

Leitrim Development Company Case Study 2019

Introduction

This case study focuses on a Goal 2 non-caseload youth/children project known as Mohill Community Youth Project. This is a targeted afterschool programme located in Mohill town in County Leitrim and the thematic area it addresses is; *'Children and their families are supported in education and personal development'*.

Mohill Community Youth Project was set up to break an inter-generational cycle of educational disadvantage. The programme targets disadvantaged children and young people between the ages of 6 and 12 years with a key emphasis on providing academic support so that young people complete more and better prepared homework. According to the projects Statement of Youth Work Practice, *'The programme focuses on children who have family, personal, educational, social and behavioural difficulties for which they require additional support, children whose parents or parent substitute have been inconsistent, children who lack stable adult models with whom they can rely and trust and children who are likely to leave school at an early age'*. The afterschool programme provides a safe, engaging environment that motivates and inspires learning outside of the regular school day.

Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board is the main funder of this project. SICAP plays a fundamental role in the overall running of the project including staff time and funding towards programme costs which will be discussed in more detail throughout this case study.

Mohill - Setting the Context

Mohill is a town situated in south west Leitrim, an area where there are concentrations of disadvantage, predominately in five local authority housing estates in the town. The majority of people who live in these areas are low income families and unemployed individuals. As a result, there are various problems including anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, culture of unemployment, financial difficulties, low levels of educational attainment and cycles of educational disadvantage. Leitrim Development Company has set up a range of initiatives to tackle some of the above problems and one such intervention has been the establishment of Mohill Community Youth Project which supports the social and academic development of disadvantaged children and young people.

Mohill Community Youth Project – What Works Well

Mohill Community Youth Project was set up to tackle educational disadvantage by providing homework support, encouraging good school attendance and assisting with the transition from primary to second level education. Children are prioritised on the basis of family circumstances, emotional and behavioural difficulties, extra support needed with homework and social and academic needs. Children who attend the project are referred from the local primary school or Tusla. The afterschool programme operates four days per week (Mon-Thurs) with 37 children

registered with the service. The project is ideally situated as it is directly behind the primary school, requiring only a hop, skip and jump across the playground to access the service.

Homework Support

One of the most important elements of the project is providing homework support. Many parents or parent substitute lack the capacity to carry out homework or it is not a priority in such households. The project has a set structure which allows time for homework completion and as a result children tend to complete more and better quality homework. Afterschool staff compile a homework report each day for all children, recording what subjects were completed, highlighting any areas of particular difficulty and if further action is required. This is signed and dated by the staff member who assisted with homework that particular day. Parents are then informed of any issues/concerns on pick-up. It is important to acknowledge the well-established links with the school staff and afterschool programme staff. At the start of each academic year, teachers fill out a report on each child which captures their strengths, weaknesses and specifies where particular academic support is required. The afterschool staff then ensure that children get appropriate assistance in particular subject areas. This collaboration means that the needs of each child are being met leading to greater confidence in their academic abilities.



Programme Activities

The project is youth focused and all children assist in programme planning which include a combination of cultural activities, life skills, academics and recreational interests. The involvement in the process allows for a greater sense of empowerment and ownership which can in turn enhance the development of planning, decision-making and leadership skills.



Each year the SICAP development officer applies for additional funding to carry out various extra-curricular activities to broaden the children's experience of learning. In May 2019, the children decided to complete an art project involving clay and wished to hold an exhibition so their parents could come and see their work. The SICAP development officer secured funding from Creative Ireland and Crinniú na nÓg which provided an artist to take the children on a journey of creativity. It focused on the art elements of texture, pattern, shape, colour and form. The art process was recorded over the five weeks and the video was showcased at the children's 'Hidden Layers' Exhibition. This event was organised by the children, family and community members were invited to see the artwork and watch the video (see attached). The project proved hugely successful as the children got the opportunity to participate in an exciting activity with the structure and consistency that they may not get outside of the afterschool programme.



School Holiday Activities

Mohill Community Youth Project runs school holiday programmes (Halloween, Easter and Summer Camps). These activities are organised by the SICAP development officer and the afterschool leader in conjunction with the young people. Activities are carried out in-house as well as some outings. As there is no main budget for school holiday programmes, SICAP funds some of the activities in addition to CCSP funding. Where possible we avail of free activities from Leitrim Sports Partnership. The camps are important as many children may not have access to such activities during school holidays. The project turns recreational activities into intentional learning experiences where children learn new skills. These youth-focused initiatives are interactive, engaging, academically stimulating and age-appropriate. A sample of camp activities in 2019 included Rap workshops, sports day, jewellery making, Zumba and art workshops.



