



LOUTH LEADER PARTNERSHIP

Building Community & Enterprise



2019 SICAP CASE STUDY

SMART START



"Funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development"
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SMART START CASE STUDY - LOUTH LEADER PARTNERSHIP

CLICK AND CONNECT – FROM ONLINE CONNECTIVITY TO OFFLINE INCLUSION

“Not knowing your way around day to day technology is a bit like being illiterate”

INTRODUCTION

“My husband died three years ago, and he used to do everything on the smartphone” says Dympna Keenan, speaking from her home in Lordship, County Louth. “My daughter in law gave me an old iPhone, but I didn’t know the first thing about it. I would ask the children but they didn’t have great patience, they’d be saying I told you that already!”

Dympna is one of those who have been involved in a project called Smart Start run by Louth Leader Partnership under the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP). Through it, she has discovered she’s not the only one who struggles with technology, and has had the opportunity to challenge her fears and overcome them.

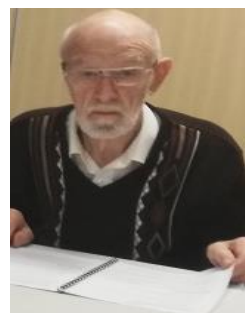
This case study is the story of Dympna, Geraldine and Martin, three of the 52 people who are now connected both on and offline, to each other, to their families, to their new group Smart Network Louth and to the wider world. It is a story of those who are at hidden risk of exclusion in the world we live in now.



Dympna



Geraldine



Martin

This case study, of what is called a Goal 2 project (which focuses on individuals) has the potential to be expanded through local community groups (Goal 1), repeated locally, and replicated in other areas. It is an example of a Community Development engagement strategy that has a bottom-up approach. It focuses on where people are at, and where they want to go, and has created a new local network with the potential to be peer-led. It has also sparked new collaborations with other stakeholders.

THE CONTEXT - How to catch up in an interconnected world

Everywhere we look nowadays, people are using their phones or other devices to stay connected and to take part in society. Apart from using devices to stay in touch via calls text or social media, daily life in Ireland now demands familiarity with technology. So many services is conducted online. But what about those who feel overwhelmed when they see things like pay online, access online, complete this form online, apply online?

For some this can be a real challenge, particularly as family groups - the digital family- often chat among themselves via Whats App leaving some members out of the loop. As one participant said, "It's bad enough feeling excluded from society, but feeling the gap widening between you and your family can be painful. It is like they know what is going on in each other's lives, without realising that I have not been told. I want to be back within that circle - not outside."

Local community groups also use social media to stay connected. Smart Start participant Geraldine Meehan had got a tablet but used to be afraid to use it. "I thought if I put my finger on the wrong thing I'd lose everything. Since I started this course, I'm using Whats App to contact my daughter in Australia. I'm also in a group as part of my involvement in a local committee. I know what's going on."

BOTTOM UP - How SICAP's on the ground presence identified a need

The programme began when local Community Development Officer Marian Finegan noticed that a lack of IT skills was hampering some people's capacity to engage with development programmes, and that traditional IT courses were too much for some people to handle. In some cases, they became overwhelmed and left training programmes.

"This did nothing for their confidence or their motivation to engage. They didn't just feel left out; they were left out. A new approach was required to ensure we could promote inclusion, and not be moving forward with development programmes while leaving so many behind. "

Marian identified that it was time to use a Community Development approach to support individuals to feel included empowered and independent.

- A one-page survey was given to active retirement groups. 57% of respondents said they had either none, or a very basic ability to use technology. Only 15% rated their competence as high.
- It was identified that unemployed people who are not in receipt of a payment had a lack of knowledge of technology, as this group are not always offered the same learning opportunities.
- Contact with community groups indicated that in some cases only a few members might have email. Sometimes groups were unaware of funding opportunities or unable to apply for them online.

- Community Development work had identified that there are individuals who live alone, who may not be attached to any groups, or have family abroad, and that technology might help reduce their sense of isolation. The survey found that 18% of respondents feel lonely and a further 12% feel lonely sometimes
- Through SICAP Work with disABILITY Louth the Community Development Officer was aware of how essential knowledge of information technology is for those with disabilities, and that with aging population knowledge of applications could have a positive effect on day to day living.

SMART DESIGN – working with people from their angle

While it was expected that older people might be particularly interested, the target group was not rigid in terms of promoting social inclusion for everyone in the community. The only requirement was that individuals wanted to communicate and access information delivered through technology.

Having previously organised IT classes, the Community Development Officer was aware that if training took place in a computer suite individuals could not always transfer the learning to their own device when they went home. However, in a group setting people might have up to eight different devices, a challenge for the tutor.

It was decided the only way to meet the challenge was for people to get to know their device with the tutor in a one –on- one setting and then with instilled sense of confidence move on to a group learning environment. The initial programme offered individuals 4 sessions of between 1 and 1.5 hours.

“There’s a fear of the unknown, people don’t want to appear stupid in front of other people”, says the programme tutor Patricia Carolan. “By offering one to one support initially we could give people a foot up the ladder”.

