



SICAP Case Study

PAUL Partnership, Limerick

Supporting Men Living in Direct Provision

Primary Thematic Area: Collaboration.

Secondary Thematic Area: Engagement with Target Groups.

Target Group: New Communities - Men Living in Direct Provision.



The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employment, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020

Introduction and Background

Migration brings with it many challenges, and adjusting to a new environment is not easy. It takes time to adapt to a new culture, language, environment and establish new social networks. However, for those who arrive in Ireland as Asylum seekers and who are living within the Direct Provision system there are additional concerns, many of which have been documented in recent reports and highlighted in the media. According to Doras¹, mental health issues among residents of Direct Provision centres are common. Asylum seekers are five times more likely to experience mental health issues and psychiatric conditions than the general public. This group is among the most disadvantaged in our community and face various challenges, barriers and general social exclusion which impacts a myriad of aspects of life.

PAUL Partnership – the Local Development Company in Limerick City – aims to enhance social and economic inclusion and improve quality of life for all in Limerick City. Working in partnership and collaboration with stakeholders is at the heart of our work. We collaborate with various stakeholders locally, nationally and internationally. Our Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) provides a space where this is possible and also encouraged.

Limerick city centre is home to Hanratty's; a Direct Provision Centre accommodating approximately 90 men. Through conversation between PAUL Partnership SICAP Development Officer, Limerick Mental Health Association (LMHA) and Doras, a gap in supports for this particular target group was identified.

	<p><u>Doras</u></p> <p>Doras is an independent, non-governmental organisation working to promote and protect the rights of migrants in Ireland through direct support, advocacy and integration support.</p>
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	<p><u>Limerick Mental Health Association (LMHA)</u></p> <p>LMHA promotes positive mental health and well-being in the Limerick community.</p> <p><u>Le Chéile</u> is LMHA's peer support project. It promotes positive mental health within the local community and offers support for people who are having difficulty coping, under the care of the mental health services, or are experiencing social isolation, and/or loneliness as a result.</p>
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¹ Doras-Limerick (www.doras.org)

Evidence from Doras illustrated that many men living in Direct Provision felt isolated and vulnerable, and had very few social connections. Furthermore, they were not integrating into the city or accessing supports available to them. The need for a formal structure to engage the men in opportunities to combat social isolation and to support enhanced integration in the city was therefore identified by the three organisations.

The PAUL Partnership SICAP Development Officer, the Integration Support Worker from Doras and the Project Manager from LMHA came together and agreed that the best method to respond to the multiple needs identified within this target group would be to work collaboratively. This method of working would enable the team to pool resources along with providing opportunities to share knowledge, expertise and experience. It would also broaden access to existing working relationships already formed by each of the three individual organisations. By adopting a collaborative model of working, it enabled the development of an interagency response to address the gap in support for this group.

Engagement with Migrant Men

This Action began initially in 2018. An initial six-month pilot project was planned to try to engage men who were living in Direct Provision and that were experiencing social exclusion. The aim of the pilot project was to:

- Foster relationships between the men living in Direct Provision and staff of the three organisations in order to enable effective engagement.
- Design and deliver programmes and activities that the men would be interested in and would engage with.
- Support the men to access services appropriate to their needs such as mental health supports and employment supports.
- Provide opportunities for the men to participate in recreational and cultural activities in Limerick City.

A community development approach was followed and it was recognised that engaging with this hard-to-reach group may be a slow process carried out over a period of time. Many of the men had not previously engaged in group activities. In addition, many had limited English language skills, making them more vulnerable to social exclusion. As such, considerable time was spent on pre-development work using innovative engagement methods. It was thought that a fun, hands-on approach would be the best way to initially engage migrant men. The three collaborating partners decided to organise a series of global food events where men from the Direct Provision Centre would volunteer to prepare a meal for their fellow male residents.

These global food events were fully-funded through SICAP and all three of the organisations played a role in organising and promoting the events through word-of-mouth at the Direct Provision Centre. Flyers were also placed in the Centre to inform the men about the event. Some of the flyers were translated for those whose first language was not English. Doras played a key role at this stage of the project. Doras is often the first point of contact for migrants arriving in Limerick, particularly for those seeking asylum and who require support in relation to their status. Therefore, Doras had already established contact with many of the men and were able to inform them of the events and encourage them to get involved.

The first global food event focused on Middle Eastern cuisine followed by a Zimbabwean Day and a Georgian Day. The men were initially slow to join in, however each event brought together a small group of men and together there was enough interest to form a group. This tool for engagement worked well in terms of identifying and building a network of migrant men living in the city centre who were at risk of social exclusion and isolation. The informal events allowed different cultures to come together in a relaxed, non-threatening way. In addition, the event allowed for each of the collaborating organisations to inform the attendees about the services they offer internally as well as being able to signpost them to other relevant services if required. For example, the PAUL Partnership SICAP Development Officer was able to offer information on the supports offered through SICAP (both Goal 1 and Goal 2) as well as other supports offered through PAUL Partnership, such as the Local Employment Service (LES), the Jobs Club and the Community Employment Schemes.

