

Leitrim Development Company Case Study 2020

Leitrim Food Cloud Programme

Introduction

This year our case study focuses on one of the responses of the SICAP team to COVID-19. The year has been dominated by the impact of COVID-19 on the individuals and community groups that we support. As a company we adapted our resources and supports to help our SICAP target groups. One of the core themes of SICAP is collaboration, and this proved essential in ensuring a coordinated approach to responding to the needs of our communities and targets groups as a result of the pandemic.

Setting the context

In mid-March 2020, the country went into lockdown to help control the spread of the COVID-19. This had a massive impact on all our lives and the way we had planned to deliver our 2020 SICAP annual plan. The needs of our communities changed dramatically and we were no longer able to engage with individuals on a one-to-one basis. As the days and weeks started to pass, it became clear that we were not going back to normal work practices in the medium term.

Need and Challenges

From our Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme section, there was concern for some of the most vulnerable groups in the community, older people, people with disabilities, the unemployed, low income families, lone parents and the impact the lockdown was having on their lives. The majority of the groups that we deal with are hard to reach groups and there was particular concern that the challenges that they face would be exacerbated the longer the lockdown would continue. Leitrim is a very rural county with over 90% of the population living in rural areas. There was concern that those in most isolated rural areas would experience greater isolation, loneliness and lack of access to much needed services. In particular, our SICAP staff were concerned about low income families and other households who experienced unemployment as a result of the pandemic.

Descriptions of Actions, Interventions, Supports Provided, the role of SICAP

Leitrim Development Company was one of the key agencies on the Local Community Call project and it became clear that a collaborative approach between all the agencies involved in supporting communities and vulnerable groups was required.

- At the beginning of April, our SICAP team worked with Leitrim Co Council and Leitrim PPN to develop a map highlighting key services in the county responding to COVID-19. This included Meals on Wheels, key contacts for collection of shopping, mental health services, older peoples services and helplines. The map was displayed on our

website and was widely distributed through social media so people could identify supports locally. It also assisted those answering the local helpline to follow up for those in need. The map also assisted us to identify gaps in services.

- As Leitrim Development Company had developed a strong relationship with Irish Rural Link on past Community Champion projects, we were approached by Irish Rural Link to manage the COVID-19 Outreach Project for Leitrim. The aim of this project was to work with community and voluntary organisations who were responding to needs of those most vulnerable in the community. The Community Champion role proved vital to supporting our SICAP initiatives and promoting our outreach work during COVID-19. Our COVID-19 Outreach Worker and our CEO represented the Company on the Community Call. This link proved vital in adapting our SICAP services to fill the gaps in services that were identified by the agencies and community organisations working on the community call.
- The Local Community Call members and our COVID-19 Community Champion identified the need for food supplies to support families in need. These included families whose incomes were affected as a result of the closure of workplaces, and also families on low income who were feeling pressure on finances as a result of having children at home full-time. While the Carrick on Shannon and Mohill areas were already covered through the Family Resource Centres food cloud project, a gap in support was evident for the mid and North Leitrim area.
- We consulted with our Partners on the community call including Túsla and St Vincent de Paul, and as a result of this need, we registered as a Foodcloud partner and started to collect food weekly from their Galway Hub. We also linked with local food providers to source fresh food. This proved very successful as we received weekly deliveries of bread, boxty and precooked meals. This ensured that staple foods were included in our weekly distribution to families. The referrals for our service increased from 5 to 60 households in a couple of weeks. Many staff from the SICAP team and labour activation scheme supervisors became involved in the delivery of the project. We also engaged the services of volunteers through the Leitrim Volunteer Information Service. At its peak we were delivering food to over 60 households from Carrigallen to Kinlough. The service proved very beneficial and helped us to engage with the marginalised and in many cases we referred people to other supports both within the company and to other agencies. We found one lady that lived in a very rural part of the county in a very distressed state. We contacted her frequently and a number of mental health support services were suggested to her.
- Use of the Food Hub building: It was essential that we had a suitable venue for the sorting of the food cloud delivery on a weekly basis. Drumshanbo Community Council allowed us to use their Food Hub Community Kitchen which provided suitable space and fridges to keep perishable items fresh. The location is private and allowed people to collect food parcels away from the public eye.

- Kids Activity Packs and Newsletters for Families: Kids packs were purchased and distributed to the families with children that were receiving food. The packs included a skipping rope, a football, colouring books, markers and puzzle books.
- COVID-19 Funding from Leitrim Co Council: The food cloud project was successful in attaining funding of €1,000 from Leitrim Co Council COVID-19 Emergency Fund which enabled us to purchase additional equipment, PPE supplies and cover some of the costs of diesel for collecting food from Galway.