ENGAGEMENT: Reaching out offline to encourage participation

While these days many projects use online social media to publicise their availability, in this case a more traditional approach was needed to ensure that the programme could reach the target group.

- The SICAP Community Development Officer placed ads in local newspapers using plain English.
- Interviews were arranged on Dundalk FM the local radio station, which was very supportive.
- Key collaborators helped with publicity such as Active Retirement Groups, Citizens Information, Men’s Sheds, disABILITY Louth and other local community groups

When individuals answered the advertisement (a phone option was given as well as email), the Community Development Officer was careful to put them at their ease by using simple language, and reassuring people that the session was not a class but a chance to get to know their phone and see how they got on.

In some cases, family members or group members got in touch to book in individuals with their consent. A decision was also made that bookings would only be taken from individuals who got in touch themselves, so that the approach was person centred from the start and focused on those who were motivated. It needed to be their choice not someone else telling them they should do something.

THE PARTICIPANTS - It's never too late to get connected

Participants ranged in age from 40 to 85, with the majority being over 60. There has been a mix of male and female participants, unemployed and retired people. Some had experience of computers in a work setting but only with a particular system. Some have family at home, others live on their own, and some are involved in community groups but others have no regular social outlet. What they all had in common was the fact that they were struggling with a device that was reducing their independence and relationship with family, friends, groups, hobbies and employment or small enterprise.

THE PROGRAMME IN ACTION - One on One Sessions to break the ice

52 people came to One on One training. Of these 7 attended only a couple of sessions to learn how to make calls and text. 45 completed their four allocated sessions, learning what they wanted to know about their phone, tablet or computer.

"I used to have a Doro – it's a small phone with big numbers especially for us geriatrics...." says Martin Daly from Omeath, who's 85. "I wanted to see how close I could get to modern technology, so I upgraded to a smartphone and went in to inquire. What made me stay was the fact that it started with two people sitting side by side phoning each other and getting the hang of it. I love photography and on the first day I was shown how to send a picture to someone! That was wonderful."

"When you go into a phone or computer shop and ask something they look at you like you have two heads, says Geraldine Meehan. "Like they're thinking, why don't you know this? With the one- on- one session, you start at the level of how to switch on the tablet. You get your confidence back."

GROUP SESSIONS - getting together and peer support

At the end of the first phase, the community development officer organised a coffee morning and evaluation meeting with One on One participants. 25 people attended and it became clear that participants were eager to continue their training. Small group workshops were designed around six themes that were discussed and agreed with participants.

These included Email, Phone extras (such as diary, calendar, notes), Photo storage and sharing, Using Apps, Social Media and Using the Internet including safety online. Between June and July 14 workshops were held covering the 6 topics, with some workshops repeated to allow all to attend. The tutor developed a booklet for each session with step-by-step instructions on each topic.

SMART NETWORK LOUTH – From Goal 2 group learning to Goal 1 group development

Further evaluation was carried out at the end of the last workshop. Once again the feedback was that participants were keen to continue with their learning. They also wanted to promote the programme to others who could have the same opportunity to learn. They had developed friendships and enjoyed the social aspect of the programme, and its capacity to help those who might be feeling isolated or lonely.

It was agreed that SICAP under Goal 1 would support the development of a SMART group/ network, which would continue to meet and learn. The group identified other workshops and training that they would like to undertake. These are now taking place during Autumn 2019, including sessions on banking online, doing your taxes, staying safe in the home with technology and other topics identified by the group. There are also sessions on creating documents and photo presentations.

A number of organisations have agreed to collaborate with the group on different aspects of technology:

- Dundalk FM is inviting members to do interviews to promote the programme. The group will also learn about using technology to listen to radio and podcasts online.
- Bank of Ireland has offered a workshop on banking and staying safe online.
- Citizens Information have offered a post budget workshop on how to get online information relevant to a person's individual situation, as well as explaining how to navigate their own website.

Other collaborations are also being discussed. Support for the progression of the group will be joint-led by the group Smart Network Louth and the Louth Leader Partnership through SICAP funding.

CHALLENGES – overcoming obstacles and improving the programme

Managing appointments during the One on One phase was a challenge. It was decided that if people cancelled their appointment it would be given to someone on the waiting list. The person would then have to wait until another slot became available at a later stage. As a result, participants did not cancel without good reason and no slots were wasted. If someone did not turn up on the day they lost that slot altogether. The policy was clearly communicated; people understood the reasoning and supported it.

Different devices meant the tutor had to learn about each individual device after the initial first session with a participant to be able to provide useful support at the second session. Using the same tutor for the rollout will be a definite advantage. However, it will be an on-going challenge as new devices are constantly being introduced.

Although all participants were invited to the May evaluation meeting at the end of the first phase, it was noted that those who had finished their One on One sessions back in February were less likely to attend. Phone calls were made to follow up with this cohort and 10-12 have since joined workshops to catch up with the other participants.

SUCCESS - Smart Start can be just the start of something more

The programme has been a success from the start. Giving a SMART START to participants has enabled them to be more independent, and for some it has encouraged them to learn more about something they had feared in the past.

