COMMUNITY EDUCATION & SOCIAL CHANGE

Qualitative research exploring the current nature of community education in Donegal

Table of Contents

Table of figures 4
Abbreviations 4
Foreword 5
Structure of the report 7
Executive Summary 8
1. Introduction 13
1.1 Community Education in Donegal 13
1.2 Research aims 14
1.3 Methodology 14
2. Defining community education: setting the context 16
2.1 A pedagogy for community education 16
2.2 Characteristics of the community education model 18
2.3 How does this model translate in the learning setting? 19
2.4 Exclusion and community education 22
2.5 Learner outcomes 24
2.6 Conclusion 25
3.0 Policy Framework For Community Education In Ireland 26
3.1 Funding sources for community education 28
3.2 Broader policy developments 28
4. Sociol Economic Profile Of Donegal 30
5. Analysis of data from a survey of community education providers 34
5.1 Group profile 34
5.2 Participation trends in community education 35
5.3 Individual, collective and political outcomes 36
5.4 Programme delivery 41
5.5 Factors that influence the type of programmes delivered 43
5.6 Who participates in community education? 45
5.7 Challenges in targeting participants 48
5.8 Key barriers to delivering community education 49
5.9 Accreditation Issues 50
5.10 Adult tutors 52
5.11 Funding and resources 53
5.12 Conclusion 55
6.0 Community Education Providers: Unlocking The Potential 56
6.1 Responding to the most vulnerable 56
6.2 A social programme or social change? 61
6.3 From the personal to the political 63
6.4 The power of the collective 64
6.5 Structural inequalities 66
6.6 Funding 68
6.7 Community education fro men? 69
6.8 Accreditation and Evaluation 70
6.9 Conclusion 71
7.0 Community Education Participants: Realising The Potential 73
7.1 The Participants 74
7.2 How people are getting involved 75
7.3 Community education approaches 76
7.4 Impact of community education 79
7.5 Accreditation and progression 81
7.6 Male participation 82
7.7 Barriers to participation in community education 84
7.8 Conclusion 85
8. Summary Analysis Of Community Education Provision In Co. Donegal 87
8.1 Community education is rooted in a process of social justice 87
8.2 Community education is 'in and of the community' 90
8.3 Responding to educational and structural disadvantage 91
8.4 Taking part in decision making and policy formation within community 92
9. Implications for the sector 93
9.1 Promotion of community education methodologies in community based practice 94
9.2 Funding for community education 95
9.3 Childcare and social care 96
9.4 Inclusion of men in community education 97
9.5 Evaluation 97
9.6 Greater collaboration in the community education sector 99
10 A community education model for social change 100

Bibliography 103
Appendix 1: Research objectives as outlined in the terms of reference 105
Appendix 2: Copy of community education survey 107
Appendix 2: Equality Framework for community education 116
Appendix 3: Issues identified by providers as barriers to community education 117
Appendix 4: Courses that participants (in focus groups) had undertaken 120

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Persons aged 15 and over in Donegal whose full time education has ceased 34

Figure 2: Type of groups who took part in the survey 36

Figure 3: Number of participants accounted for in the sample 37

Figure 4: Framework of proposed outcomes for community education in Donegal 38

Figure 5: Types of programmes being delivered by community groups in the sample 43

Figure 6: Range of community education programmes in the sample 45

Figure 7: Groups targeted by community education providers 48

Figure 8: Groups identified as hard to engage in community education 49

Figure 9: Methods used to recruit participants to community education in Donegal 50

Figure 10: Ranking allocated to issues that inhibit the recruitment of participants 51

Figure 11: Barriers in delivering community education 52

Figure 12: Levels of accreditation offered by groups in the sample 54

Figure 13: Range of accreditation offered on community education courses 55

Figure 14: Methods used for recruiting tutors 56

Figure 15: Funding sources for community education in Donegal 57

Figure 16: Range of activities that funding covers 58

Abbreviations

AONTAS	The National Adult Learning Organisation
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CDP	Community Development Project
EEI	Educational Equality Initiative
FETAC	Further Education Training Award Certificate
FRC	Family Resource Centre
HETAC	Higher Education Training Award Certificate
HSE	Health Service Executive
LDSIP	Local Development Social Inclusion Programme
NDP	National Development Plan
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

Foreword

Door to door with community education in Donegal! One can hear in this report from the Donegal Community Education Forum the individual invitations to all members of local communities to come along to something interesting in their local community education centre. One can hear the voices of learners as they express confidence and excitement about new learning. People also become less isolated and begin the journey of becoming active members of their communities.

Too often reports want to emphasise the ways in which a county, or programme, or problems differ from one place to another, even joining in a sort of competition for most disadvantaged status. This is not the way with this report. But Donegal is different. It does have higher rates of unemployment, historically fewer adults with Leaving Certificate, lower levels of involvement in higher education and a very high percentage of the population living in rural areas. Donegal community education does not dwell on these but presents a self-image as a thriving venture.

But Donegal is unique in other very important ways. There are community education programmes that go 'door to door' as a way of addressing the hesitation of so many to come along and join an interesting learning journey. A number of programmes set out to address issues of social exclusion and bring about social change. These are welcome differences and they contribute in no small way to the unique and successful programmes offered throughout this large county. Around the country so many of those who most need community education are the slowest to come into programmes but this is met by the willingness of proactive educators to connect with local communities and ease the difficult experience of joining a course. Other programmes in other places will look at this experience and will have the courage to also declare that in these cases, advertising is not very effective.

This neighbourhood work is not the only interesting way of engaging adults in Donegal. The providers and tutors are decidedly on the side of the disadvantaged in their communities to such an extent that some of the programmes have a clear social justice focus and a social change agenda. The emphasis on Freire and his pedagogy and methodology is clear and well understood. Though students may not be as committed to this agenda, the providers are rightly determined to offer to students the full range of learning in which it is possible for adults to engage. This acknowledges that for adults the possibilities open to them range far beyond what they might seek on first enrolling. We can only know what we want when we know what we can have. It is an important aspect of learning to come to know what learning is possible. Then adults can decide what they want to learn.

Foreword

The programmes in this report are impressive because they set out to deal with disadvantage. Community education empowers and builds the confidence of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision making and policy formation within the community. This impressive vision of what community education can do is the driving force behind the Donegal programmes. The emphasis is on participation and empowerment so that a collective voice can be forceful in making systems and individuals address poverty and other exclusions. Though not all programmes are as clearly focussed on social change, this ethos is boldly offered to the adult students.

Community education builds respect, supports active citizenship and teaches democracy. Mistrust, prejudice, sectarian conflict and other activities including violence are anti-democracy. The future is bright for the community education projects in Donegal because it offers the essential confidence building but always goes beyond to offer a strong social activist and social change version of community education. Their claim to be followers of Freire is modest. Their ambition and practice is about supporting real change in the lives and communities of people.

This report does not shy away from the obvious problems in the community education sector. If these include childcare, transport and progression among others the report is clear but not looking at these as insurmountable barriers but opportunities to gather one's strength and continue to push the system into addressing them. Men, as usual are particularly difficult to engage.

It it clear that this sector finds funding wherever it can, from many government department, North/South bodies, SVP, WEA, IFI. Peace II and the VEC. Far too much energy is expended by local community based organisations and programmes chasing the fragmented, disconnected and far too modest funding streams. The learning is so important, the students voice so convincing, the outcomes so vital and life enhancing that the government would do a great service to these communities if they could place funding on a sound footing and eliminate the need to attract funding from all points of the compass. Short-term funding is not a sustainable way of addressing disadvantage. It does not address the fact that disadvantage is cannot be eliminated by programmes that are funded for short durations. Disadvantage does not go away in one year.

There is as always in community education a well-understood need to support and enhance the ability of tutors to facilitate the full range of adult learning. Tutor training will further lift the ability of this Forum to deliver to the communities of Donegal.

Community educators in all parts of the country will welcome this report and benefit from the assured and convincing way in which it sets out to unlock the potential of the adult students in Donegal. All wish it continued success.

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Structure of the Report

Chapter 1
Provides an introduction to the report and details the background to the study. It also describes the methodology used in the research.

Chapter 2
Briefly examines the literature in relation to community education and describes the various theories and practice models that exist.

Chapter 3
Identifies policies relevant to the community education sector in Ireland.

Chapter 4
Describes the socio economic profile of Donegal to set the context for the study.

Chapter 5
Outlines and analyses the findings of a survey conducted with forty-one community education providers in County Donegal.

Chapter 6
Presents an analysis of the findings from interviews and focus groups conducted with a range of community education providers in Donegal.

Chapter 7
Presents an analysis of the findings from focus groups with a range of community education participants in Donegal.

Chapter 8
Presents a summary analysis of all of the findings in relation to the AONTAS definition of community education.

Chapter 9
Draws out policy and funding implications for the sector and identifies recommendations for the practice of community education in Donegal.

Chapter 10
Presents a community education model for social change.

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The Community Education Forum, made up of community education organisers and providers in Donegal, came together in 2007 with the aim of recognizing, promoting and advocating community education and its resourcing in the county. This report outlines the findings of a qualitative research process which aims to explore the nature of community education in Donegal.

As a starting point for the research, the Community Education Forum recognised the AONTAS definition of community education as one it subscribes to. This definition of community education emphasises community education as a way to respond to social justice and it, "empowers and builds the confidence of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision making and policy formation within the community." (AONTAS 2000)

The research used a range of methods to gather qualitative data. In the first instance, a qualitative questionnaire was developed and distributed to a sample of community education providers in Donegal. Secondly, focus groups and interviews were held with community education providers, to further elaborate on the findings from the questionnaires. Finally, focus groups were held with community education participants across the county.

2. Defining community education: setting the context

This chapter presents a brief literature review in relation to community education in Ireland. Different understandings and interpretations of community education exist. Many practitioners have developed models based on the teachings of Paolo Freire, which sees education as a vehicle for social change. This model emphasises the need for learners to think critically about their world and to take action to transform it. Characteristics of this model are that it is delivered by community groups, it uses the lived experiences of participants as a starting point and it works at an individual, community and political level. The emphasis in community education is on facilitative processes in the learning setting where participants are empowered to influence the type of learning that takes place. (Kavanagh, 2007)

Community education has been advocated as a way to respond to social exclusion and systemic inequalities. Targeting excluded people, and enabling everyone to participate is central to its ethos. Commentators have reported that participants are empowered to develop a 'collective voice' through community education processes (AONTAS) and that this contributes positively to social capital and social cohesion. (Sabates, 2003) Policy makers' emphasis on social inclusion via the labour markets rather than creating social solidarity may also be impacting upon the kind of community education being delivered.

[1] Throughout this report 'political' is understood in its widest sense, that is by being an active citizen and trying to affect change in society in a wide variety of ways

3. Policy framework for community education in Ireland

There are a number of policy papers which include references to community education. The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) identifies community education as part of the wider adult education agenda and outlines how it is different from adult education in terms of its ideological underpinnings, the value placed upon participants as equal learners and its 'concern for communal values'. (p. 114) In the National Development Plan (2007-2013) lifelong learning is named as a priority and it recognizes the need for the provision of second chance education for adults and names community education as having a particular role to play.

Funding for locally-based community education comes from a variety of sources, including Vocational Education Committees (VEC), the Health Service Executive, Area Based Partnership Companies, Dormant Accounts Fund, Peace II and other cross border funds and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Annually, the Back to Education Initiative 'community strand' also provides 600 places nationally. AONTAS has found in its research that groups spend a lot of time and energy dealing with funding sources.

4. Social economic profile of Donegal

Donegal has the highest unemployment rate of any county in Ireland (Census 2006) and it has the lowest rates for admission to higher education (Review of Higher Education, 2003) and low rates of participation in upper secondary education. Donegal also has a high number of young people under the age of 14 and over 60. The weak infrastructure and predominantly rural population in the county means that transport is often named as an issue faced by rural communities. (Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Donegal, 2006)

5. Analysis of data from the community education survey

As part of the research process a survey of forty-one community education providers was conducted. A wide range of community groups responded. In the sample, a minimum of 3,463 people have participated in community education over a one year period. The data collected gives an indication of how community education providers view the work they do and what they see as barriers to progress. It is apparent that a dual understanding of community education may exist within the sector. While all groups see the individual and collective benefits of providing education in the community, fewer groups appear to be delivering community education with the intention of a political or 'collective action' outcome.

At the same time a large number of community groups have set up education programmes in their communities with the purpose of addressing an absence of resources within their areas and many groups commented on how their programmes are 'vital' in the 'life blood of the community'. The majority of groups also seem to be responding directly to structural inequalities in the community and this includes the provision of community education for early school leavers, people with disabilities, ethnic groups, lone parents, mothers and people affected by poverty and unemployment.

[3] The methodology used is informed by an epistemological position which recognises the interpretation of social reality by its participants through symbolic interactionism. (Herbert Blumer, 1996). It draws from a philosophy that understands 'meaning' to be created through the interactions we have with other people in sharing our interpretation of the world around us. (Mead)

6. Community education providers: unlocking the potential

This chapter reports on findings from interviews and focus groups conducted with fourteen community education providers. Overall, there is a broad understanding of community education in the sector and it seems to cover a variety of approaches. The common denominator linking all providers is that they are community groups providing education in their areas and they all acknowledge and encourage both personal and social outcomes from community education programmes. A further aspect was the emphasis placed on community education in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable members of society, who are 'cut off' from other mainstream education opportunities in a variety of ways. The building of self-confidence and the benefits that come from interaction with others in the community were the main effects highlighted by all providers.

Providers who delivered programmes that used facilitative approaches identified increased 'active citizenship' as an outcome as well as tangible changes in the lives of marginalised groups who participated. It was felt that the emphasis on sharing, questioning and identifying common experiences is what separates this type of approach to traditional teaching approaches in adult and mainstream education.

However, barriers exist which prevent community educators reaching their goals. The ad-hoc nature of funding was named as a key issue as well as a lack of acknowledgement by agencies of the need for child and social care when addressing the needs of marginalised groups. Much emphasis was also given to the reluctance of men to get involved. With all providers, the necessity of engaging in face-to-face work to encourage and support marginalised people to become involved with community education came across strongly and it was felt that those 'most in need' were the least likely to 'walk through the door'.

7. Community education participants: realising the potential

This chapter describes and analyses the findings from discussions with community education participants. Overall, community education has had a positive impact on participants' personal, social, family and community life.

Participants who took part in focus groups had experienced different types of approaches in the programmes that they undertook. For some, community education had been similar to traditional teaching approaches, for others a more facilitative approach was adopted. However, the social dimension of community education was common to all courses and the potential of community education to combat loneliness and isolation was mentioned frequently.

For people who were coming back to education for the first time or who had been 'disengaged', the 'face-to-face' approach of the community or neighbourhood worker was acknowledged as the reason why they came along. While some people had responded to advertisements, these tended to be older people or people who had already gained qualifications through the formal education system.

Community education as a bridge to other types of courses came across strongly and many had gone on to access further training following a period in community education. People who had taken part in courses with a 'group work' methodology generally seemed to have gained a more politicised view of society, in that they were more aware of the structural inequalities that exist for their community. Generally, many people had been motivated by their participation in community education to become more involved with community development and 'give back' to their community.

While Traveller participants identified better progression for Travellers through community education rather than mainstream options, others felt that in some rural communities progression in community education was limited. In rural communities transport was named as an issue that prevents people from moving onto courses in bigger towns.

Childcare was named in every group as an issue. It was felt that it was available on an ad-hoc basis and those who accessed it were seen as 'lucky'. Many people knew of women who were not able to access education due to childcare costs.

8. Community education is rooted in a process of social justice

In this chapter an analysis of all the evidence collected is carried out in relation to the AONTAS definition of community education. The community sector in Donegal is making real inroads in the provision of life-long learning for adults in the county. However, only a minority of providers engage participants with the aim of 'taking part in decision making and policy formation within the community'. One of the key differences that differentiates community education practice in Donegal from more 'Freirian' approaches is the limited use of facilitative learning approaches. Although there is a small group of providers who are using these approaches, they do not seem to be used or understood by all providers, where traditional 'teacher', 'student' and 'classroom' models are used.

Some resourced community development groups, however, are making inroads in designing and delivering courses that allow participants to analyse and understand their own place in society and to take actions to collectively change their situation.

