and empowerment stage. The case study shows the length and depth of intervention required by such a group to ensure sustainability over a longer time period.

This case study primarily demonstrates the first theme identified for case studies in 2018 – Engagement Strategies with SICAP Target Groups/Communities, but also covers aspects of the other two themes Collaboration and Goal One or Two Projects as the group is supported under the 2018 Action 8 – Tackling Social Isolation of Older People. The SICAP thematic areas supported by work with this group include:

- G1:1 – promote community engagement and stronger communities
- G1:2 – build capacity of LCGs
- G1:4 – promote collaborative engagement
- G2:1 – promoting personal development and wellbeing
- G2:2 – providing lifelong learning opportunities

This group has also been selected for the case study as it demonstrates work done in relation to the emerging needs target group identified by Cork City LCDC for 2018 - 'Older Persons'. The group currently has eight members, all older men. They are all either long term unemployed or retired.

The work with this group will be highlighted at CCP's conference to be held on 29th November, 'Men's Engagement - Using Community Development Approaches'.

Two appendices are attached to this document. The first is 'Tea, Scones and Painting: An Immersive Profile of Fairhill Men's Art Group' – a Masters Dissertation, UCC 2018. The research was commissioned by CCP and Springboard and 'investigates why the group has been as successful as it has, through the perspectives of the group's membership'. A report from the research will be published and launched early in 2019. The second appendix is taken from the current art tutor's blog and describes and shows through photographs the group's re-production of William Sheehan's 'The Consultation'. We have also attached a podcast featuring members of the group on the Sean O'Rourke show earlier this year.

2. What was done to achieve inclusion of the target group

Secure funding – at the end of the initial course, members of the group wanted to continue with further art classes. To enable this CCP submitted a funding application to Cork City Council Arts Office, with the group receiving an Arts Grant of €500 in 2014. This funding supported the group to continue in the spring term. Since then CCP's local SICAP staff member has continued to apply for funding on an ongoing basis to allow the group to continue in their courses. The group currently has

eight members and has secured Community Education tutor hours each term from Cork ETB and is also supported by Cork City Council's Arts Grant, local Councillor's ward funds and the Farranree Credit Union. Without funding to continue their activities the group would not be sustainable.

Participation in the group - CCP SICAP staff supported men to participate in the sessions by ongoing contact and reminder/follow up calls if a member did not attend. The group members were supported from the outset by CCP to attend the weekly sessions.

Participation in community activities – over recent years the group has had several local exhibitions of their work and is also supported to participate in the annual Cork City Lifelong Learning Festival and now also has strong links with the Crawford Art Gallery. These exhibitions provide opportunities for the group to highlight their work and have helped to raise awareness of men in the community and their needs.

Tackle social isolation – CCP SICAP staff recognised that many of the group experienced loneliness. As the group progressed CCP liaised with Springboard/Tusla to collaborate in widening the activities to include social outings twice each term. For some of the men, this helps to counter the social isolation that they experience at home. Additionally, some of the men have substance use issues and find that coming to the group is therapeutic for them and reduces their risk of relapse.

Recognition - In October 2015 CCP and Springboard supported the men to launch their art group at Hollyhill Library, which was launched by the then Lord Mayor of Cork, Councillor Chris O'Leary. This was a great achievement for the group and it also received coverage in the local media.

3. Core principles and approaches used in the engagement process

The core principles/approaches used in engaging with this group include:

- *responding to an identified need* - in the local community for an art course for men.
- *outreach* - at the pre-development stage to recruit members to the group. The outreach was done mainly by meeting older men walking their dogs in the local park and letting them know about the group. A leaflet drop was also done in the local area advertising the upcoming courses in the Community House.
- *relationships* – many of the men came to the group through word of mouth by family members who were already accessing services in the Community House and encouraged family members to come along. Over time strong, trusting relationships have developed between group members and both CCP SICAP and Springboard staff members and the art tutor.
- *working with people where they are at* – group members have been made to feel welcome in the Community House and are under no pressure to do more than they want to or are able to. Their level of comfort with the facility and the SICAP staff member is demonstrated by individual members often calling to the House at other times simply for a chat.
- *collaboration* – this has been particularly strong with the Springboard Project and both Cork City Council's Arts Office and the Crawford Art Gallery. Collaboration has also taken place within the group on occasion, when members have worked jointly on a piece of art (for example, see Artist Blog at appendix 2).
- *empowerment* – giving older men living in a disadvantaged area on the northside of the city a voice and a platform to showcase their abilities and to help with their wellbeing. This wellbeing has a ripple effect as it widens out to their families and community. This was highlighted in a piece on the Sean O'Rourke RTE 1 programme in June of this year, in the

making of which a researcher visited and interviewed some members of the group. The piece was aired on radio the following week, and can be heard in the podcast attached.

4. Role of SICAP funded staff and the skillset required for this work

The role of the SICAP funded Community Development Worker is to work with and support the group on an ongoing basis. This work includes:

- ensuring the room is booked and prepared for the art lessons to take place
- contacting the group members to remind them of lessons or in case of cancellation
- welcoming the group members each week and ensuring that refreshments are available to them
- making funding applications on behalf of the group
- applying for and co-ordinating the administration of the Cork ETB's community education hours
- listening to individual group members and signposting them to other services as necessary
- helping to organise events such as exhibitions and participation in Cork's Lifelong Learning Festival, in conjunction with CCP's SICAP education officer
- ongoing contact with Springboard to collaborate and enhance the programme of activities to meet the needs of the men

The skillset required is a respectful, confidential and professional approach, with an excellent understanding of and experience of using community development principles.