Funding

Mohill Community Youth Project is managed by Leitrim Development Company. It is subject to funding on a yearly basis and the inter-agency approach ensures successful delivery of the project aims. The funding can be broken down as follows:

Mayo Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (Main Funder)

- Afterschool Staff Costs (Part-Time)
- Programme Costs
- Running Costs

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

- School Meals Programme (provision of healthy snacks)

Pobal (CCSP)

- School Holiday Programmes
- Capital Equipment

SICAP

- School Holiday Programmes

Role of SICAP Funded Staff

The SICAP development officer is accountable for the overall co-ordination of Mohill Community Youth Project. While the project is fortunate to have two paid part-time staff (MSLETB) it must be recognised that this time is essentially for direct contact with the children. Therefore the SICAP development officer is responsible for:

- Working on the ground, co-ordinating all activities, advising and supporting staff and overseeing the efficient running of the project
- Planning and initiating projects directly with the young people
- Submitting renewal applications to MSLETB and DEASP on a yearly basis
- Completing Progress Report to MSELTB on yearly basis
- Facilitating team meetings with afterschool staff and on-going communication in the overall running of the service
- Monitoring budgets in conjunction with finance department
- Applying for additional funding relevant to the project. In 2019, the SICAP development officer secured funding of €5,145 for small-scale maintenance/enhancement grant for the project through DCYA Capital Funding Scheme and funding of €1,400 from Crinniú na nÓg/Creative Ireland as mentioned previously
- Co-ordinating Advisory Group Meetings
- Afterschool cover when short staff/Assisting with school holiday programmes particularly day trips.
- Recruitment of staff

Collaboration

This project is an excellent example of good collaboration amongst various stakeholders which maximises the project as well as achieving the best possible outcomes for the target group.

School

The afterschool staff and primary school staff have an excellent working relationship based on mutual understanding and respect in a way that maximises the children's opportunities. The school refers children to the service as well as completing assessment forms to ensure children's needs are met. There is on-going communication between staff and teachers as well as sharing of necessary information throughout the academic year. This collaboration and alignment with the local primary school allows the young people ample opportunities to complement and reinforce learning that takes place during the school-day.

Building

The building in which the afterschool operates in owned by MSLETB and is leased to Leitrim Development Company at minimal cost. In turn, LDC maintains the building and continuously carries out upgrades to the centre. Numerous improvements have taken place including insulation of the building and the capital funding granted for 2019 is currently being used to paint and decorate the afterschool rooms, install new window blinds and fit new carpet in the homework/study room.

Advisory Group

Mohill Community Youth Project set up an Advisory Group to review and assess the work of the service. The Advisory Group is facilitated by the SICAP development officer and consists of the Principal of the local primary school, MSLETB Youth Officer, SICAP Education and Youth Support Worker, parent representative and afterschool staff. This group meets quarterly to monitor progress, ensure continuous improvement and best practice.

Horizontal Themes

Community Development & Equality

- Mohill Community Youth Project provides a wide range of quality non-formal educational activities which address inequality, celebrate diversity and promote inclusion.
- The project targets marginalised communities including disadvantaged children and families, lone parents, Travellers, new communities and low income households
- Young people get the opportunity to have a voice and are encouraged to actively participate in the planning of programme activities.
- The rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled.

Challenges

Funding is always a key challenge and like many projects funding is allocated on a yearly basis which leads to uncertainty. The project relies on a number of funding sources and each funder has its own set of requirements which means good governance structure is essential.

The funding channel from MSLETB is changing in 2020 which may affect the age cohort that Mohill Community Youth Project is currently working with. The SICAP development officer and other staff members are currently examining alternative funding options to ensure the sustainability of the project.

Project Outcomes

- Young people complete more and better prepared homework.
- Young people better equipped to successfully make the transition from primary to secondary school.
- Youth development is strengthened where young people build on individual strengths and capabilities.
- Young people engage in a range of activities which help develop their social, emotional and academic skills.

Lessons Learned

- Consistent and targeted intervention ensures children get the most benefit from the education system.
- Engagement in informal learning activities increases young people's confidence, self-esteem and social skills.
- The inter-agency approach is fundamental leading to a more efficient use of resources and greater value for money.
- The location of the project which is between the primary and post primary school is advantageous.
- The central role of SICAP ensures that projects like this work to best effect.
- There is need for consistency in funding to ensure the future of this project.

Conclusion

To conclude, Mohill Community Youth Project is providing an invaluable service in Mohill town where there are high levels of deprivation. Through holistic approaches the service is doing its utmost to provide an initiative which encourages young people to remain within the school system. The project provides children with an emotionally and physically safe place, while they also get the opportunity to participate in activities and routines that they may not get outside of the afterschool programme.