9. Implications for the sector

In this chapter twenty-three recommendations in relation to community education in Donegal are presented. These relate to:

- **The promotion of community education methodologies:** providing training in community education methodologies for providers and tutors
- **Funding:** lobbying for enhanced funding to the community education sector and agencies to work more strategically to fund community education and to identify clear indicators for community education practice
- **Childcare and social care:** the enhancement of childcare provision and social care provision for community education participants, especially for those on low incomes; the provision of integrated family community education approaches
- **Participation of men:** creation of dialogue around the participation of men and promotion of the participation of men in community education through community work approaches
- **Evaluation:** review of current evaluation processes and exploration of more qualitative evaluation approaches, considering the role played by the facilitator and community group
- **Collaboration in the sector:** development of ways for the sector to share information and learning in relation to community education

1. Introduction

"Education ... is the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" **(Paolo Freire)**

In January 2007, Co. Donegal Vec's Adult Education Service brought together representatives from a range of organisations and community groups who are involved in delivering community education in Donegal. Since then the group has been meeting with the aim of recognising, promoting and advocating community education and its resourcing in the county. The following groups have been involved in the process: Inishowen Partnership; Second Chance Education Project for Women; St. Johnston and Carrigans Family Resource Centre; County Donegal VEC's Adult Education Service; Donegal Town Family Resource Centre (2007 only); Donegal Community Workers Co-op; Noel Bradley, Community Education Worker; Pobail le Chéile and Donegal Women's Network.

While acknowledging that different interpretations of 'community education' exist, the group has adopted the AONTAS definition of community education as a starting point for exploring the nature of community education in the county:

"Community education is education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community. It is distinct from general adult education provision, due both to its ethos and to the methodologies it employs."(AONTAS 2000)

In preparing the terms of reference for this research the Forum spent considerable time discussing their *own* understandings of community education and many questions were raised about how community education is perceived and practiced in Donegal. By adopting the AONTAS definition of community education the group felt it was highlighting that community education is not just about providing education in the community, but about promoting social justice. In this way, community education is seen as a process which challenges the roots of oppression and injustice, by giving participants the opportunity to analyse 'how' they came to be in the situation in which they find themselves. Participants are then supported to act and use this knowledge to affect change for themselves or their communities, which will lead to greater equality. It is from this perspective that the research set out to explore the current nature of community education in Donegal.

1.1 Community education in Donegal

Recent figures and anecdotal evidence suggest that there is a very active community education sector in Donegal. 2007 figures from the VEC indicate that there were 175 groups in the county supported by its Community Education Support Programme and that they delivered 630 education courses in the community. If we take an average of 12 participants per programme, this indicates that approximately 7,500 people have participated in community education programmes (funded by the VEC only) during 2007.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that there is a high degree of community education activity outside of the VEC funded groups. A number of funding sources support activity in community education: these include Peace II funding, Dormant Accounts, Department of Social and Family Affairs under the Community Development Programme and the Family Resource Centres. While many groups funded by these schemes are involved in community development, community education is also an integral part of their work.

1.2 Research aims

The purpose of this study is to explore the current nature of community education in Donegal using a qualitative approach. The research objectives were as follows [2]:

- To provide an analysis of the nature of community education in the county by using the AONTAS 2000 definition of community education as its benchmark.
- To highlight elements of 'good practice' and name the elements that contribute to good community education practice.
- To explore the relationship between community education and community development.
- To identify the outcomes from community education.
- To highlight the barriers and obstacles faced by the participants and organisers in the community education sector.
- To highlight the funding and policy implications for the sector.

1.3 Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of this study, it was deemed important that contributors to the research would be able to describe their experiences in their own words; therefore a qualitative approach was adopted[3]. The study is also informed by a perspective that acknowledges the structural inequalities that exist in society. This view recognises how the economic, social, cultural and political resources of a society are not shared equally and how the management of these resources contributes to the social reproduction of inequality.

The research process was conducted over two phases. The first phase of the research was a 'qualitative questionnaire' (See Appendix 2) aimed at community education providers. Initially, a pilot questionnaire was developed and piloted with six community education providers. Following the pilot phase, the questionnaire was distributed to a wide range of community groups across the county using email and post. The sample was selected using a list of community groups that was compiled by representatives on the Community Education Forum. In this way, community groups from a range of different sectors and geographic locations across the county were identified. In addition, the questionnaire was distributed at a community education seminar which was hosted by the VEC in December 2007. Eighty three questionnaires were distributed and forty four were returned. The responses were analysed using SPSS and the N6 qualitative data analysis software.

The second phase of the research involved the organisation of focus groups and interviews with community education providers and participants. Six focus groups were held with participants. These were hosted in Falcarragh, Raphoe, Inver, Letterkenny, Buncrana and Ballybofey. In four of these locations, a member of the Community Education Forum promoted and organised the focus group to encourage participation. In the other two locations (Letterkenny and Raphoe) the researcher organised the focus group. Travel and childcare costs were made available to all of the participants. Fourty-three participants took part in the focus groups.

Group and one-to-one interviews were also held with community education providers. Members of the Community Education Forum organised groups of providers to participate in group interviews in their areas. Fourteen providers took part. Group interviews were held in Falcarragh, Ballybofey and Inishowen. One-to-one interviews were held with two providers, both of whom were based in Letterkenny.

The interview process reflected in-depth interviewing. Such interviewing consists of open-ended questions that focus on participants' experiences and perspectives. The researcher began the interviews with broad questions to relax participants and

[2] See appendix 1 for full terms of reference

[3] The methodology used is informed by an epistemological position which recognises the interpretation of social reality by its participants through symbolic interactionism. (Herbert Blumer, 1996). It draws from a philosophy that understands 'meaning' to be created through the interactions we have with other people in sharing our interpretation of the world around us. (Mead)

open up the subject; the process was then followed by a series of prompts. These prompts were used to probe for in-depth description, elaboration, and clarification of responses.

In all of the interviews and focus groups the researcher felt that a good rapport was established between her and the participants, and people were very willing to tell 'their stories'. Before each of the focus groups, the purpose of the research was explained and all of the participants were asked for their permission to record the proceedings via a voice recorder. The researcher was surprised at the willingness of participants to share their own experiences and after all of the focus groups and interviews, participants commented that they had enjoyed the discussion.

Each focus group began with each person saying something about themselves, to build trust between participants. Following that, participants were asked to select a picture (50 different random pictures were spread out on the ground) that said something to them about community education. This allowed participants to give their own 'interpretation' of community education, without being too influenced by other people's views. It also allowed the group to take the lead in the discussion without too much influence from the researcher. Following this, groups were allowed to direct the discussion and in all of the focus group a good 'conversation' between participants took place.

All of the data from interviews and focus groups were transcribed and then coded with the assistance of the N6 qualitative data analysis software. Through this process a number of core themes emerged and these are described in the following chapters.

AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education identifies community education as *"education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community. It is distinct from general adult education provision, due both to its ethos and to the methodologies it employs." (AONTAS 2000)*

If a person on the street was stopped and asked what the difference is between community education and adult education, it is likely that they may not be able to say. Alternatively, they may guess that community education is education that takes place in the community. A quick search on the internet for 'community education' reveals information on schools programmes, government education programmes, university programmes, sports programmes etc. that are all being operated in local communities. It seems that 'community education' is used as a generic name for all types of education opportunities that take place in the 'community'.

In Ireland and elsewhere, in recent years, in academic and government policy documents and in the community development sector, the term 'community education' has come to be used to define a particular *way* and *ethos* of organising and delivering education in the community. In the 1980's there was a high level of social deprivation, unemployment and poverty. In response to this, community groups came together to try and address these issues from within. Women's groups were particularly innovative in leading the way in the development of community education. These groups recognised and used education as the primary tool for bringing

2. Defining community education: setting the context

about social change. People with common concerns were facilitated to come together to collectively look at the issues they were facing and develop ways to address these issues and change their situation. This meant increasing their awareness of the social, political and economic conditions that impacted on their lives and then taking collective action to try and change the way things were. This was the start of a new movement in adult education in Ireland and is what we know today as community education.

2.1 A pedagogy for community education

Community education as a process for social change is related closely with community development practice and theory and "*serves the ideal of a more equal society,*" (Connolly, 2003) Many community educators and community activists borrow from the theories of Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educationalist and social activist who worked with disadvantaged and illiterate communities. In his work the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire argues that the situation of the oppressed is a result of wider economic, social and political forces. Therefore, part of enabling people to break out of their situation is to allow them to develop a critical awareness of the world around them and their place within it. This process is called 'conscientization'. It is a facilitative process which allows participants to work collectively to investigate the world around them. Through active engagement with each other and the world outside, they become more aware of the forces that are oppressing them.

Dialogue between the participants and between participants and teacher is central to this approach; all are seen as equal participants in the education process. This differs from what Freire describes as the 'banking model' which espouses a more authoritarian teacher-pupil model, where participants are seen as 'empty vessels' to be filled with information. Therefore in Freire's model, education is seen as a shared process developed together through connection, dialogue and communication. In this way learning involves the active construction of knowledge. (Freire, p.75)

So how can knowledge be actively constructed between participants? Freire offers us his theory of Praxis, "*reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it*" (Freire, p.33). This is a process of theory, application, evaluation, reflection and then back to theory. Put simply, it is about participants considering the knowledge that 'they' have gained on the subject from lived experience and comparing this to the 'accepted' knowledge which exists. The process not only considers the 'facts' that exist, but also encourages participants to look at their feelings and emotions on the subject. The process then involves the participants taking action which can involve challenging the current knowledge that exists and then reflecting on and developing theories from the action that they have taken. It is intended that this process will enable participants to be more critically conscious and that through this process they will become more aware of themselves and the world around them.

In her article *Listening to the Voices* (2003) Connolly describes 'facilitation' as fundamental to community education. She asserts that through a facilitative process participants are able to take part in 'self directed' learning where "*instead of the teacher controlling the syllabus, the participants control the process, identifying their own learning needs. The role of the facilitator is to create the critical environment and to provide expertise in the subject or topic*."(p. 13).

Learning and education are not just seen as psychological processes. The social relationships that make up society are hugely important to community education. Outcomes from community education may include acquisition of skills and knowledge, however, it is *critical reflection* on issues that

sets the community education learner apart. This is seen by some commentators as the most important outcome – "*the ability to critically reflect, to understand issues of concern and power is crucial to community education.*" Community education strives to meet the needs of individual learners in their own education development, but also attempts to address the needs of the community by ensuring the learners can analyse the society in which they live and act for change. (Connolly, 2003, p. 16)

2.2 Characteristics of the community education model

2.2.1 Lived experience as the starting point

Community Education 2004 (AONTAS) and the *Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework* 2005 both maintain that community education begins with 'lived experience'. In the *Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework*, a framework that was developed following a consultation process with women's community education providers over three years in different locations in Ireland, this aspect is contained in the '*women-centred principle*' upon which community education is based: "*The women's centred principle in women's community education welcomes all women, concerns itself with aspects of women's lives and empathises with the reality of women's experiences.*"

This idea of starting with 'lived experience' is also advocated by other practitioners in the field. In an article which describes community education work with men in North Donegal, the approach is described as "*respect for men in their respective situations, listening to them and the issues they have strong feelings about, facilitating them around some of those issues … hopefully with some support, encouragement and facilitation they will move on to acting on these issues.*" (Bradley, 2003, p. 75)

2.2.2 Community education responds to disadvantage and social exclusion

Historically, community education has taken place in Ireland in disadvantaged urban and rural communities. The women's sector in particular has used community education to heighten women's awareness of the inequalities that women face and look for opportunities to break down these barriers.

By following a Freirian model, participants will question the distribution of power and privilege in society and seek a way to 'challenge systems of oppression in society'. In this light, AONTAS see[6] community education as a model for social transformation, in favour of the weakest members in our society: "*Community education has as its intention the empowerment of participants with the skills, knowledge and collective analysis to challenge oppression and to engage in action to bring about change*." However, it is also noted that community education sometimes fails to reach this level and that its transforming effects are limited. Therefore, according to AONTAS community education is taking place, even if '*action to bring about social change*' does not happen, as long as it is underpinned by a *principle* of social transformation. (Community Education 2004)

2.2.3 Community education works at an individual, community and political level

Community education is not just concerned with individuals gaining skills and knowledge, and developing confidence and self-esteem. At a community level it is also seen as important that people develop their capacity to interact as a group, work on local issues that affect the group and analyse their own and the community's situation. One commentator has described it as *'education for community within community. In other words, '*community*' is not just the place or context in which education is to occur; fostering community is also a central concern*."(Smith, M. 2007)

Connolly describes community education as an agent of community development in that it raises issues "*around social and cultural inequality, such as poverty, discrimination, neglect and other disadvantages*" – "*the personal is on a continuum with the social and the political.*"

Principles that inform community education practice also espouse the 'political' dimension of community education activity. Here 'political' is understood in its widest sense- that is by being an active citizen and trying to effect change in society. AONTAS describes this as a *'sense of solidarity'* with other groups in similar situations and learning about national and local policies that affect the learners. From this knowledge and sense of connection between learners in sharing their common concerns, political actions may be taken to address some of the issues raised.

2.2.4 The community group is the deliverer of community education

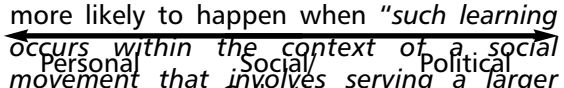
Community education has been successful in reaching marginalised groups and developing relationships with people who are often excluded from society. For this reason, statutory agencies such as training bodies and employment agencies use some of the methods from community education. Connolly argues that there is a fundamental difference between community education (delivered by community groups where people can opt to attend) and programmes where people are compelled to attend, "*The fundamental condition for community education, the grassroots movement, where participants identify and self direct their own learning stories, is completely missing when people are forced to attend … it is top down, compulsory imposition on people who have very little social power.*" (p. 15) This view also appears to be held by AONTAS who sees community education as "*in the community and of the community reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale.*"

2.3 How does this model translate in the learning setting?

In practice, some questions have arisen over community education's ability to respond to needs at a collective and at a broader political level[4], when working with disadvantaged people. In research that explored the outcomes from a community education project in America, serving a Hispanic community, clear individual and familial outcomes are identified for learners. In this example, the organisers used a Freirian approach in delivering their community education to young people. Parents noted that they had seen improved self-confidence in their children as a result of being able to do their homework and 'do it well'. However, when questioned about community concerns, all parents felt that they were too busy (some holding two or three menial jobs to bring in an income) to know about or address community problems. Instead parents saw the family as their focus and were motivated by the potential of community education to benefit their children. This was achieved by taking part in language classes so that they could help their children with their education and by sending their children to homework support classes. The ethos of the learning centre was emphasised in the research with parents noting that the centre '*wants our children to succeed'* and parents were appreciative of the relationships that were fostered between teachers, learners and parents. The researchers concluded that the project has adopted an 'Americanized' model of Freirian/liberation theology "*The pressures of American life caused the participants to involve themselves only in activities that benefited them or members of their family. Their sense of community awareness became more individualized than liberation theology would predict.*" (p.20 Bauer and Spillett, 2000) In response to this example, one may question whether the project 'avoided'

the wider social and political pressures, or if community education, working within a capitalist economy, has the possibility or capacity to tackle oppressive structures in society.

Mezirow (2007) also places great emphasis on the social context in determining whether transformative learning will result in collective social action. He suggests that this is much more likely to happen when "*such learning occurs within the context of a social movement that involves serving a larger cause.*" (p. 17)



One example of social action within a wider social movement took place in the Adult Learner Project in Edinburgh. During the 1990's its community education programme coincided with the larger mass movement for a Scottish parliament. A wealth of community education grew out of this wider issue. History and writing workshops explored this question and allowed people to develop pride in their national identity. In addition a democracy group grew out of these community education groups, which worked and campaigned for Scottish independence and focused attention on the issue by the wider community. (Stan Reeves, 2007)

One might also consider the growth of community education in the eighties in Ireland as part of the wider reaction against poverty by communities and the rise of the women's movement in the country. It provokes the question of whether the wider popular political context still exists in this country for community education to flourish, or if community education is still possible without reference to a wider political agenda.

In a framework for community education developed by Kavanagh, she raises questions for providers about how community education can contribute to greater equality. In this framework a political outcome is not named specifically; however it may be a consequence of this type of process. The framework (2007) which promotes equality through community education, specifically emphasizes the dynamics within the learning setting. The relationship between the tutor, participants and course organisers is highlighted and the need for learner's views to be taken into account in curriculum development. In this approach the tutor should be able to facilitate learning and be aware of the power dynamics within the learning room. Participants should be able to influence the developing curriculum and identify their own learning needs. A comfortable space for learners and dialogue in the learning room is also seen as central to this approach. A question is also raised about how learners are targeted.

Kavanagh's model does not emphasise external 'political' action by the group as an expected outcome (although this could be a consequence). The political agenda is one that is contained within the 'classroom', looking at who controls learning and whether there is an equality of learning between all participants. (See Appendix 2)

The core elements of the model put forward by Kavanagh names group work as opposed to individual learning as a central tenet of community education. This means that an atmosphere is created where there is more emphasis on dialogue and conversation than the 'delivery' of knowledge and skills. Kavanagh proposes that "*This process encourages the learners to engage with each other for learning and places the learning with each member not just the tutor. This process can be used in any learning setting be it a computer course, cookery course or communications. Working creatively will enable people to discover new skills and new knowledge and build a sense of cohesion and solidarity.*"

[4] Throughout this report 'political' is understood in its widest sense, that is by being an active citizen and trying to affect change in society in a wide variety of ways

Mezirow's assertion that adult educators foster learning communities in which people can '*reflect critically, discourse collaboratively and act collectively'* , appears to complement the vision put forward by Kavanagh, by putting a specific emphasis on collective action. Whether a programme can have a political impact beyond the immediate depends on if the learning is taking place within the context of a social movement that involves serving a wider cause. (Mezirow 2007)

The framework for community education adopted by the *Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework* also espouses a 'radical' political agenda in that it advocates that a community education process should lead to a political action and a strategic approach in addressing 'systematic' change.

