

Leitrim Development Company Case Study 2018

The Case Study we have chosen for 2018 is a Community Group supported under Goal 1, Leitrim International Community Group (LICG). This group was assisted over a period of two years and with SICAP support has progressed along the community development matrix from pre-development stage to capacity building and empowerment and is now involved in policy and decision making processes at local level.

The group emerged under the SICAP Programme 2015-2017 and continues to be supported under the new Programme 2018-2022. The need was identified by a group of migrants living in Leitrim in 2016. A member of the local migrant community approached Leitrim Development Company and expressed an interest in setting up a local group to support migrants in South Leitrim and to raise awareness and tolerance amongst the growing number of new communities living in Leitrim and among the indigenous population.

Leitrim experienced a rise in the number of migrants living in the county over the past ten years, with 12.6% of the population being non-Irish nationals in 2016. The breakdown of these figures is outlined below:

Nationality	Leitrim 2011	Leitrim 2016	Change	% Change
Ireland	27,349	27,767	+ 418	+1.5%
UK	1,665	1,502	-163	-1%
Poland	764	829	+ 65	+0.8%
Lithuania	174	177	+ 3	+0.1%
Other EU 28	557	643	+86	+1.5%
Rest of the world	543	362	-181	-33.3%
Not stated	404	435	+31	+ 0.8%
Total	31,456	31,715	+259	+0.8%

Source: Census 2016

Leitrim also has a number of Kurdish families who were resettled in the county under the Refugee Resettlement Programme in 2005-2006.

Pre-development stage

In this context, SICAP in Leitrim worked initially with a small number of migrants who had expressed an interest in establishing a group and assisted them to organise an exploratory meeting to establish the level of interest amongst the community. The first meeting was attended by eight people, both Irish and members of new communities. This meeting identified a need for a group that would promote cultural awareness and understanding and would allow cultures to celebrate special holidays or days of importance in their countries. The need to enhance integration was also identified.

This pre-development stage enabled the group to engage more people. Members who attended this initial meeting made contact with other members of new communities and encouraged them to come to follow up meetings with the numbers growing over time. The approach was very much a bottom up one which was led by the group members and supported by the Community Development Worker with Leitrim Development Company.

Capacity Building Stage

Following the initial start-up stage, the Community Development Worker facilitated the group to undertake committee skills, develop aims and objectives and to produce an action plan. The following mission statement was agreed:

'Our objective is to raise awareness of different cultures in Leitrim, to bring everyone together in a shared space and to reduce racism'

This stage also involved linking with other local organisations including Breffni Family Support Centre, the Dock Arts Theatre in Carrick-on-Shannon, HSE and the Community Foundation of Ireland. The group was assisted to raise their profile by organising events to promote National days of interest from around the world. These events included Nigerian Independence Day, Newroz Kurdish New Year, Holi Hindu Spring Festival, Estonian Independence Day, Mexican Day of the Dead and Panama Day. These events were held in central locations in Leitrim to involve as many local people as possible. The group linked with local community groups and became involved in events including St Patrick's Day Parade, Carrick Water Music Festival and Carrick Carnival. All activities proved very popular and were well attended and received excellent coverage in the local media.

Other projects undertaken by the group included a book *Words from the Planet* – a collection of stories by members of LICG which was funded following collaboration with Creative Ireland through Leitrim County Council.

Photos of events LICG



Nigerian Independence Day in Carrick on Shannon organised by Leitrim International Community Group



Food prepared by the Syrian community at an Event on Syrian culture



Fáilte Isteach conversational English classes in Carrick on Shannon

In 2017/2018, with the arrival of Syrian refugee families to Carrick on Shannon and Drumshanbo, the group played a central role in working with Leitrim Development Company to assist their integration. A *meet and greet* event was organised to welcome the families to the local community.