5. The involvement of the other stakeholders

The main stakeholder, other than the men themselves, the art tutor and CCP's SICAP staff member is the Springboard Project which has supported the group since 2015. Springboard is a TUSLA operated programme that places family support projects in specific communities that are deemed to suffer disproportionate levels of disadvantage and marginalisation.

A need was identified to expand the group's activities to include social outings and in response the CCP SICAP staff member approached the Springboard Project. Springboard agreed to collaborate with the group and since then a male member of staff has liaised with the men and organises social and cultural outings which they really enjoy and also meets the group on a weekly basis.

As outlined above, some of the men are very isolated in their communities and these trips have provided an opportunity for them to develop their friendships and avail of an opportunity to benefit from a social outing, thus lessening some of their sense of loneliness.

6. An analysis of how this work contributes to the horizontal principles of community development and equality

Some of the ways in which this work contributes to the horizontal principles of community development and equality are outlined below.

Community Development

Community development approaches: The work with the group is underpinned by community development approaches and principles. One of the aims of the group is for the men to come together to practice and enhance their art/painting skills. The group also provides an opportunity to tackle the social isolation of some of the men and to build community spirit and individual wellbeing. The inclusion of the men in programme planning is key to the success of the group. At the beginning of each term the CCP SICAP staff member and the Springboard staff member meet with the men to plan dates/venues for their outings. The art tutor also consults with the men regarding their individual pieces of work. Therefore, the principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way are applied.

Collaborative approaches: liaising with Springboard has enhanced the social inclusion of the men as they go on social outings several times per year as a group with a Family Support Worker from Springboard. This worker attends the weekly group sessions and has supported the men to get to know one another and support one another.

The group has also liaised closely with the Crawford Art Gallery. This collaboration has been mutually beneficial; it has given the gallery an opportunity to outreach and engage with a community art group and provided a space for the local group to exhibit their work in the City centre. The impact of this collaboration has been invaluable to the men. It has enhanced the self esteem and confidence of the group members through gaining recognition of their skills within the wider community.

The collaboration also exists within the group itself as members network with one another on a weekly basis, sharing information on local news and activities.

Community development matrix: The CCP SICAP staff member has supported this group to progress along the stages of the community development matrix. The group started with us at the pre-development/group formation stage and is now at the capacity building and empowerment stage. Community development approaches have supported the group in this transition.

Arts as a Community Capacity Builder: the research highlights the role that community arts programmes can have in creating identity within local communities (see appendix 1 pgs. 21-23 for further discussion of this point).

Equality framework

All members of the group are treated equally in a respectful manner and they are listened to and their views inform the work of the group. For example, their views inform the content of their art work and where to go on social outings. As the group meets weekly in a CCP Outreach office, located in the heart of the community where most of the group members live, it provides ease of access and also the men can readily avail of information on local service provision, activities, etc.

7. Learning

The research findings (pg.3) identified the following as reasons for the group's success:

- The supportive nature of the relationships developed between members of the group and the group as a whole
- The sense of affirmation experienced by the group in relation to having their work exhibited
- The facilitation and running of sessions is ritualistic and guided by familiar and astute professionals.

In addition, from our perspective, the following are examples of what went well with the group:

- A group of 8 older men consistently turn up to the group on a weekly basis and being part of the group gives them joy
- Resources accessed by the CCP SICAP staff member from the Cork ETB (community education hours), CCC's art grants, Councillor ward funds and funding from the Farranree Credit Union enables the group to continue year round (September to June)
- The collaboration with Springboard allowed the focus of the group to widen out to include social and cultural trips. The Springboard staff member also helps members of the group get to the Community House by providing transport. Springboard also provide funding towards programme costs as required
- On an annual basis the group holds local exhibitions. This gives members a sense of pride and also brings in family members and friends. This sense of pride is reinforced by the publicity the group has received with their paintings being featured in the local media etc.
- The group were nominated for Cork City's Community and Voluntary Awards in 2018 and members from the group went to the event, helping to network the group with other local C&V groups
- Work of the type involving groups accessing and working with perceived 'elite' spaces such as the Crawford Art Gallery helps to lessen such barriers to access and participation of SICAP target groups.

Challenges

The research findings (pgs. 48-52) identify recommendations in relation to:

- Setting up a centralised funding mechanism for established community projects such as this one through ring fencing
- Generating a simple process of recording and evaluating the work completed by the group to act as a buffer, should any of the facilitators currently involved, step away. This would also address the increasing requirements associated with justification of support from funders
- A list of criteria that constitutes this process of evaluation
- Implementing the model in other communities (*abstract pg. 4*).

From our perspective, the room used in the Community House provides the main challenge to the group continuing into the future. The room available is on the first floor and is relatively small. As the group members age, they will need access to a larger, ground floor room with bathroom facilities also on the ground floor. Additionally, the size of the current room used does not give scope to allow the group to take in any new members, resulting in a waiting list to join them.



Members of the group during a visit to the Crawford Art Gallery looking at the original painting of Men of the South to inspire their reproduction shown on front page.