In this framework the community education process begins before learners ever make it to the 'classroom'. It involves doing outreach work to encourage 'hesitant' or socially excluded learners to become part of the learning process. It places great emphasis on the experiences of learners as a starting point for discussions and invests a large amount of time in developing a group dynamic.

The *Women's Community Education Quality Assurance Framework* (2005) is underlined by four key principles. The first principle is that it is *Women Centred*, therefore it recognises women's contribution to society. Secondly, it is *Quality* education that promotes excellence. Thirdly, it addresses *Equality* and the conditions that limit women's freedoms and choices. And fourthly, it espouses *Justice*, in that it raises awareness of injustices experienced by diverse communities of women in Ireland.

The approach to community education outlined by the women's sector also identifies four key dimensions to its work: that it is 'rooted in women's lives', that it is 'women-led', that it is 'political' and that it is 'strategic'. Much emphasis is given to the outreach aspect of community education and the challenges that many women face in returning to education. That community education should be a '*consciousness raising'* and '*collective*' experience is also highlighted and "*the opportunity must be created for all women to become active on issues affecting their lives if they so wish.*" (p.37)

Like the previous model, a more democratic model of education is advocated for the 'classroom'. However, the women's sector model goes a step further in that it identifies clearly the role of community education groups in tackling issues of injustice: *"[create] spaces in the public domain where women can identify and address justice issues and challenge injustices women encounter."* (2005)

2.4 Exclusion and community education

A wide body of research indicates that everyone does not gain equal outcomes from the mainstream education system (CPA, 1998). Ryan identifies that exclusion is not a 'haphazard' incident in education, but rather that education is part of the system that excludes. Ryan suggests that the formal education system is not meeting the needs of all learners and that this is linked to their socio economic conditions. Participants from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to complete second level education and achieve lower grades. In the report on the action group on access to third level, 2001 (p.34), it is suggested that the education system is not responsive to vulnerable learners.

She emphasises this viewpoint by proposing that education institutions see 'excluded learners' as the problem: the differences of

the 'non-traditional' participants (such as their need for learning supports, wheelchair ramps etc) are "*not seen as a resource to be drawn upon but as deficiencies to be rectified. Access to education under these conditions implies a degree of benevolence on the part of a system that accommodates these 'outsiders' as exceptional cases.*" (p.137)

In community education theory, the emphasis changes from the deficiencies of 'excluded' people to the deficiencies in the system. In this approach the concern is with understanding how the system works, how it reproduces existing inequalities and revealing the values that sustain it. It is this outlook which predicts a radical approach to tackling exclusion in education. The critical pedagogy put forward by Freire reflects this view in that it has the particular and explicit intention of enabling disadvantaged people to claim their place in a more equal and just society. (Connolly, 2007)
Given this analysis, enabling 'disadvantaged learners' to access community education is fundamental to its ethos. In research conducted in 1997, by Morgan et al. it was found that early school-leavers had lower literacy skills than those who had left with a Leaving Certificate. Because of this, their involvement in a range of activities was limited, especially those activities that involved reading and writing, as well as participation in community and voluntary organisations. Early school-leavers were also found to be less likely to participate in adult education. The same study also found that college graduates were six times more likely to have attended a course in adult education than those without qualifications. (Morgan et al 1997)

In the community sector, interventions have been developed that try to engage 'excluded' learners and those who would not normally get involved. In research carried out in 2001 by the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre, UCD (At the Forefront) one of the case studies presented, which tried to engage disadvantaged women in community education (based in Donegal) outlines that "*women with children and living on low incomes would not be attracted towards or able to avail of courses unless transport, childcare and other supports were provided*." Other barriers to participation were noted as a lack of public transport, which particularly affected Donegal because of its mainly rural population (p.54). in all of the case studies presented in the report, participants' low level of confidence and self-esteem were also seen as factors in preventing them from participating in courses. Other barriers named by participants in other areas included Live Register discrimination, costs, "*fears about being thought foolish*", guilt about taking time for themselves, inadequacy of reading and writing skills, little spare time for themselves and the general 'juggling' of commitments which became necessary before undertaking a course. (p. 72)

In this report 'neighbourhood work' is named as a notable development in women's community education based in Donegal. This approach had been developed in response to the low participation of women in marginalised communities in education. The response involves a 'neighbourhood worker' meeting with women through 'face-to-face work' and building relationships with them. "*This process of face to face contact breaks down barriers of fear and indifference and facilitates building of trust within communities.*" (p.57)

In research carried out by the Second Chance Education Project for Women (SCEPW), neighbourhood work is described as follows: "*It gives priority to the most excluded. It facilitates people in a community to get to*

know each other in a group context and to get to know a great deal more about themselves. It starts .. on the doorstep and more particularly around the kitchen table. This face-to-face approach motivates, supports and encouraged people to be concerned about their personal development and correspondingly their development of their own community."(p. 6)

2.5 Learner outcomes

In the examples presented in *At the Forefront* a wide range of learner outcomes is identified. The effects for disadvantaged learners of engaging in community education have been an increase in confidence and self-esteem and a desire for further learning. (p.55) The learning undertaken by mothers also had positive impacts on their children and expectations were raised. However, wider impacts felt in the community were also recorded. In Longford a women's community education group became mobilized around the need for a centre and as a result had built a resource centre, which provides childcare, counseling and training. In Dublin women had also become mobilized around community concerns and women saw their *'collective voice'* as one of their biggest strengths (pp. 90-73). In many instances, allowing women to come together in a collective way had resulted in the development of wider community structures and networks to debate issues and provide support to more women.

At a theoretical level, Preston questions the links between increased community participation and societal cohesion. He found that adult education can impact upon peoples attitudes that can lead to greater social cohesion and the generation of social capital, (although this may not always be possible for people who hold extreme positions). Sabates also raises questions about the relationship between education participation and societal cohesion and outlines how policy makers assume that one aspect (education participation) leads to the other (societal cohesion). (p.4) He traces these policy shifts to growing concerns, *"throughout the advanced economies … the socially fragmentary effects of globalisation, and the symptoms of community breakdown and social disorder… seem to accompany rising consumerism and individualization."* (p.5) Despite this he concludes that the dominant policy discourse (in Anglo Saxon Countries) is not so much on community renewal and social solidarity but rather on the impact of education on 'social inclusion' via the labour markets.

2.6 Conclusion

The theory and practice of community education is given different emphases and interpretations by commentators and researchers in the field. While some propose a radical agenda which questions systemic inequalities, others propose a more 'liberal' agenda which emphasises discourse and dialogue in the learning room. Some also suggest that in the right environment (in the context of a wider social movement) any dialogical process could result in a more radical agenda.

The emphasis placed on 'excluded' learners also differs. In Freirian approaches, the desire is for a more just and equal society. Therefore this approach necessitates the inclusion of those who are not 'normally' included in the system. However, not all approaches to community education give attention to inclusive processes that happen beyond the 'classroom'.

The women's sector in Ireland has been particularly vocal and focused on the radical agenda encompassed in community education and this is linked to a feminist ideology and desire for more equal outcomes for women generally. In the wider community education sector, this radical agenda may sometimes get lost within a policy agenda that is seeking social inclusion by using community education as an access route to the labour force.

At a general level, there are certain components that seem to make up a community education model. While not all approaches may result in a political or collective action, the possibility of this happening is encouraged and accommodated by allowing for an exchange of views within the 'learning centre' and a dialogical approach to learning adopted. The 'teacher' takes on a more facilitative role and allows the participants to also direct the learning approach and outcomes. In this way, the idea of community education operating as a continuum is useful: where collective needs are facilitated, common political issues may be addressed. Where systemic inequalities are also allowed to be questioned by learners, these political outcomes may be more likely to occur. In this way, Freire's quest for a more just and equal society for all can be an outcome of education as opposed to the emphasis often put on individual outcomes in mainstream education processes.

In Ireland ***The White Paper on Adult Education (Learning for Life, 2000)*** has set out the broad context for the development of the sector. It identifies community education as part of a wider adult education agenda, however it also outlines how community education is distinct from adult education in terms of its ideological underpinnings and the value placed upon '*participants as equal learners'*, '*concern for communal values'* and its '*inherent political agenda.'* (p.114)

Learning for Life offers two distinct definitions of community education: The first sees community education as education that takes place in the community as a system of provision within the community by a range of institutions including schools, training agencies, universities, churches and others who make premises and resources available locally. The second ideologically based definition describes community education as '*a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level.'* (p.110) The second definition acknowledges community education as a participative process "*which is based on an analysis of the structural barriers to people's life chances.*"

The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) clearly identifies the key characteristics of the community education sector and it acknowledges the individual, collective and political outcomes expected of a community education programme. It identifies that community education is process focused, where '*participants are engaged as equal partners'*. In addition it emphasises that

this process includes 'reflection on the lived experiences of participants' and that there is a concern for communal values. Finally it identifies an 'inherent political agenda' which aims to promote critical reflection, challenge existing structures, promote empowerment and 'influence the social context' in which the participants live. The White Paper clearly links community development and community education processes and outcomes and sees the role of community education as *'transforming society.'*

Like other commentators previously mentioned, the White Paper acknowledges the individual, social/collective and political outcomes from community education and names the key characteristics of the community education sector as:-

- *Its non-statutory nature*
- *Its rooted-ness in the community, not just in terms of physical location, but also in that its activists have lived and worked for many years within the community, have a deep knowledge and respect for its values, culture, and circumstances, and an understanding of community needs and capacity;*
- *Its problem-solving flexible focus based on trust;*
- *Its process rather than syllabus focus - participants are engaged from the outset as equal partners in identifying needs, designing and implementing programmes, and adapting them on an ongoing basis;*
- *Its respect for participants and its reflection of their lived experience;*
- *Its concern with communal values and its commitment to match curriculum and pedagogy with the needs and interests of participants;*
- *Its promotion of personalised learning and flexibility within the environment of a learning group.*
- *Its goals include not just individual development but also collective community advancement, especially in marginalised communities;*
- *Its placing a key emphasis on providing the supports necessary for successful access and learning — particularly guidance, mentoring, continuous feedback and dialogue, childcare etc;*
- *Its collective social purpose and inherently political agenda - to promote critical reflection, challenge existing structures, and promote empowerment so that participants are enabled to influence the social contexts in which they live;*
- *Its promotion of participative democracy.*
- *It sees a key role for Adult Education in transforming society."*(p. 113)

Proposals identified in the White Paper included the appointment of community education facilitators to promote and support the development of community education and a 'long term funding' source for and increased investment in the sector. In 2003, 37 community education facilitators were employed by the VEC's and since then have been supporting a range of groups around the country.

The National Development Plan 2007-2013 names Lifelong Learning as a priority and identifies a sub-programme for activation and participation of groups outside the workplace. It says that *"People of working age who are outside the labour market are particularly vulnerable to poverty or social*

exclusion" and identifies the need for the provision of "*second chance education for adults in various settings and contexts, both formal and informal*." It goes on to say that "*…engaging with hard to reach groups such as long term unemployed, adults with negative initial school experience, the homeless and older unemployed and early school leavers through the provision of non-formal and informal learning opportunities. Community education has a particular role to play in this context as has the provision of appropriate information through guidance and counseling.*" (p. 247-248)

The Working Age Education Programme (NDP 2007-2013) intends to address this need by engaging in "*an expansion of provision in line with learners' needs, increased emphasis on successfully reaching those most in need and availability of information, advice and guidance*" through increased investment in BTEI (2000 additional places), VTOS and Literacy programme. It also states that the Education Equality Initiative (EEI) will continue to provide short term grants (2-3 years) to organisations for specific purposes.
In addition it "*aspires to having an equitable education system that provides opportunities to learners throughout their lives to reach their full potential as individuals and as members of society and successfully participate in higher education, regardless of social, economic or cultural background.*" (p.248)
Childcare is also named as an issue in the National Development Plan, stating that provision for childcare expenses will continue to be made through the BTEI and other educational programmes.

3.1 Funding sources for community education

Currently, community education receives funding from a wide variety of sources including VEC's, the Health Service Executive and Area Based Partnerships. More recently some groups have availed of funding under the Dormant Accounts fund. Groups delivering community education in border regions have also gained access to Cross Border and Peace Building funding through the Peace II Programme. The Community Development Programme (CDP), funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, is a major source of funding for many groups who have an anti-poverty focus. In addition, the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme includes provision for "*courses and training opportunities*." Groups who are supported by the VEC's tend to get small grants that cover costs of tutor hours through the Community Education Budget, while also having access to support from the Community Education Facilitator.
The White Paper proposed the development of the BTEI (Back to Education Initiative) and this was introduced in May 2002. Groups can also apply for the 'community strand' of the BTEI (Back to Education Initiative) directly from the Dept. of Education and Science. 10% of places under the BTEI scheme (600 places in 2003) are allocated to community-based providers; however none of these places are taken up in Donegal at the moment. Instead, Co Donegal VEC makes community-based places available through its 'formal strand' places.

AONTAS has identified that "*groups spend a lot of time and energy dealing with funding sources*" and has called that a specific budget be ring fenced for community education as promised in the White Paper. They have also called for a greater of degree of integration between state funders. (2007)

3. Policy framework for community education in Ireland

3.2 Broader policy developments

Other policy developments, while not exclusively linked to community education, have the potential to impact upon the sector:

In the ***Task Force on Active Citizenship 2007***, "*Voluntary and community organisations are seen by many as the backbone for Active Citizenship … and encouragement for active citizenship requires support for these organisations.*" The report names 'education' (both formal and non-formal) as a way of enhancing active citizenship.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2006-2017 states that the government will continue to resource the Community Development Programme, Family Resource Centres, the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme and Gaeltacht and Island programmes as a way of supporting communities. However AONTAS, in a recent submission to the new National Development Plan 2007-2013, states that the "*review and subsequent restructuring of the Community Development Programme for example, has caused much uncertainty and angst in the community education sector.*" (p.3)

The establishment of **the Further and Higher Education Council (HETAC**) and the **Training Awards Council (FETAC**) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) established in 2003, create the potential for community education to build its own suite of accredited programmes and many community education providers use the FETAC scheme of accredited programmes within their organisations.

In the report ***Tomorrow's Skills, Towards a National Skills Strategy (2007)*** the need for people in the labour force to 'update their skills' is emphasised as well as the need for targeting the low skilled and educationally disadvantaged. The report identifies that Ireland is falling behind set targets in terms of adults engaging with lifelong learning. It also highlights that re-engaging adults with education is 'challenging'. (p.99) Where adults are educationally disadvantaged or have low levels of skills, it states that they "*should be assisted to achieve such an award, through either full- or part-time study, without incurring tuition costs and with a level of subsistence, where appropriate, provided by the State. The State should continue to support and, where necessary, increase funding initiatives targeted at addressing educational disadvantage, the second-level retention rate, and low literacy levels.*" (p.93)

Donegal is often admired for the beauty of its landscape and its amazing coastline and the county has a rich cultural heritage, not least reflected in its Gaeltacht and island communities (County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012). In recent years, many people from other communities have also come to live in Donegal, including Polish and Lithuanian nationals (2006 Census). However, the recent decline in traditional industries and services and the peripheral location of the county has been noted as an ongoing 'challenge'. (Donegal Development Plan 2006-2012)

While the population in Donegal has grown in recent years, Donegal has been identified as the county in Ireland with the highest poverty risk and this has been attributed to structural factors such as unemployment, low paid work, low educational attainment, old age, child dependency and lone parenthood. (Watson et. al 2004)

Socio-economic factors: Donegal has both a high population of young people and older

people, with the county having one of the highest percentages of young people aged under 14 years. (Mc Faddan and Mc Nicholas, 2006). In Donegal 12.5% of the population are over 65 and just under one third of this group are living alone. (2006 Census)

According to 2002 census figures Donegal is highlighted as the county with the highest number of households with the lowest disposable income in the state. Haase and Pratschke, state that with a deprivation score of -9.6, '*Donegal constitutes the most disadvantaged county*' (2005, p.43). In addition, it was recognised that persons living in rural areas have a higher risk of poverty (24.1%) compared to those in urban areas (16.6%). However, in terms of consistent poverty, those in urban areas were more affected, 7.6% against 5.5%. (EU SILC 2005)

Other indicators also give some indication of socio-economic groupings. The average level of unemployment in Donegal is almost 13% (2006 Census), making it the *county* with the highest unemployment level in the state. In addition there are at present a total of 2,814 seeking re-housing from Donegal County Council and a recent report identifies that the waiting list is growing at a rate of approximately 90 applicants per month. (County Donegal Action Plan for Social and Affordable Housing 2004-2008)

Census 2006 gives us some indication as to the different types of workers in the county. The largest number of people employed in Donegal is involved in non-manual work (18.4%). The second highest group is employers/managers at 12.6%. The lowest category is those employed as higher professionals (3.4%). This is lower than the state figure set at 5.7% of the population.