Involvement in Local Decision Making Structures

In 2018, LICG received a small grant under SICAP to host intercultural events. The group also became involved in the Ethnic Minority PEACE IV Programme and a representative now sits on the PEACE IV Partnership with Leitrim County Council highlighting progression along the Community Development matrix. LICG has become an active member of Leitrim Public Participation Network and has entered *Love Where You Live* Awards organised by Leitrim County Council.

What worked well and what did not work?

One of the key factors which assisted this Local Community Group to develop and grow was the community development approach adopted by SICAP from project commencement. The project involved a pre-development stage which included outreach work and allowed for exploratory meetings initially. It provided time to reach out to more members of new

communities and enable the group to grow. Initial events organised by the group included a Festival of Nations event enabling the group to develop and for participation to increase.

The idea for the group originated from members of new communities, who initially approached Leitrim Development Company for support. It was important that a bottom up approach was employed and that while support was provided SICAP, the group was led by the members and it met the integration needs and supports identified by the community.

The members were also encouraged to use their strengths and talents to assist group development. One member set up a webpage, a Facebook and Twitter account for the group. Another member, who is a graphic designer, designed posters for events.

In partnership with the Dock Theatre, films and documentaries were screened to mark specific holidays of countries, for example, to celebrate Estonian Independence Day a documentary '*Memories Denied*' was shown. This proved a successful way of engaging the local community and giving everyone an opportunity to learn about different cultures in Leitrim.

Frequency of actions and initiatives

The group has had a total number of eight interventions to date in 2018 to support their development. Interventions included planning meetings, a small grant and assistance with funding applications and fundraising ideas. The group has also been supported to actively participate in the Public Participation Network and to develop a number of initiatives through the PEACE IV Ethnic Minority Project. The group worked with Leitrim Development Company to organise information events on training, education and employment supports for the Syrian community in March and they have become actively involved in the *Faillte Isteach* Programme, which provides conversational English classes for migrants.

In order to progress the group, support from SICAP has been intensive and has been responsive to needs identified by members. The group was keen to assist the Syrian community who were relocated to Leitrim during 2017 and 2018 and this was enabled by SICAP. Friendships have been developed and members support Syrian families with information and translation. Links with other organisations including the Public Participation Network, Breffni Family Support Centre, Leitrim Arts Office and Leitrim County Council PEACE IV Programme have been vital to group development.

SICAP Contribution

The contribution of SICAP was vital in supporting the development and progression of the group. LICG needed a high level of intensive support at the initial stages to build their capacity to undertake actions and organise events. The Community Development Worker played an active role in supporting them to organise events, access funding, and assisted them to link with other agencies. This has led to the group becoming involved in the wider community and has led to the group working closely with other agencies and becoming part of the wider local development processes including PEACE IV.

Outputs/Outcomes

There are currently over active 40 members from several countries including Syria, Kurdistan, Nigeria, Mexico, Estonia, Ireland, Bangladesh and Poland. Events are attended by between 50-80 people. A number of members have progressed onto education and training programmes through information supports provided by the group. Friendships and links with the local community have been developed as a result of this project, which have assisted in the integration process. This project has contributed to SICAP themes including promoting community engagement and stronger communities and building the capacity of local Community Groups. As a result of SICAP supports this group has shown progression along the community development matrix and has a greater capacity to address the social inclusion needs of new communities in Leitrim. Recently the group has been awarded funding under the Integration Funds and the Community Enhancement Fund.

Lola Gonzalez, Chairperson of LICG stated that

'Being involved in LICG has helped me connect more with the community in Carrick on Shannon and other immigrants in the county. It has given me tools to advance and integrate into Irish life. The SICAP programme has helped the group grow and reach their goal of integration. Also shown the Irish population how immigrants enrich their community. I hope LICG will keep growing and reaching our mission.'

Zainab Azizi, a Former Kurdish Refugee, one of the Founding members of the Group stated

'the group was set up to bring all communities together, to introduce our countries to each other, to show our traditions and culture and to get to know each other'

Ayokunmi Fagbo, originally from Nigeria stated

'LICG has brought us all together. We now stop to say hello to each other on the street. We support each other, we are no longer strangers to each other'