The initial idea had been to give the One on One learning support to enable people to join computer classes offered by other organisations. However, through formal feedback and other communication with participants it was extended developed as outlined above, to better reflect the needs of participants.

The three-stage programme is now a model that has been road tested in Louth, and can be taken and used by other areas:

1. One to One IT support using the participant's own device.
2. Move on to group learning, on a single topic at a time, using their own device.
3. Move on to group formation – having their own IT or digital group where the learning continues through peer learning, invited speakers and workshops.

Of the 52 people who started at the One on One stage, 37 are still engaged with the programme and are continuing into the third stage.

The idea is they can move on and join Smart Network Louth,” says Patricia Carolan. Eventually they will take over the running of it themselves, meeting once a month. It’s peer led and you can see that there are two or three who could take the helm.”

Smart Start has come a long way in just one year. What began as a Goal 2 programme with One to One tutoring has now developed into a three-stage programme with clear potential to be extended using Goal 1 Community Development Supports.

It had a Community Development approach where learning was facilitated via shared responsibility with the participants. The learning took place in a relaxed community setting with refreshments available.

Many participants commented on how the content and pace of learning was tailored to their individual needs. There was no overhead power point training; Overheads were only used when exploring the web or social media. There were no slides.

Feedback from participants has been hugely positive leading them to feel more connected, independent, confident and up to date.

“I’m on Facebook now, says Dympna. And I can look up rip.ie. I’m on Spotify for the country music – can you believe it? And I know what an emoji is – I remember once telling my grandchild I thought it was a cartoon!”

“I’m involved in a couple of groups and I can send photos and find out what’s happening” says Martin. “And I’m in touch with family and friends in England and Holland via Whats App audio. My family can’t believe it. It’s been absolutely marvellous.”

Another key element of success was that participants were involved in all the decisions about how the programme would progress. They are aware that their feedback has played a crucial role in how the programme developed and are keen to share it with others. What is also noticeable is that this is now also about social inclusion and community, as well as feeling more independent and capable online.

“It’s so worthwhile”, says Geraldine. “I have a focus on a Monday morning. This class gets you out meeting people. It keeps your head right. It should be in every county in Ireland.”

THE ROLE OF SICAP IN THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAMME

The project was 100% funded by SICAP, which allowed the programme to be very inclusive, and to develop using Community Development facilitated learning.

The SICAP Community Development Officer identified the need through previous SICAP work and in close collaboration with other local community groups. From previous experience with IT classes she could see what would and wouldn't work. She also saw the potential to build on the first phase of the programme, the One on One sessions, leading on to a second phase of group sessions and then the establishment of a group that could continue into the future. Feedback and evaluation was used to tweak the model, move things forward, build engagement and develop new collaborations.

The tutor on the course, Patricia Carolan, is herself a Community Development success story. She started working in the community office on a Tús scheme doing admin, this gave Patricia the confidence to return to IT tutoring. Patricia also studied Community Development at Dundalk DkIT. Having a tutor who had a strong understanding of Community Development principles and of SICAP goals and approach was critical to the project's success.

FUTURE PLANS

Identifying those who need the programme can be challenging. Many surveys about online access are conducted online, which means they don't reflect those who do not have access at all. New census questions may help to address this gap.

In the meantime, Louth Leader Partnership plans to roll out this programme in 2020 by promoting it through Goal 1 Community Development Supports in SICAP. The plan is to encourage new members to go through the SMART START programme and continue through to joining SMART NETWORK Louth.

What's clear is that this programme has unlocked potential among participants and given them confidence to get connected, and to overcome not just their fear of technology but other challenges in their lives.

"I'm going to keep going with it", says Dympna. "I want to know how to shop online, how to deal with fraud. Pat's laptop is there; it hasn't been used in three years. I don't know his password but I'm going to bring it in and I'm going to try and get going on it."



Anne: *'I enjoyed everything as I did not know much about using my phone or computer, I plan to use my computer more to get more contact with my*



Darren: *'I liked the things I found out about the phone and tablet, I will use the phone to text and phone and look for things as long as it's not going to change me'*



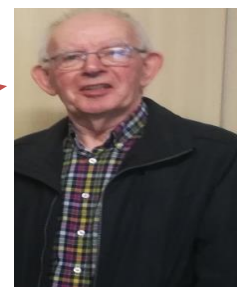
Marie: *'Tutor deals specifically with the needs I require, to communicate with my iphone / computer and my way around same'*



Brendan: *'I liked learning whats app, facebook and facetime, I will use it communicating with friends and relations, Very good course and trainer'*



Ann: *'I liked the attention to detail and very informative and interesting and good communication, I will now use my computer more*



Patsy: *'I can now use my 2 devices with confidence, sort my photos into folders and know how to hook into wifi outside the home*



Nuala: *'I could ask any question about the phone, I will use more of the apps along with doing more emails from my phone*



Veronica: *'One to one is great, I now have an email, I plan to practice, this was excellent, just what I needed*