As yet, statistics in relation to immigrant communities are limited. 2007 statistics from the HSE indicate that there are 67 asylum seekers resident in Donegal. Accommodation for all asylum seekers in the county is provided in Donegal Town. The 2006 census indicates that people from a wide range of nationalities are living in the county. As an indication of the people in Donegal from the EU access states, the 2006 census shows that 714 people identify Poland as their place of birth and 234 people identify Lithuania as their place of birth.

Spatial distribution of the population: Donegal is predominantly a rural county with only a few towns with a population in excess of 3,000 namely Letterkenny, Buncrana and Ballybofey/Stranorlar. According to Mc Faddan and Nicholas (2006), 58% of the population of the county is living in rural areas. In their report they state that "*rural areas … are at a particular disadvantage in terms of accessibility to community infrastructure.*" (p.110) In addition, the authors identified that just 23% of all community and voluntary groups are found in rural areas and this was viewed as an inequitable distribution in terms of the number of groups serving the rural population of Donegal.

Unemployment: Donegal is the county with the highest level of unemployment in the country at 12.9%. (2006 Census) There are eight unemployment black spots in the county – these are DED's where the average rate of unemployment is greater than 22%[5]. Unemployment among males (14.4%) is higher than that of women. Donegal also had the second lowest proportion of persons over 15 participating in the labour force in the state, (57.2%).

In the Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Donegal (2006), it is noted that the high unemployment rate in Donegal is mirrored in the high rate of social welfare dependency (56%) which is 18% higher than the national

average. In the 2006-2012 Development Plan for County Donegal, it is recognised that there is a need to address the decline of traditional industries such as textiles, clothing, agriculture and fishing and the high unemployment rate relative to the rest of the country. The inability of the region to compete for employment on a national or international scale is also identified as an issue. Infrastructural constraints/deficiencies throughout the County are also identified.

In research carried out by a group of CDP's, evidence is presented that suggests the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas means that many people have to leave to find work in other towns and cities in the county and the country and many people in Donegal also access work in Northern Ireland. This migration for work in the short and long term has an impact on the residual populations, especially in rural areas in the county. (Priorities for Action, 2007)

Education: While Donegal compares well to state figures in relation to primary and secondary education, the attainment levels in upper secondary and degree levels fall below national levels. (Census 2006) The chart below shows the highest education level completed by those who have ceased their full-time education. The figures show that nearly one third of all people who have completed their education in Donegal have only completed primary education.

In addition, Donegal has the lowest rates for admission to higher education in the country (Review of Higher Education Participation, 2003). The EU SILC 2006 shows that adults who have a low level of education are at a greater risk of poverty.

The Report on the Interdepartmental Group on Donegal (2006) also refers to research carried out by the Social and Family Support Service. It states that there is a consistent pattern of under- education and a lack of skills training among unemployed people in the county. The results also show that 70% of unemployed people are early school-leavers and of those under the age of 25, over 50% had not obtained a Junior Certificate. In addition, research carried out in January 2004 by Donegal Travellers Project highlighted that Travellers experience a high level of education disadvantage in the county with just 37% having had attended secondary school.

Disability: Census 2006 shows that one in ten people are affected by a disability nationally. The EU SILC survey shows year on year that people with disabilities are more likely to experience consistent poverty. Research carried out by DLDC (2006) showed that disabled persons in south and east Donegal are mainly living in rural areas and small villages. While the report showed that many people with disabilities are active in their communities, a number of attitudinal and physical barriers still prevent people with disabilities from becoming actively involved in their communities.

In the implementation of the Disabilities Act by Donegal local authorities, it is intended to increase accessibility for people with disabilities to information and services, consider needs of people affected with a disability in housing policies and review progress in relation to the 3% target for the employment of people with disabilities[6].

Family/Gender: In Donegal there are 6,233 lone parent households (86% lone mothers, 14% lone fathers), accounting for 12% of all households in Donegal. While not all lone parent households are poor, lone parent families have been identified as having the

highest poverty risk and consistent poverty rates nationally. (EU SILC 2006)

Tenure: As mentioned earlier, figures recorded in 2004 indicate that the gross number of applicants seeking re-housing from Donegal County Council was 2,814 and this figure is growing at a rate of approximately 90 applicants per month. These figures are twice as high as the national annual average figures[7]. In the census carried out by Donegal Travellers Project in November 2006, there are 243 Traveller families in the county. Nine of these families are residing in temporary halting sites.

This chapter presents the findings from a survey of community education providers in Donegal. These findings are subsequently elaborated upon in the next chapter, which details the findings from interviews held with community education providers.

To gain a broad perspective of community education across the county, a questionnaire survey of community education providers was undertaken. The sample was selected by identifying a cross-section of community interests delivering community education in the county. This was done by drawing on lists compiled by the VEC and the Donegal Community Workers Co-operative, and local knowledge held by other community education providers (represented on the Community Education Forum). In the sample small, medium and large community education providers from different geographic locations and a broad range of community interests were identified. In total, eighty-three questionnaires were distributed, through email, the postal service and by hand. The questionnaires distributed by hand were given out at a community education seminar held in January 2007. Fourty-one responses were analysed.

The results of the survey were analysed using SPSS for any 'closed questions' and the QSR N6 qualitative data analysis package, for 'open ended' questions. The results of this analysis are presented in this chapter.

5.2 Participation trends in community education

In the survey, providers were asked to indicate the number of participants availing of community education over the past year in their projects. The results indicate that a large number of people avail of community education in any one year. By taking an

4 Socio-economic profile of Donegal

average of the 'participant categories' we can see that at least 3,463 people are taking part in community education activities; this is a very significant number given the size of the sample (41 groups). It also indicates that much community education in the county takes place in addition to that supported by the VEC Community Education Support Programme, which estimates an attendance rate of 7,500 participants in 175 groups. Therefore the community education sector is making a significant contribution to life long learning in the county. Of this group

- 49% of organisations in the sample (or 20 community groups) engage fewer than 50 participants per year. This accounts for approximately 352 participants

- 24% of organisations in the sample (or 10 community groups) engage between 51 and 100 participants in a year. This accounts for 805 participants

- 27% of organisations in the sample (or 11 community groups) engage more than 100 participants in their community education activities in a year. This accounts for a minimum of 2306 participants

5.3 Individual, collective and political outcomes

Three questions were included in the survey to investigate providers' motivation for organising and delivering community education programmes. These were:

Question 3: *Overall, please describe your main reason for providing a community education programme?*

Question 6: *Have you tried to address any issues in the community through your community education programmes?*

Question 22: *Overall, what do you hope participants will gain out of community education?*

It was also hoped that these questions would indicate common understandings of 'community education' within the community sector and reveal the different types of activity taking place in the sector.

From an analysis of responses, the following framework has been developed to categorize the different types of community education provision taking place in Co. Donegal. This framework has been informed by the findings from literature review, but structured primarily from the responses given in the questionnaire survey. It should be emphasised that this is just an *indication* of activity in the county as identified in a written survey, which only allowed for short responses to questions. In addition, as noted in the literature review, many adult education programmes can have outcomes that have not been anticipated by the programme organisers. Focus groups with learners and organisers revealed greater clarity and depth on this subject.

5.3.1 Cross-cutting themes

The table above represents the various 'motivations' of community education providers in the county. This information has been drawn together by coding the written responses to questions in the qualitative survey. The different types of 'motivations' are numbered according to the response rate.

The table shows that almost half of all groups are active in all three levels, with the greatest activity in acquiring individual and collective outcomes. Although these different layers – *individual, collective and political* are shown separately in the table, in reality all three dimensions of community education are on a continuum and there is crossover between the different layers. All respondent groups valued the '*coming together*' (*collective outcome*) of people on an equal footing with acquiring skills (*individual outcomes*). Raising peoples self-confidence, addressing needs in rural areas and combating rural isolation were also cross-cutting issues that came up

very frequently in the analysis of data:

"We would hope that a good experience in community education would boost the confidence of people to... take on other courses of a more extensive nature."

"Breaking the chain of isolation for all women especially those living in rural areas."

5.3.2 Different perceptions of community education practice

Using the table developed above as a guide, the survey sample appears to indicate that 100% of community education programmes work in some way at an individual and collective level. In addition, 46% also have a political dimension to their work. This analysis does, however, raise questions about how community education is perceived.

"Adults will take part in community based education in order to acquire personal skills, knowledge and competences to progress to further education and lifelong learning."

"We hope all participants will gain confidence, qualifications, the ability to integrate with other members of our community and the will and enjoyment to go forward and learn, do more courses."

From the descriptions given, many groups' activities identify more with traditional understandings of *adult education practices* rather than the more '*transformative*' practices of community education.

[3] Principal Economic Status Report, Census 2006; www.census.ie.

5.3.3 Political outcomes

Just under a quarter of groups cite that they deliver specific programmes with the aim of challenging the status quo and developing critical social analysis (although this may be an unintended outcome for other groups also):

"To become more mature responsible adults, promoting their own growth as persons, learning to build community, learning to be critical of institutions and systems in order to improve them."

"To develop greater awareness of their own strengths and abilities. To develop a greater critical analysis."

"A sense of belonging and self-worth. A reflective space that will have enhanced their own awareness and a better understanding of the issues for women in Donegal. Recognition of their own power and the strength of collective action."

A larger number of groups are also involved in what could be broadly termed political activity, by trying to improve participation in community life and by responding directly to structural inequalities in their communities. These inequalities include unemployment, the marginalization of specific groups such as people with disabilities and women, gender inequalities, people with low educational attainment, people who are experiencing poverty and the exclusion of rural communities from wider educational opportunities:

"It can be a daunting experience for many especially those who have left school at an early age."

"Removing the barriers to learning by taking the learning to the participant group."

"[Addressing] women in decision making, housing and community education."

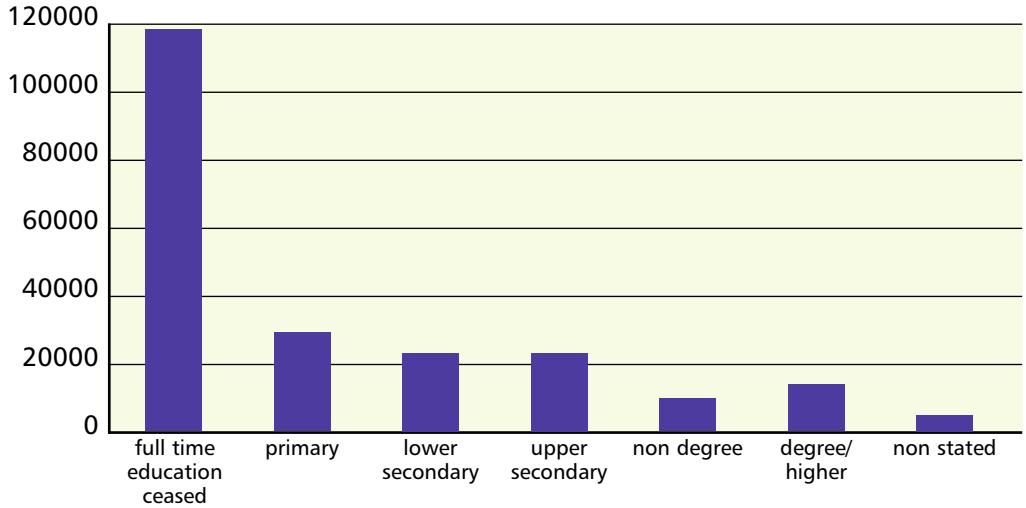


Figure 1: Persons aged 15 and over in Donegal whose full time education has ceased

Just two groups named political *action* as an expected outcome for their community education programme: *"Develop their critical thinking, make changes in their community, become activists. Make political changes and lifelong learning and personal development."*

A common feature of groups that hold political 'critical analysis motivations' is that they are core-funded and all but one employ full-time workers and have a wider community development brief beyond the delivery of education programmes locally. A number of factors could explain this finding. These groups may be familiar with the language to describe the impact of systematic inequalities on their community members. It may also imply that to address systematic inequalities through specific programmes requires a higher level of funding, investment and expertise than that to which most community groups have access.

5.3.4 Collective outcomes: building social capital and social inclusion

At the collective level, we see that groups are trying to address educational gaps in the community. This indicates that people have come together locally to identify these gaps, highlighting the link between community development and community education processes:

"Having a centre in our community has a long term effect within the community by creating the potential for people within our community to develop their own potential as a learner …. in their own community .. it will build capacity in the community and retain skills within the community for future generations to come."

"Increase social inclusion [for those affected by mental illness] by speech and drama which increases communication and self esteem."

Many groups (15 out of 41) alluded to the issue of building social capital in their communities through community education. This was seen in the form of building skills and knowledge in the community to enhance the community generally, as it has the potential for creating wider opportunities in

[6] The Disability Act 2005, Framework for the preparation of an implementation plan in Donegal Local authorities, www.donegalcoco.ie
[7] County Donegal Action Plan for Social and Affordable Housing 2004-2008. www.donegalcoco.ie

5 Analysis of data from a survey of community education providers

the local area. In particular, the needs of groups who are excluded either through poor education, unemployment or ability are seen as a goal for community education:

"It provides an outlet for people who are excluded. It empowers people who are disadvantaged by virtue of their disability."

"Many women who have taken part in our courses are not at a stage where they are ready to do accredited courses, any mention of paper work and some of the women would not come back to the course and these are the women we are targeting most."

While eleven groups delivered programmes for specific excluded groups in the community – including ethnic groups, carers and people with disabilities- not all of these had an 'outward' political agenda, although the organizing of these types of programmes does attempt to address an imbalance of how resources are distributed in the community.

In the written responses, 'employment' was generally mentioned as an additional outcome for those who want it:

"We see this as a stepping stone back into education for both young and older participants to bring them back to the workplace or to further their outcomes"

"It is a vehicle to break the barriers of social isolation and a chance for people to up-skill and go on to gain employment."

5.3.5 Individual outcomes: widening horizons

In most cases an outcome of employment was not seen as the most important reason for delivering a community education

5.1 Group profile

The forty-one community groups who responded to the questionnaire can be broken down into the following categories:

Type of Group	Frequency
Family Resource Centres	6
Groups working in the women's sector	6
Community Development Projects	4
Community groups active in the youth sector	2
Partnership Company	1
Community Groups who specify a cross community 'brief'	2
Community Groups targeting ethnic minorities	1
Community Groups targeting men	1
Community Groups active in the disability sector	1
Community Groups offering 'school' support to parents	2

Figure 2: Type of groups who took part in the survey

We can see that the survey represents a broad range of interests from the community education sector.

programme. Groups were more concerned with addressing local issues, having local education provision and giving people the opportunity to explore options through self-development:

"To learn something beneficial to the group, that can easily be implemented into activities of daily living and might help them to attend to issues that need to be dealt with outside."

"To open doors for them, to widen their horizons and to become confident and happy people who are active members of their community."

When this is linked with the activity of targeting early school leavers and unemployed members of the community, it points to the role of community education as an access point to further education, for people who would not normally access mainstream education channels.

While the survey set out to reveal the intentions of community education providers, a key component of community education practice is the dynamic that happens in the classroom. By definition, community education is based on a dialogical learning process whereby participants influence what is learned and how information is shared. This issue will be explored further in the analysis of data from the focus groups.

Number of participants	Number of respondent groups	% of total groups	Average Number of participants	Cumulative Number of participants
0-25 people	16	39%	200	200
26-50 people	4	10%	152	352
51-75 people	3	7%	189	541
76-100 people	7	17%	616	1157
101-300 people	10	24.5%	2005	3162
301+	1	2.5%	301	3463

Figure 3: Number of participants accounted for in the sample

5.4 Programme Delivery

Groups were asked to identify up to four programmes they deliver as part of their community education provision. The purpose of this was to give an indication of the types of programmes being delivered in the county. A wide variety of programmes were identified ranging from computers to doll making and peace building.

From the questionnaire survey it is unclear how many of these programmes subscribe to a *community education approach* in their delivery – that is the creation of a dialogue between learners in identifying learning needs and outcomes. This is particularly dependent on the role played by teachers/facilitators in a specific programme.

The various programmes have been listed and organised into different categories. (Figure 6) Once again, there may be some cross-over between categories, for example a computer programme may be responding to a distinct need of a particular group in the community, whilst also allowing individuals to build a new skill.