Following the pilot project, the group which now consisted of approximately 15 men began to meet regularly. The LMHA were also in a position to allocate a staff member to facilitate these weekly, two-hour long, group meetings. In many ways this new migrant men's group is based on a peer support model. Parallels can be drawn between the migrant men's group and Le Chéile which is LMHA's peer support project. They both offer a friendly, welcoming space providing peer support, friendship, activities and access to information.

Alongside the regular group meetings, the SICAP Development Officer, the Integration Support Worker from Doras and the Project Manager from LMHA meet regularly to assess the ongoing needs of the group, plan and evaluate the progress of the group, and provide support as required. Collaboration between these three different organisations is useful as each organisation can draw from their different channels of skills, knowledge and resources to offer support.

Collaboration has enabled a wide variety of supports to be offered to the men's group. Since the formation of the group, the men have:

- Participated in group activities enabling participants to build up social networks. This can contribute to combatting social exclusion, isolation and promoting successful integration into the city.
- Developed their English language skills through participation in group activities.
- Accessed CV support provided by the group facilitator.
- Participated in social, cultural and recreational activities in the city, such as visiting The Hunt Museum and King John's Castle.
- Taken part in activities with other local groups such as The Laneway Art Project which brought together local men's sheds, or sporting activities organised through Limerick Sports Partnership such as boxing and kayaking. These activities are important for fostering a sense of belonging and building mutual understanding between the local community and migrants.
- Accessed mental health supports where required.
- Received clear, up-to-date information to assist them to access all supports available to them, increasing the likelihood of successful integration.

SICAP's Role to-date and Moving Forward

This collaborative response to address a gap in support for migrant men in Limerick city saw the adoption of a community development approach. SICAP played a key role in supporting the formation of the group in partnership with Doras and LMHA. A lot of time was spent on pre-development work. This pre-development work was required to gain trust and build good working relationships with the men even before a group was properly formed. Delivery of the initial engagement sessions, in the form of the global food events were funded through SICAP. These were key to attracting migrant men to come together and form a group. Furthermore, the SICAP Development Officer has been able to offer information to the men about other SICAP supports as well as other supports available in the city. The SICAP Development Officer also takes an ongoing role in the evolving assessment of needs of the group, planning and evaluating the progress of the group, and providing supports as required. As with the other partners in the collaboration, being able to draw on existing working relationships has assisted in the planning and delivery of various activities for the group of men to-date.

As this group moves forward, SICAP will continue to support its ongoing development. Working with Doras and LMHA, the SICAP Development Officer will assist in the planning of training and development programmes for the group, some of which will be funded or co-funded through SICAP, or through resources/supports provided by other relevant organisations. These programmes will assist in empowering individuals and encouraging them to actively take part in their city. They will also build capacity of the collective group, enabling the group to better link with other structures in the city and in time to take an active role in representing their group on decision-making bodies in the city. Some of the training and development activities which are already being discussed include:

- Employment Supports.
- Improving English Language skills.
- Leadership Training.
- Active Citizenship Training.

What Worked Well and Lessons Learned

PAUL Partnership and our SICAP staff are often involved in projects which require working in partnership and collaboration. This project demonstrates how effective collaboration can deliver comprehensive support to a target group. The collaboration was established as it was thought that working together would enable the organisations to achieve much more than if they were working alone. Ensuring a successful partnership was underpinned by good communication and clear sharing of responsibilities. Each of the organisations has a different goal and set of resources; a Local Development Company (PAUL Partnership), a Migrants Support and Advocacy Organisation (Doras) and a Mental Health Association (LMHA). As such, each organisation was able to contribute their particular expertise for the benefit of a shared objective. The collaboration created a platform from which knowledge, expertise and experience could be shared, and existing working relationships could be drawn on. By its nature, it enabled effective access to resources and efficient use of them. This was a major benefit to the project from the outset. In addition, the collaboration has strengthened professional links between the three organisations which will enable good management of this current project as it moves forward, but may also be beneficial in future projects.

One of the challenges noted by the SICAP Development Officer was the transient nature of the group. The Direct Provision System sees men coming and going and as such this will be an on-going challenge overtime. However, by firmly establishing a strong, inclusive and friendly group this will help to ensure that the group continues on once the current tranche of men leave. Another on-

going challenge is the language barrier which some of the men face when they arrive in Ireland. This may prevent men from joining a group. Therefore, it is important that the group is clearly visible and offers a welcoming and friendly space for all. The group can also assist in overcoming the language barrier by its ability to offer advice on supports available to men including English Language Supports as well as the opportunity to practice English through group activities.

Conclusion

Developing the migrant men's group to the stage that it is today has been a long and oftentimes slow process. However, this is often the case with community development work. Although challenging at times, the journey has been a positive one and much learning has been achieved along the way. The group has consistently had about 15 men in attendance since its inception. These men, and the group as a collective, have participated in various types of learning and growing, and this will continue into the future as the group continues to develop. However, in addition to this the three collaborating organisations have also benefitted from various types of learning both from each other as well as from the process of collaboration. By working together and taking part in this journey together they have assisted each other in the development of something of more value and worth than they may have achieved by working alone.