What Worked Well

- The collaboration in responding to the crisis and providing support to the most vulnerable families was key to the success of the project. The links with Túsla, St Vincent de Paul and the Gardaí assisted us to identify those families most in need. The coordination within our own Company between the SICAP staff, the Employment Schemes and the Volunteering Information Service provided us with enough support to ensure the delivery of the food cloud on a weekly basis. The links with local suppliers also provided staple foods for the families and the support from Food Cloud was essential to the running of this project
- The outreach delivery of the food cloud to families in need helped build up a relationship with the SICAP Workers and families in need and this helped identify the need for further services. As a result of this, activity packs for families were purchased with SICAP funding and distributed. We printed newsletters with details of all our SICAP supports and distributed those with the food cloud delivery to the families.
- As a result of building this relationship with the families, some members have received more intensive one-to-one support from our SICAP Workers and have progressed to accessing further Goal 2 supports (personal development supports through our Seeds For Self Growth course and employment / training related supports).

Quotes from participants

“My kids had tears in their eyes, wow the hamper is amazing, the kids are over the moon here, thank you”

“Thanks so much, I am in shock how much there was for us and how much this will help, it truly means a lot”

“Thank you, this means so much to our family. I haven’t been able to work since this started and we were finding it difficult with bills for food with the kids at home”

Quotes from food suppliers

“we are delighted that our returns are going to good use. We had tried to arrange something with local charities before but it never got off the ground”

Role of SICAP Funded Workers

- The role of the SICAP Workers from Goal One and Goal Two was vital in developing and progressing the project. The SICAP team organised meetings with key bodies to get the food cloud up and running. Contact was made with Food Cloud Ireland to organise a collection of food from Galway on a weekly basis. SICAP staff provided weekly updates and assigned tasks by e-mail to all Workers and Volunteers. Our SICAP Workers coordinated the project and maintained contact with Food Cloud, local suppliers, Túsla, North Connaught Youth Services, the Gardaí and St Vincent de Paul

on a regular basis. SICAP staff also provided additional supports to the families in terms of personal development and career development supports.

Horizontal Themes

- The delivery of the food cloud programme was based on a community development approach, bringing about positive change to these families lives through a process of outreach engagement. The project responded to a need in a time of crisis. The project has facilitated the empowerment of our target groups, some of whom have now progressed to accessing our personal development and employment supports.
- The collaboration between the service providers, community organisations and state agencies has already been highlighted. SICAP added value to the delivery of this programme as it was providing a holistic approach to supporting these families, ensuring that not just basic food needs were catered for, but also additional supports that some of these families required; resources for their children, personal development supports and mental health supports and collaborating with other agencies where necessary to meet these needs e.g. Mental Health Services and HSE.
- The service provided an equality framework and in particular, it ensured that the needs of one parent families were met. Many of the families supported were one-parent headed households and the food cloud project ensured that they were prioritised for supports.

Challenges

- Ensuring the families we delivered to were the most in need.
- Sourcing fresh quality food locally.
- Some volunteers were in the vulnerable category.
- Food supplies collected weekly were not consistent in quality or quantity.
- Foodcloud are now looking for registration fees but families still need support because they have not been able to return to employment.
- Staff have become busier with their normal work leaving less time to help with the Foodcloud project.



Outcomes

- The feedback from participants has been very positive and they really appreciate the effort we made to help them.
- Over 60 families were supported
- Almost 20 people are currently accessing additional SICAP and other supports.
- There was a multi-agency approach to the project with approximately 7 agencies actively involved in the project.
- The publicity we received in delivering the project has increased the profile of the Company and more people are aware of the type of supports we provide.
- Enquiries for supports have increased because of the level of engagement we had with the various agencies and the public.
- The demand for supports has decreased in recent weeks as more people return to employment.



Lessons Learned

- SICAP staff are very adaptable and willing to help our target groups in any way possible.
- The value of volunteers and the benefits of sourcing volunteers through the Leitrim Volunteer Information Service.
- The importance of clear communication on a regular basis when dealing with volunteers. This ensures they feel valued and part of the decision making process of the project.
- The fact that the project operated for 6 months on a budget of less than €1,000 has shown that you do not have to have a large budget to have a very effective project.
- We learned the importance of meeting people from our target groups on the ground.
- The need for this project was not all caused by COVID-19. We discovered that there were underlying issues in many cases and will be able to inform other relevant agencies of these needs.

Conclusion

2020 has been a year we will never forget for all the wrong reasons. However, the ability of people, communities and agencies to collaborate on projects to help the most vulnerable was clearly demonstrated in many ways. Our Foodcloud project is a perfect example of this and we are very proud of what was achieved in very difficult circumstances.

In the medium term, the project will continue with food collected from Galway on an ad-hoc basis and relying on the continued goodwill of local food suppliers. This will be done in close collaboration with St. Vincent de Paul and North Connacht Youth Services.

In the long-term, a scaled back version of the project should continue. We hope to source more dry foods as they are easier to store, usually have a longer shelf life and can be delivered to families less frequently.

As people's circumstances change, our list of families will change. This will be decided through consultations and referrals with the many agencies and bodies that have supported the project to date.