An analysis of the programmes on offer from the forty-one providers shows that there is an emphasis on specific skills development programmes:

Computers	21
Art And Craft	27
Digital Photography	3
First Aid	6
Irish Translation	1
CPR And Defibrillation	1
Irish Classes	2
Languages	1
Fitness	1
Music	2

Figure 4: Framework of proposed outcomes for community education in Donegal

[8] Throughout this report 'political' is understood in its broadest sense, that is by being an active citizen and purposively trying to affect change in society in a wide variety of ways

Cookery	3
Bridge	1
Story Telling Workshop	1
ESOL	1
Yoga/Tai Chi	9
Training In Editorial	1
Beauty On A Budget	1
Dancing	3
Driver Theory	1
Talk, Rhythm And Repetition	1
Relaxation	1
Sign Language	3
Total	**91**

Image And Confidence	1
Personal Development	5
Self Advocacy	1
Total	**7**

Training For Trainers	1
Youth Leadership Training	2
Community/Women's Leadership	3
My Place In The Community	1
Taster Courses	1
Training For Transformation	1
Group Work	1
Facilitation Training	1
Diversity Training	1
Intercultural Women's Groups	1
Peace Building And Conflict Management	1
Neighbourhood Work Training Programme	1
Women's Sector Joint Activities	1
Peer Education Training	1
Men's Basket Making	1
Total	**18**

Return To Work	1
Child Protection	1
Rehabilitative Training	1
Return To Education	1
Drugs Awareness	1
Our Local Heritage	1
Course For Carers	1
Marine Radio Operator	1
Suicide Awareness Training Course	1
Supporting Parents Of Children With Special Needs	1
Total	**10**

5.5 Factors that influence the type of programmes delivered

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to allocate scores (1-6) indicating the importance they placed on (1) accreditation; (2) requests from the target group; (3) popularity of programmes and (4) responding to an identified need, when deciding on the type of community education programme they plan to deliver.

5.5.1 Accreditation

Overall, accreditation is not given paramount importance by providers. Just 13% gave a score of 6, indicating that it is very important. This finding indicates that accreditation is not a key priority for the majority of community groups. The written responses (in the previous section) corroborate this finding, in that many groups identified that their aim is to attract people who are at

a 'pre-accreditation' stage and those experiencing education disadvantage.

5.5.2 *Requests by the target group*

Respondents indicated that requests made by the target group are much more important when deciding upon programmes, with three-quarters giving this question a score of 6.

5.5.3 Popularity of programmes

Responses to whether popularity was a factor in influencing the type of programmes delivered were mixed. Approximately one third of respondents indicated that it was not very important. One third gave the maximum score of six, indicating that it was very important. While the popularity of a programme may be linked to *'an identified need in the community'*, it may not take into account the diversity of needs in the community. Linked to this question may be the need for community groups to get 'minimum numbers' to take part in a programme in order to avail of funding, as mentioned by some respondents. When faced with this dilemma, decisions may be taken to deliver 'popular' programmes to ensure that numbers are maintained.

5.5.4 Responding to an identified need

Respondents indicated that programmes, which respond to an identified need are of the utmost importance. This finding is verified when we see that two thirds of groups *are* attempting to address issues in the community through their community education programmes. The different types of issues that community groups respond to have been categorised into six key areas below; again, there may be some cross-over between categories:

Rural isolation/disadvantage:

- Isolation and disadvantage in the community
- Distance from mainstream courses
- Older people living along in rural areas
- Poor infrastructure

Marginalization of particular groups:

- Lone parent families with limited transport
- Exclusion of disabled people
- Including marginalised young people
- Responding to lack of health services for women
- Domestic Violence
- Lack of women in decision making
- Exclusion of lone parents

Education disadvantage issues

- Low level of computer literacy and early school leaving

Community integration

- Language classes for new communities
- Exclusion of women
- Poor Protestant/Catholic relations
- Building cross border relations

Social concerns

- Drug and Alcohol misuse
- Suicide Awareness
- Protection of heritage sites in the area
- Supporting Parents
- Health and Safety of Fishermen

Structural inequalities

- Unemployment
- Poverty
- Education Disadvantage
- Racism/Discrimination

From the list above it is clear that community education activities in the county have a clear social function as well as an educational function, a reminder of the assertion by Sabates et al of the re-emergence of the

policy agenda of utilizing education to build social cohesion and tackle social exclusion. (2003) In addition, the issues raised respond to many of the key 'social inclusion' issues facing Donegal. In a recent study that was carried out by Donegal CDP Network, issues facing lone parents, unemployment and rural isolation/limited transport were named as key issues that are preventing people from moving out of the poverty trap. (2007)

The most recent census statistics and EU SILC statistics also corroborate this evidence, citing high levels of poverty and exclusion for lone parents and a high level of older people living alone. Donegal is named as the county with the highest rate of unemployment in the country. The effectiveness of community education in tackling these key areas and other social issues was explored further in the focus groups with community education participants.

5.6 Who participates in community education?

89% of community groups that took part in the survey identified that they actively target people to take part in their community education programmes (see the chart below). As we can see, women are the most targeted group, while ethnic minorities are the least targeted group. However, overall there is a relatively high degree of targeting of specific groups. Even though ethnic minorities are the least targeted group, almost one third of providers identify them as a target group.
Other groups mentioned were: Potential volunteers; children (involving them in intergenerational workshops); lone parents; carers; Travellers; mothers with young children; childcare workers; cross border participants and widows.

Respondents were also asked to identify any groups they find difficult to involve in their programmes. 'Men' as a difficult group to attract onto community education programmes was mentioned fifteen times (over one third of groups) – this was qualified in two instances by saying that men affected by depression and men with low literacy levels were particularly difficult to engage. Younger women and women parenting alone were also specified as 'hard to reach', with one respondent suggesting this was due to a lack of availability of childcare support. Other groups mentioned are identified in the chart below:
One group that uses neighbourhood work to bring participants onto courses/programmes noted that recruiting '*hard to reach*' women participants was not a problem for them because of the approach they use. In addition just over 10% did not target any particular groups.

Participation is explored further through consideration of *how* respondent groups target participants. (Figure 9)

Every group that responded to the survey used a range of methods for recruiting participants. While the majority use newspaper community notes, newsletters and posters, fewer engage in neighbourhood work and door-to- door calls. 18 groups said that they use the phone also to contact potential participants. The effectiveness of these methods was not explored in the questionnaire and this issue was explored further in the focus groups with participants.

5.7 Challenges in targeting participants

Just under half of respondents indicated that childcare and transport provision is the most difficult issue for them in engaging participants. Given the rural nature of the county, the limited childcare provision and the lack of transport infrastructure, this is not surprising. Only five groups ranked this issue below three, indicating that is was not an area of great significance for them.

Many groups identified a need for extra resources and two thirds saw this as a very important issue. One fifth of respondents ranked this at three or less, indicating that it is not so important to them.

Many groups felt that *people are not informed about community education*, with two thirds of respondents giving it a score of more than 3.

From the chart above we can see that transport/childcare was most frequently identified as the most challenging issue in the

recruitment of participants for community education programmes.

Other issues that were named by respondents, as an impediment to recruiting participants were: lack of time and apathy in potential participants; low self-esteem in potential participants and being too 'down' to participate; potential participants' fear of coming into a 'new' situation; lack of an accessible venue that is affordable; the lack for neighbourhood work; lack of tutors; limited budgets for marketing and a lack of eldercare and respite cover.

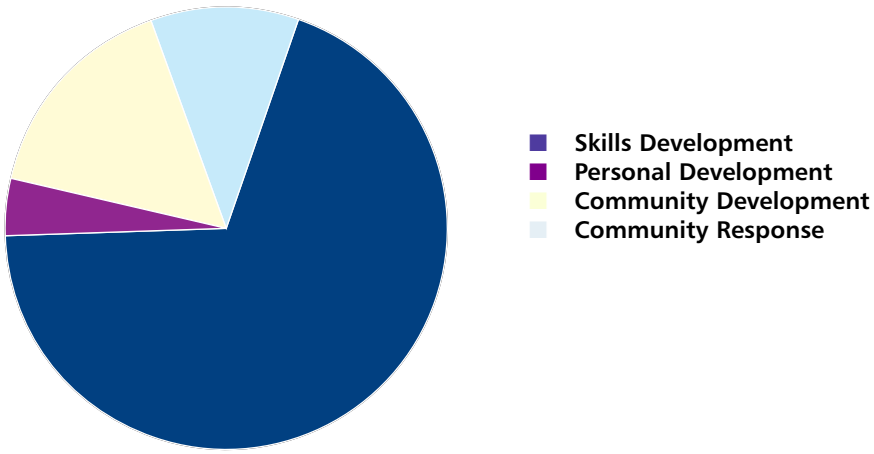


Figure 5: Types of programmes being delivered by community groups in the sample

While the majority of respondents named funding generally as a key issue of concern overall in community education provision, many groups also expressed concerns about specific funding provision. The issues of transport, childcare, eldercare and personal assistant costs (for disabled people) were noted by many as key issues in the organisation of their community education programmes. In addition, the cost associated with sourcing suitable venues was named by ten respondent groups. Lack of staff to engage the target group and co-ordinate programmes were also named as key issues. The high cost of delivering accredited courses was named by three groups as a funding concern.

The second highest issue identified was the difficulty of reaching and engaging the identified target group. As previously stated, in excess of 3,400 participants had engaged in community education provision over a one-year period in Donegal from the sample of community groups surveyed. Despite this, for a large number of respondents (65%), accessing their target group and *'hard to reach'* participants is an issue for them. The significance of this is two fold: community educators seem to be best placed to access the most disenfranchised in the community, therefore their limited ability to do this is a concern; however, community organisations are continually striving to increase participation in programmes, especially for marginalised groups.

Reasons for difficulties in engaging the target group were named as low confidence and marginalisation of potential participants, lack of funding which excludes vulnerable groups and apathy among some community members. The difficulty of sometimes reaching quotas (10 per class) was also named as an issue for groups. Turning people down when quotas are not reached also has a further negative effect on participation in subsequent programmes. One person noted that greater co-ordination between community education providers needs to be managed so that a range of different programmes are offered in particular rural areas.

Seven groups felt that it is difficult to engage tutors with the skills they need. One group reported that facilitation skills are key in the delivery of community education and that there are limited numbers in the county with these skills. In relation to 'meeting participant needs', some groups had concerns about choosing the right programmes for participants and the difficulty of meeting the wide range of needs that exists.

Some respondents felt that they lacked information on where to access tutors and funding. Other responses included the lack of accredited training available and lack of good practice models.

However this does not mean that accreditation for learning has no place in community education and in response to the question *"What is important to you when deciding on a community education programme*?, "fourteen groups indicated that accreditation is important to them when deciding on programmes. Of the fourteen groups that gave accreditation a 'high importance' rating when deciding on programmes, only one group indicated that it was of equal importance to an 'identified need in the community' and the other 13 groups felt that an 'identified' need in the community was 'more important' than accreditation. This indicates that the community education sector is primarily attempting to be responsive to the needs in the community when identifying programmes.

At the same time, 26 groups (72%) indicated

Figure 6: Range of community education programmes in the sample

that they face barriers in providing accredited programmes and 68% of respondents felt that the accredited programmes available do not respond to their needs (giving a score of 4 or more). Just over three quarters (78%) indicated that they do not have the resources to develop good accredited programmes and see this as a barrier in providing accredited programmes.

Of the groups who are delivering some accredited programmes, (approximately two thirds), the chart below demonstrates the different types of accreditation offered:

5.10 Tutor Issues

In the previous section it is noted how some groups experience difficulty in finding suitable tutors to deliver programmes. Respondents also commented on how they recruit tutors for their community education programmes. The chart below displays the results. As we can see, '*personal experience of a tutor*' is the method most used by organisers when trying to identify a tutor; this is followed by 'recommendations from other groups'. This is an interesting finding especially in light of the earlier finding that some groups find it difficult to identify tutors for specific programmes. Just four groups that responded have staff who deliver community education programmes for them, alluding to the 'contractual nature' of filling community education posts in the sector.

There was a high level of agreement between groups when they identified the 'three things they most look for in a tutor'. While most groups cited knowledge of subject and experience as key issues, much attention was also placed on a tutor's ability to interact with participants – this was named as 'rapport', 'empathy', 'having an equality outlook and respect for diversity'. Facilitation skills were also named by nine groups as a key skill for tutors. While two groups identified the need for tutors to have qualifications, one group identified that formal qualification are not necessary and that they often employ '*talented amateurs*' with a passion for their subject.

While many of the responses identify with a community education model, others, where there is not an emphasis on pupil-teacher interaction, seem to identify more with an adult education model.
As can be seen, organisations draw from a wide range of funding sources. The VEC community education grant system is widely utilised, and mainly provides funding for

tutors for 'one-off' programmes although many groups access this funding repeatedly. It is noted that the majority of funding sources are linked to organisations that work to address disadvantage and build community capacity.

Groups were asked to identify the types of activities they can engage in, based on the funding they receive. All but one group was funded to provide an external tutor; however just 10 received funding to cover travel and childcare expenses for participants. 22 groups identified that they are funded to target participants (six groups identified this category as 'not applicable') showing that the majority of groups feel they are resourced to target participants. This finding does not seem to correlate with the earlier finding, where groups identified the targeting of participants as one of the biggest challenges in delivering community education. It raises questions about how organisations view 'targeting' within a community education context.

In relation to funding, one group commented: "*We have such a wide remit as a CDP that education administration and promotion presents a challenge. There is no assistance to enable lone parents, carers, isolated or disabled participants to engage on an equal footing with relatively well-off people*."

Another said: "*We can not provide travel/childcare/eldercare so our programmes are not accessible to some of our target groups.*"

Whereas other groups do not *seem* to see this as a crucial issue in the targeting process: "*We generally target people to take part in courses ourselves. We are not in the position to provide travel/childcare for the purposes of a community education class as there is no funding available for same.*"

Other groups have tried to meet needs as best they can, given limited resources, by organising programmes at times that will possibly cut down on childcare expenses:

"*There was no travel or childcare allowance but we delivered the programmes in the participants' areas, cutting down on the need for transport, we ran the courses mornings and evening in the hope that we would be able to accommodate as many women as possible.*"

While some groups have a 'blanket' approach to targeting, making programmes generally available to the local population, others seem to attempt a more targeted approach in recruiting participants. It is the second group, in considering the specific needs of their target group, that have particular issues with the provision of childcare and transport.

Many groups commented on the use of 'core funding' to cover the associated costs of community education, which indicates that earmarked 'community education' funding sources do not provide for these additional costs. *"The money received from the V.EC. only covers the tutor; we used our core grant to rent room and organise course."* It also hints that to promote and deliver community education, funding has to be accessed from a number of sources.

5.12 Conclusion

The data collected from the survey of community education providers in the county gives an indication of how community education providers view the work they do and what they see as barriers to progress. It is apparent that a dual understanding of community education may exist within the sector. While all groups see the individual and collective benefits of providing education in the community, fewer groups appear to be delivering community education with the intention of a political or 'collective action' outcome.

At the same time there are community groups who have organised education programmes in their communities with the purpose of addressing an absence of resources within their areas and many groups commented on how their programmes are 'vital' in the 'life blood of the community'. The majority of groups also seem to be responding directly to structural inequalities in the community as they see them and this includes the inclusion of early school- leavers, people with disabilities, ethnic groups, lone parents, mothers and people affected by poverty and unemployment.

For groups who are trying to target the more marginalised members of the community,

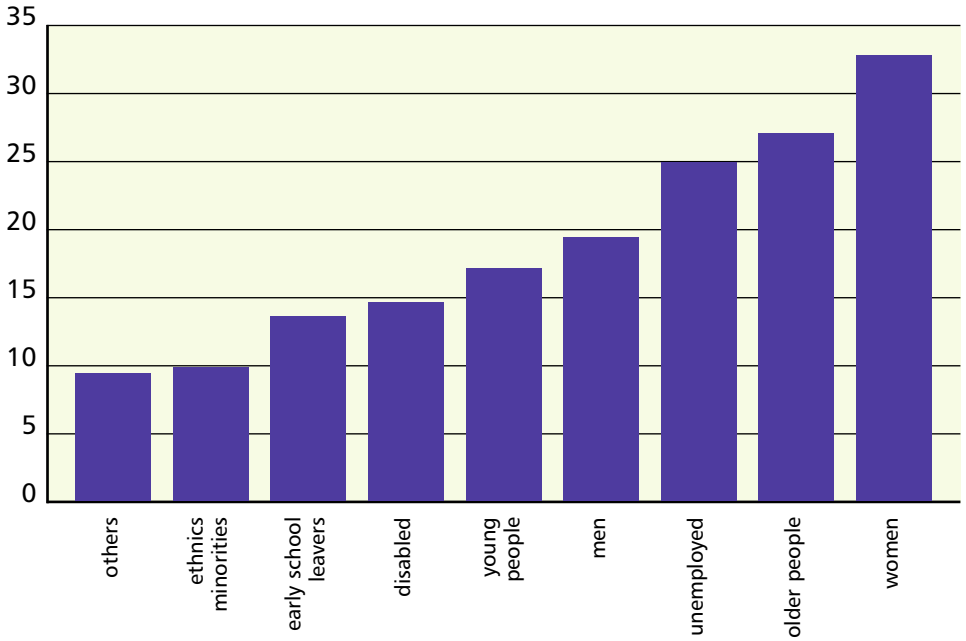


Figure 7: Groups targeted by community education providers

issues like childcare and transport are barriers. In addition, the resources to invest in getting marginalised people to take the step to engage in education is identified as a difficulty. Nearly all groups seem to be struggling with funding and the responses may indicate that many groups are in competition for resources, despite that a large number of funding sources are used by the sector.

Accreditation does not carry equal importance across the sector. Responding to needs in the community, maintaining the 'social' element of community education and holistic outcomes are given much more significance. In addition, some providers felt that 'accreditation' sometimes has the impact of 'putting off' people who are educationally disadvantaged or who have left school early. Moreover, the majority of groups felt that there are barriers to delivering accredited programmes and a lack of resources was seen as the main reason for this.

Key to community education is a dialogical and democratic process within the learning setting. A question about 'tutors' in the survey was designed to give some indication as to whether this was happening. While the results indicate that tutors relationship with learners is as important to providers as their knowledge of subject matter, a facilitative approach was not emphasised and it raises questions about the pedagogy employed in community education centres and projects.

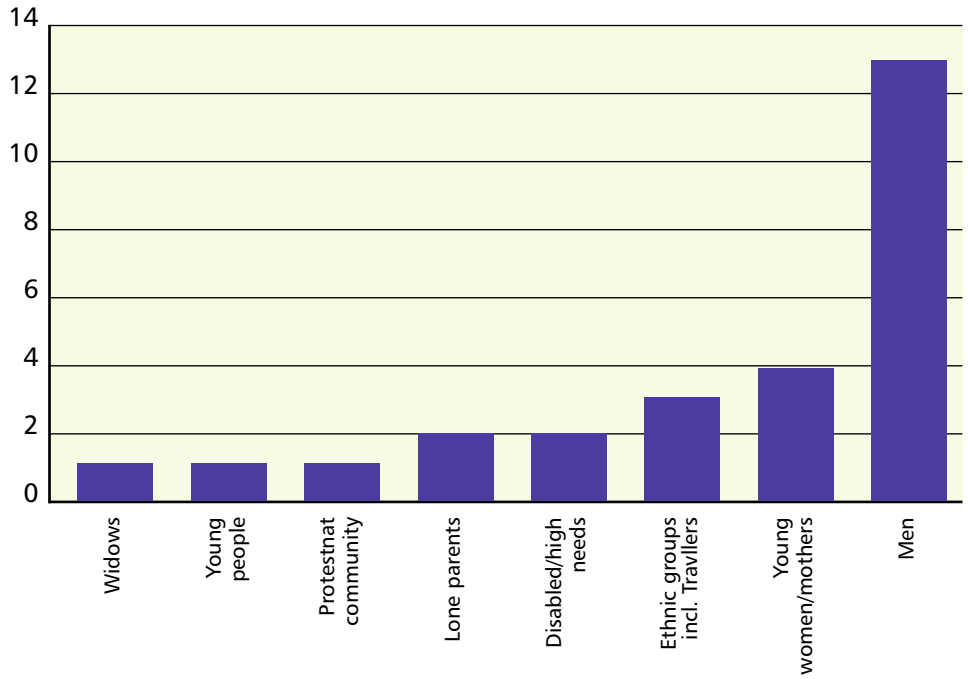


Figure 8: Groups identified as hard to engage in community education

This chapter describes the key findings from focus groups and interviews carried out with community education providers. Fourteen community education providers from different projects were interviewed to explore the current nature of community education in Donegal. In this group there were representatives from two providers in the women's sector, one area based partnership, one men's group facilitator, one Gaeltacht based community support group, five community development projects, one disability organisation, two community education organisations, and one school-based support programme for parents.

Eleven providers took part in three separate group interview processes. In addition, one face-to-face interview and two telephone interviews were carried out. The majority of interviews lasted approximately one hour, and the proceedings were recorded via a voice recorder and then transcribed. Following transcription all of the data was coded using

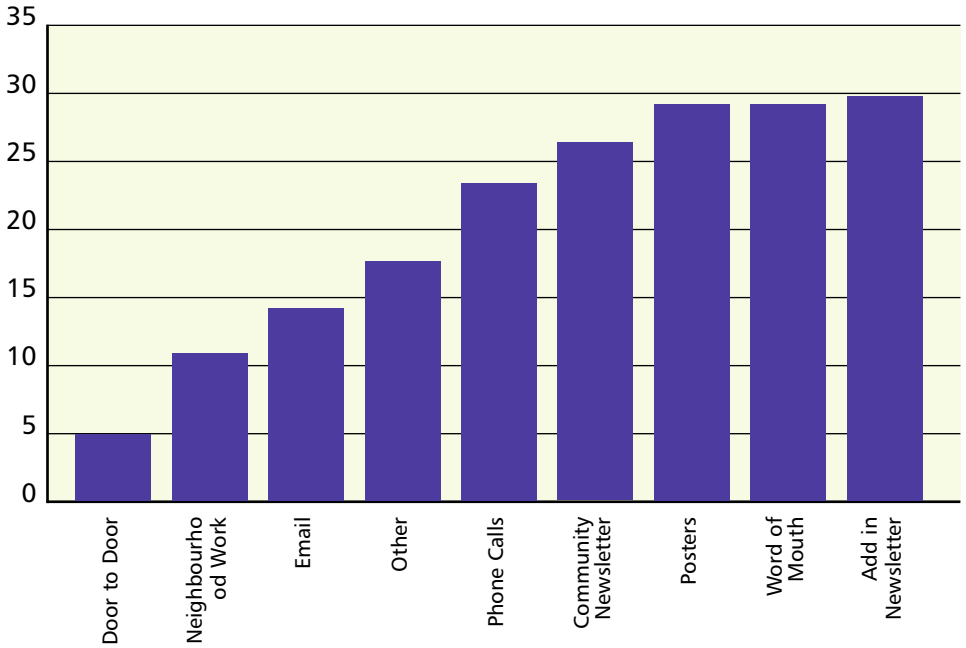


Figure 9: Methods used to recruit participants to community education in Donegal

the QSR N6 qualitative data analysis software. This chapter outlines the key issues that emerged. At the beginning of each section a 'green box' highlights the key findings.

6.1 Responding to the most vulnerable

- Providers see the role for community education in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable in the community
- Providers emphasize 'confidence building' in community education programmes to take participants to the 'next step'
- Providers' assessment of their own performance is partly based on their ability to engage the 'hard to reach' in their community education programmes
- Addressing the needs of the community sector itself (e.g. training community leaders) is seen as a second 'arm' of the agenda of community education

The common thread that tied all community education providers was their focus on how community education can respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in society and how it addresses the needs of the most marginalised people in our communities. All providers spoke about the potential of community education to address the needs of people who "*aren't comfortable in mainstream classes and they might need that additional kind of help*."

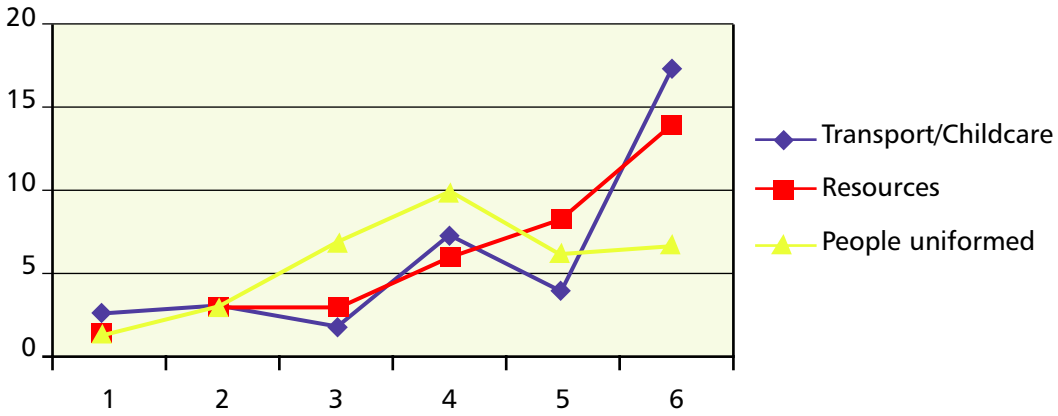


Figure 10: Ranking allocated to issues that inhibit the recruitment of participants

5.8 Key barriers to delivering community education

Respondents were asked to name the three main challenges they face when delivering community education. This was an open-ended question, so respondents were free to name any issue. The results are categorised as follows:

Issue	Frequency of Response
Lack of Resources	40
Reaching and engaging the target group	24
Meeting participant needs	8
Accessing suitable tutors	7
Access to information	7
Other	5

Figure 11: Barriers in delivering community education

"There's a lot of people out there who would like to return to learning, and this gives them a chance to go to a less formal situation."

Others focused on the potential for community education to respond to the needs of disadvantaged people and address issues of poverty and exclusion. In all of this, the community education sector in Donegal is clearly placed as a first *'port of call'* for people who are *'hard to reach'* and who are *'so far at the bottom'* that they are not able to access opportunities elsewhere: *"It values people who are not valued in society"*; *"It's really a foundation stone, a starting point that you can build from."*

All providers also recognised the 'social' element of community education and saw 'confidence building' as a key element in the community education process. The potential of community education to address low self-esteem was also emphasised:

"I think people come too who are new in the community and make new friends and build a relationship with people."

"People who suffer with mental health (difficulties) because of isolation and low self esteem..."

"For women availing of the domestic violence service, when they come out of the home, as well as physical support... they need to build up their self esteem again."

Alongside this perspective, many providers also saw a role for community education of addressing the needs in the community sector. Some respondents spoke of the key role that community education plays in 'up-skilling' community volunteers. One project was also totally dedicated to developing

the needs of young leaders in the community. The women's sector also saw a role for community education in informing the sector about policy issues and creating leaders to work with women in different community settings. Therefore, as well as responding to the needs of the most vulnerable directly the second 'arm' of community education is developing capacity in the community to support vulnerable groups.

In this way, providers see themselves as a 'bridge' between marginalised people in the community and more mainstream responses to education or employment needs. In addition, providers are not prescriptive in their role – while some will use the community education experience with the intention of allowing participants to access other education or employment pathways, others will use it to help participants become more fully integrated in the community, less lonely or build confidence. Their focus on people who '*don't normally go on courses*' or who are some way marginalised in the community, sets community educators apart from many other education providers.

5.9 Accreditation Issues

As noted earlier, for the majority of respondents accreditation for programmes is not of paramount importance when deciding on the type of community education programme to deliver. This fits well with the ethos of community education, where the focus is learner-centered rather than curriculum-centered.

This finding is reflected in the small number of community education providers who offer accreditation for the programmes they deliver:

Level of accreditation offered by community education providers	Frequency
Offer accreditation on all programmes	4
Offer accreditation on half the programmes	6
Offer accreditation on a third of the programmes	13
Don't offer accreditation	14

Figure 12: Levels of accreditation offered by groups in the sample

All of the interviewees, in some way, assessed their performance in terms of the 'type' of people that they have got involved – providers felt that it was their role not just to make education accessible to the community but also to ensure that it was accessed by people who are in some way disengaged in the community. Their response reveals an outlook that acknowledges the system, rather than the individual, as the reason for exclusion and education disadvantage. Therefore, greater investment is made in connecting with these individuals, to try to support them in overcoming the obstacles that they face. All of the educators who were concerned with engaging the '*hard to reach*' saw the development of relationships with participants as critical to a community development approach.

How to cast the net?

- There is recognition by providers that the most marginalised people are the least likely to come 'through the door'
- Community groups' links in the community and community events enhance the attendance of the 'hard to reach'
- Face-to-face work is acknowledged by providers as the best way to engage the hard-to-reach; however a minority of providers engage in this work in a strategic way
- 'Soft' programmes or 'taster' programmes are often used to engage people who are educationally disadvantaged
- The use of advertising as a recruitment method for engaging the most vulnerable or educationally disadvantaged members of the community is questioned

Despite agreement among providers about the type of people community education serves and its potential to address needs of marginalised groups or gaps in education provision that serve community needs, there are differences among providers as to how

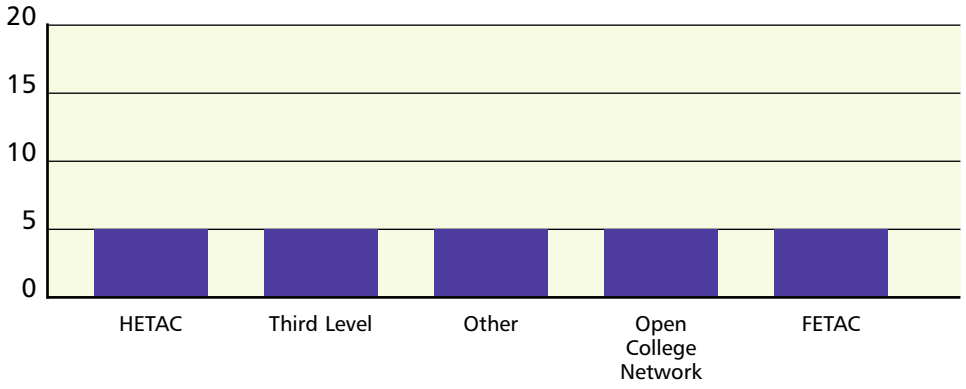


Figure 13: Range of accreditation offered on community education programmes

Other accreditation offered includes: Equal skills ICS; Volunteer Development Association certificate in child protection; ICS (IT accreditation) and First Aid certification.

they approach the delivery of community education. The first of these differences is in how they engage participants. This difference can be summed up as those who 'cast the net wide' and those who target specific participants.

The evidence suggests that general community development organisations tend to *'cast the net wide'*; however they also benefit from the connections that they have made in the community through the community work they do. Their alliances with other agencies that support vulnerable people, such as the St. Vincent de Paul or schools, also help them to identify and make contact with those 'most in need'.

"*In a mixed community you have to cast the net wide, you can't say really we're only going to facilitate people who have a disability or who are on the dole, you know you will catch all comers and hopefully you'll benefit them, especially people who are on their own or lonely*."

The need to keep programmes open to everyone, seemed to come from a reluctance to 'label' people or impede participation by the wider public. "*People come through the door, or they are invited or we have events. Everyone is on an equal basis and we would offer the same service for all*."

Indeed, advertising the programmes widely meant that they were enabling anyone to come onto programmes who felt they needed them and people felt that the fact people were enrolling meant that the organization was meeting a required need. The availability of programmes in a rural area was also seen as a key reason to provide education in the community.

For most groups 'casting the net wide' meant advertising programmes in the local paper and distributing news about programmes in their own newsletter. Other groups also distributed flyers and advertised programmes on their notice boards. However there was

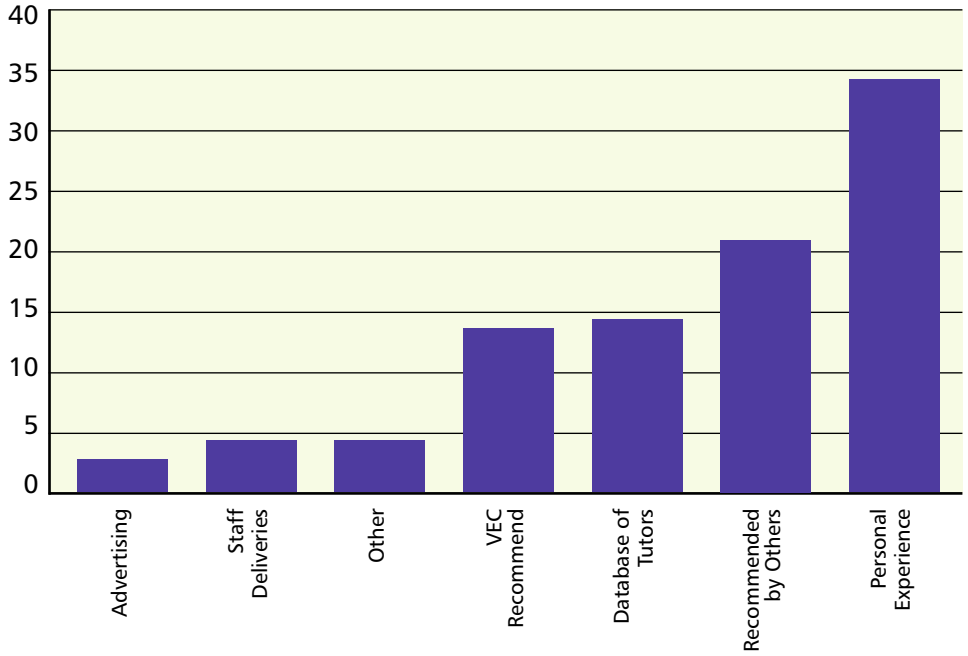


Figure 14: Methods used for recruiting tutors

5.11 Funding and Resource Issues

The table below outlines the funding sources that contribute to community education provision in the respondent organisations:

Funding Source	Frequency
Cooperation Ireland	1
Dormant accounts	1
Equality for Women measure	1
Fundraising	1
Workers Education Association	1
Failte Ireland	1
Donegal Youth Service	1
Social and Family Affairs	2
Family Resource Centre (Dept. of Social and Family Affairs)	3
No funding, participants pay	3
Health Service Executive	4
Community Development Project (Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs)	6
Partnership Companies	6
Peace II	7
One off grant	11
VEC community education grants	27

Figure 15: Funding sources for community education in Donegal

also an acknowledgment by all that "*the further down the ladder they are, the poorer they are, the less education they have, the harder they are to get in*." However groups have developed strategies to try and engage more 'marginal' members of the community. For many, the management committees of community groups (who were named as representatives of disadvantaged sectors of the community) were a link to other people in the community. In one case a specific sub-group of people from the 'new communities' on a management committee was established to look into addressing the needs of the 'new communities' and encourage their participation in community education. These 'key-holders' to the wider community were seen as vital in establishing contact. Some community workers on the ground also felt that they had been able to develop relationships with people through other parts of their work and this had enabled them to encourage specific individuals who they thought might benefit. Other groups hosted general events in the community or held taster sessions to give people a flavour of what was on offer.

People also selected programmes which they considered 'soft programmes' to get people who may not be too familiar with mainstream education approaches involved: "*We try and start them off with basic stuff, like flower arranging, and I know that there are skills involved but there is more of a social element to them*."

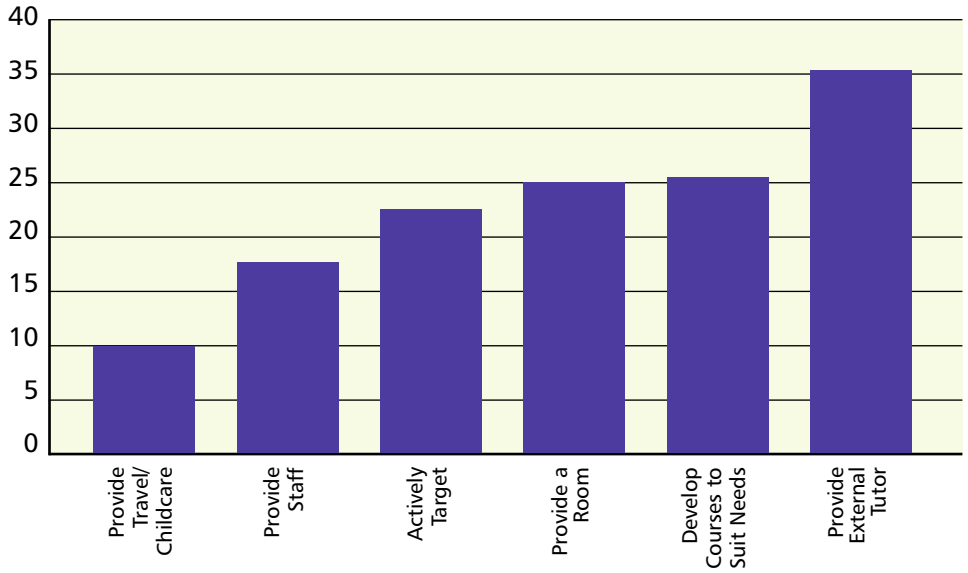


Figure 16: Range of activities that funding covers

However, when a broad 'advertising' approach to recruiting participants is used, it results in similar trends of participation across community organisations. Many said that they tended to attract an older age group (people over 35 and older) and all acknowledged that they mostly attracted women. One interviewee commented: "*If you advertise those soft skill courses, you really are targeting older people and you don't mean to be, but that is what happens, because they feel that it is only for them*." In many cases disappointment about not being able to get those 'most in need' was also expressed. "*All I can say is the people who need to be supported, like lone parents who are isolated, people who are living alone, people who would have emotional or mental health challenges that you know would benefit, are by virtue of their circumstances the hardest people to get involved*." While limited resources are part of the difficulty in attracting these people, the evidence suggests that recruitment procedures also greatly impact on the number of disadvantaged people that get involved.

Groups who were able to focus on the specific needs of marginalised groups seemed more convinced of their ability to attract the more disadvantaged members of the community. In these groups greater resources were invested in establishing relationships with people in the community through face-to-face work. "*The best way is one-to-one and going to the places where people are*"; "*I beg him and ask him 'will you come down' and tell him we'll just be chatting and talking about things*"; "*where you are going door to door and then you might have a cup of tea with someone, and you are giving time .. and suddenly you have a relationship with people, it is slow but that is where it makes the big impact if you can do that*."

As mentioned above, people did admit that this process of recruiting people was slower and more time demanding; however every provider recognised the benefit of making the personal connection with people in order to get 'buy in' from marginal groups: "*The thing about getting into it and how we get people in, it has to be very much like neighbourhood work, like word-of- mouth at the beginning, going out and telling people.*"

One respondent also commented on the specific set of skills needed to connect with people: "*The thing about hard to reach and*

there being more work involved, it is about having the time and capacity to walk up to that farmer and strike up a conversation." The group who did community education as their core activity were much more strategic in how they undertook this process than general community development groups, where the face-to-face work outside of the centre was more of a random activity. However this ability to make relationships and invest in connecting with people is what sets community education apart from other education providers who are addressing the needs of marginalised groups.

6 Community education providers: Unlocking the Potential

6.2 *A social programme or social change?*

- Community education providers understand community education in different ways, including the provision of traditional adult education programmes and facilitative group approaches to bring about social change
- A strong emphasis is placed on the need for community programmes to be social, friendly and to combat isolation
- Many community education participants 'give back' to the community through community and voluntary work
- Community education programmes aimed at specific groups tend to use facilitative approaches more than programmes aimed at the general community

The perspectives of what community education could provide for participants ranged from the provision of a social outlet to combat isolation to a collective desire to challenge the power dynamics at work in the community. This strongly reflects the continuum developed in the last section, which highlighted that community education can have personal, collective and political outcomes. What came to the fore, however, in interviews, is that the dynamic in the 'classroom' to a large degree, dictates the type of outcome that will be achieved.

In all cases, providers were concerned with the social element of the community education programme. The need to provide tea and conversation and the need for a comfortable surrounding was highlighted.

A great deal of emphasis was placed upon the potential for community education to respond to those who are lonely or isolated and make links within the community as well as learning a new skill. Providers felt therefore that the benefit of doing a programme was not only the personal skills and knowledge gained but also the rise of 'social capital' in the area. Many projects spoke about how previous community education participants had come to be members of management committees or taken part in the wider community events and activities of the organisation. On another level, the interaction between group members in itself was seen as a benefit and a way of allowing a person to reach their full potential: "*A certificate at the end....is not always necessary, some actually want to come in and interact with one another and sometimes the social aspect can have a real positive effect*."

At another level, the impact on children and families of seeing their mother [specifically] take part in a programme was also acknowledged, and it was perceived to greatly influence the outcomes for children from their own education and to broaden expectations for all concerned. "*To make an impact … you have to look at making an impact with the community, with the parent, with the family, and this captures that holistic approach to education*." In addition, people spoke extensively about the impact of community education in enabling people to have more self confidence; this was described by one person as "*working on parents who*

"Community education is the ladder out … there are two elements … helping people to get out of poverty and then there is the other side of the coin where community education helps combat loneliness without the visible returns like progression."

past history of ever going out the door to do anything … so you start very much there and you build it up."

While people gain different benefits from education, those providers who were seeking a personal and/or collective development outcome organised their classes in a different way to other community education providers. In this case, sharing and 'creating a reflective space' in the classroom was emphasised. A facilitative approach and a facilitator who understood the dynamics at work in the community from an equality perspective was seen as crucial. In these cases the emphasis was placed on '*a safe environment to talk'.*

For other community education providers, greater emphasis was placed on the ability of the tutor to support and encourage participants and one person mentioned an ability to '*draw people out'*. It was seen as very important that the tutor created a friendly environment where people could ask questions and engage people in the subject matter. However the dialogical approach and creation of learning by the group, advocated by community education theorists, did not appear to be pursued by all community education providers. This indicates that providers understand community education in different ways.

This divergence in approach was reflected in the type of group that was established. In programmes aimed at specific groups (such as lone parents, disadvantaged women or men's programmes) there seemed to be more of an emphasis on collective outcomes and exploring common issues. In programmes that were more general and open to all, the emphasis was on a social space and personal learning outcomes rather than looking at collective needs.

At another level, programmes that were aimed at particular groups seemed to have a more long-term strategy, whereas general programmes that were open to the public seemed to be organised on a more short-term basis, subject to demand. For example, in programmes that were aimed at particular groups, undertaking art, craft or cookery skills is often used to help people gain a 'taste' for learning – however this is seen as part of a wider transformative process. In more general programmes, undertaking art and craft was seen to have good personal and social impacts, and also having the effect of raising people's confidence, but these programmes were organised in isolation from others without reference to any wider agenda. While the availability of resources has impacted on this situation, it also demonstrates how providers understand 'community education' in different ways.

"It's really a foundation stone, a starting point that you can build from."

6.3 *"From the personal to the political"*

- All community education providers emphasised 'holistic' outcomes for participants and considered increased self-confidence of participants as central to the community education ethos
- The potential for community education to improve peoples quality of life was paramount, more so than qualifications or the acquisition of skills
- Community education is seen as a bridge to other types of education programmes

Emphasizing the improvement of participants' self-esteem in whatever programme is being delivered was perceived by interviewees as having a strong impact on the individual, their family and the wider community, whether this impact is interpreted as political or personal. At the same time, many of the providers admitted that it was hard to assess the impact at the end of a programme, and it was only through people who had continued with their education in the community or had become involved with the community organisation over a period of time, that the real impact of a programme became more apparent. It was perceived that becoming involved in community education does act as a 'way in' to wider community activity. Providers also acknowledged that many people took part in community education programmes to enhance their careers and gain new skills that would allow them to move into a different area of work.

Creating that social environment where people can discuss and share their stories was discussed widely and seen to have wide implications for people's lives:
The quote (below) reflects the process in personal development programmes and involvement in community groups where a process of reflection and sharing is emphasised. This process, and the focus on raising peoples self-esteem, came across from all community education providers. Others saw the raising of confidence as coming not from 'sharing and reflection' models of practice but rather through the acquisition of skills and knowledge, such as might be gained by taking part in a computer class using a traditional teaching approach. While skills-based programmes have the effect of raising the skill base in the community and impacting on self confidence, the way they were organised (through advertising) and delivered seemed to have more in common with traditional adult education methodologies than with a community education approach.

The personal outcomes for participants can only really be quantified by participants themselves; however, providers did give some indication of what people have gained out of community education. While many have gained new skills, others have enhanced community and family life: "*We have people who have come along and done parenting skills and done the easy-going stuff [art/cookery/basic computers], who would have said that they can now help their children with their homework and they are not wanting to go further*." For others, an experience of community education has encouraged people to go further with their education and "*Once they get to the stage where the learning for them isn't as difficult*" people go on to access courses in third level colleges or elsewhere. Community education as a gateway to other courses came across strongly in all of the interviews. The impact of community education on improved self- confidence was emphasised strongly by all of the providers and how this in itself can encourage people in life – "*I have seen endless people saying 'It has changed my life' or 'God I feel so much better' or 'I go out more now'* ."There was a strong focus by providers on education from a holistic perspective i.e. education not just to learn a skill or gain knowledge but education to enhance the whole life of the participant and his/her family:

"People say training courses, they think somehow there is a certificate at the end, that is not always necessary, some actually want to come in and interact with one another and sometimes the social aspect can have a real positive effect. The potential of the person that is really the important thing for us in the community."

6.4 The power of the collective

- A minority of community education providers in the sample are concerned with political outcomes or 'critical thinking'
- Providers engaged in 'political' approaches see personal development and self-awareness are forerunners of critical social analysis or collective action
- Group work and 'listening' is central to this approach

Where the focus was on political and collective outcomes, strong personal outcomes also came across; however fewer community education providers paid attention to the political impact of community education.

The starting point in these types of programmes was with individual experiences, therefore it was felt that the 'transformative' effect on all parts of their lives was inevitable. Through these programmes, which often started out with programmes in art, crafts etc. to develop an interest in learning, participants were noted as having made tangible changes in their lives. However, as already stated, on these types of programmes (with a focus on collective outcomes) the participants were people who had been selected from disadvantaged groups and they were often people who had left school early. In one case a collective approach had enabled one group of women to identify a common concern – housing: *"They began to realize that they deserved a decent house, and when they looked at it collectively they began to see the bigger picture ... they were able to challenge perspectives in a different way."*

In the example above, the building of an awareness of self and heightened self-esteem is seen as essential as a forerunner to collective action and this model has many comparisons with a Freirian model of community education. Through a collective action – challenging the need for social housing in their area – a process of community education took place.

This process required information from tutors or facilitators, but largely it allowed the women to name the purpose of their learning process and allowed them to direct the learning process that would lead to their common objective. In this case, the women were successful in influencing housing policy in the local authority for their area.

In another project that helps young people build leadership skills in the community, participants were encouraged to focus attention on an issue in the community. Through this process one young man has been working on heightening the awareness of policy makers about the need for neurological services for Multiple Sclerosis sufferers. Although this project is not a collective response, it also shows how, when space is made, people can develop their ideas through community education approaches. In another project that has allowed women with disabilities to come together, one group has begun a campaign to allow disabled people with mobility difficulties to take priority in queues, as this is a big access issues for them. 'Listening' was seen as 'key' for allowing concerns of participants to come to the fore – and this was seen as one of the most important aspects of community education by those concerned with political outcomes.

The impact of community education processes on community 'cohesion' was also something that was emphasised by the women's sector. This was particularly emphasised in programmes that were provided to strengthen the community sector itself – these programmes included neighbourhood work and leadership programmes. One programme targeted potential leaders in the community sector. It was seen as important that women from different backgrounds and cultures would have the opportunity to come together as "*huge learning can come from that*." It was also felt that "*the personal touch of that person is so powerful you couldn't put it into books*." The perceived impact of community education on strengthening community relations and integration of minority cultures came across strongly. Indeed, it was mentioned that a lot of effort went into making groups as diverse as possible to allow that exchange of views to take place.

At an even wider level, the participation of women at the community education level and their attempts to address issues for

"Where you are going door-to-door and then you might have a cup of tea with someone, and you are giving time .. and suddenly you have a relationship with people, it is slow but that is where it makes the big impact if you can do that.."

themselves and women in wider society was seen as essential for addressing the imbalance of the representation of women in local and national political structures. Collective action of women is seen as way to push forward women's issues and get women's issues on the agenda – community education is seen as a way to enable this to take place.

6.5 Structural Inequalities

- Structural inequalities prevent people from participation in community education- these include disability, educational disadvantage, unemployment and gender issues
- A minority of providers see the exploration of structural inequalities through group work as the goal of community education
- Childcare is seen as the biggest barrier in offering equality of provision and few community education providers can address this need
- The lack of funding for social care needs for older people, carers or disabled people is also a barrier to inclusion for these groups

Many providers acknowledged the structural inequalities that prevent people in society from gaining equal outcomes in education. These were also seen as the main barrier to participation in community education. Many people who are 'hard to engage' were listed as people who were experiencing multiple disadvantages, such as unemployment, disability or early school leaving – hence greater resources has to be put into supporting these groups to access community education. Their experience was seen as being compounded by experiences such as discrimination and/or poor living standards. The gendered expectations that people have about education or the gendered division of labour was also named a key barrier: *"Like the husband goes out the pub and he doesn't think that the wife wants to do something, that he should mind the children, we find that*."

A symptom of the inequalities that people experience was named as apathy: "*Apathy and TV is an awful draw, sitting in the house, it is so comforting ... And the next thing you know the day is over and that's good*."

While many providers acknowledged the existence of these forces, not all saw a role for community education in exploring these inequalities with those who are affected by them. The providers who *did* engage in this approach saw transformative effects for participants (this issue is explored in more depth in interviews with participants in the next chapter).

While not all providers dealt with the issue of structural inequality as part of the programmes they were delivering, many did acknowledge some structural inequalities in how they tried to organise their programmes for participants; however this was dependent on the availability of funding. Many providers placed great emphasis on how the lack of transport and childcare can make community education inaccessible to people, especially to people on low incomes whom they are trying to attract.

Childcare was seen as a real barrier and the reason that many women from their 'target groups' don't get involved in community education:

"We are talking about very isolated people that don't really know anybody, single parents [in rural areas], they can't run next door and say would you watch the child for an hour and they can't spare the coal money or whatever to do a programme, and then they say to themselves 'I'll go up there and I'll be so nervous I won't want it anyway' ."

"Unless you have been resourced to facilitate a (whole) family the barriers are so high."

"Say for example you are a single mum and your mother lives next door .. And you want to go out and do a course .. but you also want to go out at the weekend and you want to do shopping and you genuinely want to do all these things, and you say 'Mammy there is a great course on, will you mind such and such?' [She says]'I'm damn sure I'll not because you'll be looking for me at the week-end', so you are constantly pulling favours ."

The complications in providing childcare were also named. One community education provided a child-minder in an adjacent room to facilitate mothers undertaking a programme. However, given the regulations around childcare provision this arrangement was not allowed to continue, despite the fact that the programme lasted for two hours one day a week. Following this, the mothers tried to continue their work with the children in the room, however it was very difficult: "*It became a mother and toddler group, the personal space was invaluable (before) ."*

A small number of providers have been enabled through particular funding arrangements to provide childcare expenses for participants and this often helps to enable mothers to attend programmes: "*It did seem like offering them the twenty euro (made it possible) ... they wouldn't have been there otherwise, because they would have had to pull a favour from a friend to mind their wains, and they wouldn't have been able to pay them back financially*."

Childcare was recognised as an issue more so by groups who were targeting marginalised women specifically for their programmes, rather than groups who were delivering programmes that were open to the general public. While providers have shown creativity in trying to accommodate childcare arrangements, funding was named as a key issue, as childcare is rarely provided for through mainstream funding sources. Although some mainstream programmes offer varying levels of childcare allowances (Fás, BTEI, VTO's, Literacy), in most cases community education providers are unable to offer childcare support.

In rural areas, transport was also named as a barrier in enabling marginalised people to get involved in community education. As many people live in widespread rural locations this was seen as a particular difficulty and the reason why many people who attend programmes live in the immediate area. However, this difficulty also highlighted the necessity of bringing programmes into rural areas as the transport links to the major towns in the county are so poor.

As well as childcare, eldercare and personal assistants are often needed to enable certain people to take part in programmes. In a few cases organisers named carers as one of the groups who frequently attend community education programmes as a way to break the isolation that they experience as a carer, and as a way to interact with other people. It was felt that a lack of social care meant that some

"In courses aimed at specific groups, there was more of an emphasis on collective outcomes and on exploring common issues."

people in this target group would not be able to attend programmes. The need for funding to cover personal assistants for people with disabilities was also named as a big problem, and it had been some people's experience that the lack of funding for this meant that some people with disabilities were unable to attend community education programmes. The need for an affordable, accessible building to provide community education was also named as a concern by some providers.

The difficulty in getting 'good' tutors was also named by a minority of providers. Some providers have found that they have been very successful in getting effective tutors by tendering the positions or finding people through word of mouth. However, in the women's sector particularly, it was felt that tutors with good facilitation skills and a feminist critique and social analysis capabilities were hard to find in Donegal although it was acknowledged that there was a small number of tutors in the county with these skills.

6.6 Funding

- Funding is an ongoing challenge for community groups
- Funding does not allow for the strategic development of community education programmes

Overall, funding was seen as a major barrier. Community education is funded mainly in a short-term manner and while some providers were content to offer one-off programmes, others wanted to be able to deliver a progressive programme for people over a longer period of time. Many providers spoke about the necessity of starting with 'soft programmes' that help to get people in the door and 'used to learning' before supporting them to go on to undertake more challenging programmes. This method was named as the best way to engage marginalised groups and help them to eventually widen their life choices or go on to access mainstream education programmes.

Two of the providers who were interviewed are facing an end to their education programmes in the summer of 2008 due to an end in the Peace II programme. Some providers commented on the ad-hoc nature of funding for the sector, how it is 'once off' and how it is often seen "*as the poor relation of formal education*" by policy makers.

It was felt that community education offered a critical intervention to give marginalised groups and early school leavers access to education in a non-threatening and supportive environment; however it was felt the funding to properly engage these groups and offer them a longer term strategy was often not available. Providers also felt that looking for funding and filling out application forms took away from the community education work that they are trying to undertake.

For providers who were offering 'short term' community education programme options, it was felt that the VEC was very supportive and it was felt that the VEC understood and allowed for the holistic vision of community education. However, where there was an

"So many people have changed their whole lives by coming in here and getting involved in stuff … just listening to other people and what they do, and not try and change other people around you, but just changing your own self and your own attitude .. you start to learn more about yourself and other people and you think 'well maybe if she can do it so can I'. "

focus groups and interviews. While the

women's sector targets its programmes at women with the aim of re-balancing participation in community and political life, general community and development organisations hoped to gain the participation of men *and* women in their community education programmes.

The complexity around men participating in community education became apparent throughout the interviews and focus groups. While many seemed to acknowledge that men have become, in recent times especially, marginalized, and many are subject to some of the societal and systemic forces which exclude women, there was no agreement on the need to engage men in community education. While marginalised women were often to be found 'in the home', it was felt that men already had "*more access to outdoor activities and … therefore they are less frustrated by being isolated in the home with children and that*."

On the other hand, the only provider who was working specifically with men to engage them in a reflective and collective process recognised that many men are deeply marginalised in today's society and have much to gain from community education. The situation of men now returning from the cities, where they had earned good money to "*going back on the dole in Carn*" was raised. Stress and alcohol were also named as issues affecting men in particular.
Despite this, many providers said that men do not access community education as freely as women. It was felt that this was because there is less of a culture of men accessing education and it was seen as a 'women's thing'. However a gender division *real* effort into attracting marginalised men into their programmes. While some had provided programmes that were seen as more masculine, such as woodwork, few had actually gone out and made links with men, in the same way that links had been made with women. This could have been as a result of women showing a much higher need and women being more likely to access community projects. Women are also a named target group in most community development projects and programmes.

"I have seen endless people saying 'It has changed my life' or 'God I feel so much better' or 'I go out more now' ."

The provider who was trying to engage with marginalised men was doing so by simply asking men to come to a group, where they could 'chat and talk' about things. **(sentence here about the home visits first?)** This provider felt that if he named a subject it would be off-putting and the response would be "*No,I don't like that."* Therefore he felt that the best way to get men involved was to just encourage them to come along. From there the learning needs of the group would be deciphered through group facilitation techniques and through talking and sharing in the group.
The tradition of community education coming from the women's sector came across strongly in interviews with providers. The fact that women are being targeted primarily by providers and the cultural attitude in society is that community education is for 'women', seems to be the reason for a differentiation in gender balance on programmes.

6.8 Accreditation and Evaluation

- Accreditation is not always seen as important for those in the initial stages of returning to learning and can be off-putting
- Holistic outcomes are seen as more important than gaining qualifications
- Current evaluation methods used in community education are not seen as useful

In interviews, accreditation came across very much as an issue that people needed to have

choice about in community education. It was acknowledged that at the beginning, accreditation could be very off putting for people, especially those with low self-confidence and those returning to education for the first time. However, once groups had got through the initial stages it was felt that accreditation was very important for participants to acknowledge the learning that had taken place and so that they could demonstrate that learning to others. Providers were keen to emphasise, however, that accreditation was not the '*be all and end all'* for them and that they were more concerned with unlocking "*the potential of the person, that is the really important thing for us in the community*."

The evaluation methods for community education were also questioned by providers. Overall, many felt that the real impact of a community education programme was hard to assess in the immediate aftermath of a programme and that often it was months later when somebody would come up to them and say how that programme had made and impact on their lives.

However, many providers did indicate ways in which they could find out how a programme was going. Overall attendance on programmes was seen as a positive indicator of how the programme was going and the ability of the tutor. Where providers were familiar with programme participants, it was felt that when a programme was successful participants would come and tell them, but often it is was going badly people's silence would be a good indicator that all was not well. It was also said that many people were reluctant to give a 'bad evaluation' of a programme and be totally honest on evaluation forms. Providers also had other methods of checking on progress, eg by 'popping in' to see how things were going. One provider felt that a good indication of the success of a programme was when people stayed to chat afterwards: "*If people are flying out the door or whether people are hanging around to talk about things, it says a lot*."

Questions were raised by providers about the use of a form in order to assess the impact of a programme. It was felt that this gave them little of the qualitative information they needed in designing new or future programmes and questions were also raised about the value of the information obtained in forms to funding bodies. The lack of resources to evaluate programmes qualitatively with participants and to hold evaluation and planning meetings with tutors was also perceived as taking away from a cohesive community education programme.

6.9 Conclusion

This section has outlined some of the key issues raised by providers in relation to the organisation and impacts of community education in Donegal. Overall, there is a broad understanding of community education in the sector and it seems to cover a variety of approaches. The common denominator linking all providers was that they were community groups providing education in their areas and all of them acknowledged and encouraged the personal and social outcomes from community education programmes. A further aspect was the emphasis on community education in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable members of society, who are 'cut off' from other mainstream education opportunities in a variety of ways. The building of self-confidence and the benefits that come from interaction with others in the community were the main impacts highlighted by all providers.

While the benefits to participants were emphasised by all providers, a further dimension was named by providers who engaged participants in a collective and ultimately political process. Here, active citizenship was a named outcome as well as tangible changes in the lives of marginalised groups. It was felt that the emphasis 'in

the classroom' on sharing, reflection and collective experiences is what separated this type of approach from traditional teaching approaches in adult and mainstream education.

However, barriers exist to community educators reaching their goals. The ad-hoc nature of funding was named as a key issue, as well as a lack of acknowledgement by funding agencies of the need for child and social care when addressing the needs of marginalised groups. Much emphasis was also placed on the reluctance of men to get involved and it came across that discussion and learning in relation to the participation of men may be necessary. With all providers, the necessity of engaging in face –to-face work to encourage and support marginalised people to become involved with community education came across strongly and it was felt that those 'most in need' were the least likely to 'walk through the door' without encouragement.

"Other [reasons] that people drop away is that they need childcare, they think that they will manage and then they just don't manage to pay the child minder or whatever."

This chapter describes the key findings from focus groups and interviews carried out with community education participants in Donegal. Six focus groups took place with forty-three community education participants taking part, six men and thirty-seven women. Focus groups were held in Inver Community Centre, Raphoe Family Resource Centre, Donegal Women's Network in Ballybofey, Pobail le Chéile in Falcarragh, Tullyarvan Mill in Buncrana and Donegal Travellers Project in Letterkenny. At all venues, participants from the local area were invited to attend to share their views. In most cases community education providers set up the meetings and invited participants that they knew of to take part in the focus groups. All of the focus groups lasted at least one hour and the proceedings were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed. Following transcription all of the data was coded with the assistance of QSR N6 qualitative data analysis software.

The participants who took part in the focus groups had taken part in a range of community education programmes. Overall their experiences can be divided into three types of programme:

a) Participants who have taken part in 'one off' skill based courses, including computers, ECDL, card-making, patchwork, photography, First Aid etc.

b) Participants who have taken part in a 'once off' programme with an emphasis on group work and personal development outcomes. Examples include personal development programmes and counselling programmes.

c) Participants who have taken part in a group work process with social analysis and collective action as its central component but also including a skill-based programme as part of a longer-term community education *strategy*.

While not knowing the full history of participants involvement in community education, approximately half of the participants were involved in skill based programmes (a), while a quarter were involved in each of the two other types: once-off group work programmes with an emphasis on personal development outcomes (b), and longer-term group work processes with an emphasis on collective outcomes (c). A small number of participants had taken part in community education programmes that would reflect all three types listed above.

Participants had taken part in programmes offered by at least 16 different providers and the majority of these were through funded organisations who were resourced (full-time) in the community. Four of the programmes that were discussed were organised by voluntary committees who were not resourced in any other way other than 'once-off' VEC funding. Participants from the third group had come from just three projects involved in community education. (A list of programmes named by participants is given in appendix 3)

The following sections outline the issues that emerged from the analysis of data drawn from participants' focus groups:

7.1 The Participants

- Community education participants come from a diverse range of backgrounds, and include many people who have left school early or people returning to learning
- An overwhelming majority of participants reported coming into community education with low self-confidence and low self-esteem
- The social aspect of involvement in community education was given equal significance to acquiring skills or qualifications: community education is seen as being particularly responsive to the needs of mothers at home and people who feel 'isolated'
- The need to acquire specific skills (particularly in computers) was reported by participants in every focus group

Reflecting participation trends in community education, the majority of people who took part in the focus groups were women. (88%) However, they came from a diverse range of backgrounds. While some had become involved in community education despite having gained qualifications through formal education systems, the majority had had a negative school experience or had been absent from an education or work environment for a long time. For others, involvement in community education came about as a result of a gap in knowledge or skills necessary for involvement in the community or to further their work prospects. However, involvement in community education had been undertaken by all participants in response to feelings of isolation or loneliness and wanting to get out and meet people.

The potential of community education to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in the community was reflected in the focus group discussions with participants. In each focus group, a number of people shared stories of how community education had been the first step on the ladder for them to realizing their potential. Many had given up education at a young age or felt that the education system had failed them: "*I left school at 14 and I got a year in the tech and I had to leave it because I lacked, because I was that type of person in that I didn't think that I was going to go anywhere*."

Many women indicated that they entered community education with feelings of low self confidence and low self esteem: "*I would have had a lot of trauma in my life, so I was coming along having no sense of myself at all, no sense of being able to talk or anything*."

For a large number of women, coming into community education followed a period at home caring for children. The isolation of working in the home was felt to have undermined their self-confidence. Jobs that they had or skills that they had gained before having a family were no longer available to them or their skills were out-of-date. *"We were just doing nothing, we were about to crack up. I had three at school and one at home … that's how I ended up"*; "*I worked in an office until I had kids, 8-9 years ago; I couldn't go back to work in an office now because things have moved on so much … but as well, just getting out and meeting people is just as important*."

Another distinctive group was those who had come into community education to get more

involved with their community and to meet people, while learning new skills. Sometimes these were people who were new to the area. This group was predominantly made up of women and men from an older age group and women who were working in the home. In addition, some people reported wanting to be able to keep up with their children's education and help them with homework as motivating forces. The ambition to become more familiar with information technology was a driving force for many people. Participants also reported increased levels of self-confidence from taking part as well as gaining new skills in their chosen area.

In addition, some people had come into community education to respond to a community need or to keep alive community traditions and practices. While these people came from a variety of educational backgrounds, their common characteristic was that they were all volunteers in the community. From the focus groups, it was evident that participants in community education in the voluntary sector frequently become involved in organising programmes themselvesl, in response to perceived social and community needs within their own networks.

7.2 How people are getting involved

- Participants from a range of backgrounds including those with formal education qualifications are more likely to be engaged through 'advertising' approaches 'Face-to-face' recruitment works best in engaging people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who had poor experiences in the formal education system
- Many participants hear about programmes informally and they are more likely to hear about other programmes once they have become involved once

Where an isolating 'home' experience is compounded by poor educational outcomes, a negative school experience or discrimination because of ethnicity, the move back into education is not so much a conscious decision to get an education as a response to encouragement to join a group by a community or neighbourhood worker. Some people in this group had come from a position where they did not look 'beyond tomorrow' and the whole idea of 'a course' or education programme was a foreign concept to them: *"You do it for all the wrong reasons at the start, like I had never done any kind of course before, you do it for all different reasons at the start, but once you get in and get a qualification .. You see I can get something out of it."*

The experiences of this group reflect the community education providers' conviction of engaging the 'hard to reach' through face-to-face work. For this group, organisers having a 'belief' in them and having empathy with their position was seen as important. In addition the relationship that they build up with the organisers and tutors was seen as important.

Where people were coming from a stronger education background or a history of voluntary work in the community, they were more likely to respond to an advertisement, sign up to a programme on their own initiative, or walk into a centre to ask questions about a programme. However, most people who had not been contacted personally found out about programmes 'through the grapevine' or from another person. People also mentioned that it was much easier to find out about programmes once they had done one, as they were then known to the community group. Despite this, many people reported feeling intimidated and insecure on their first day. However many also commented on the friendly and caring atmosphere that was created by provider organisations and this helped to support their continuing involvement.

7.3 Community education approaches to teaching/facilitation?

- Three teaching approaches are identified in the community education sector:
- Traditional teacher-participant approach, with an emphasis of the programme being social, friendly and supportive
- Facilitative approach with an emphasis on personal outcomes and awareness of social issues
- Group-based action learning approach where the agenda is set by the participants

Three broad approaches have been identified which represent how community education is being delivered in Donegal.

In the first type of approach, emphasis is placed on the social aspect of a programme and the need for a tutor to be engaging, friendly and helpful. However, the approach in the classroom is similar to that of traditional teaching approaches where the tutor holds all the information. Computer classes, for example, were reported as being delivered in this way. In this type of programme people felt that they did gain social and personal outcomes from the programme and it was beneficial to them to have the programme in their local area. Participants also appreciated where people of a similar age group (e.g. older people) or people in a similar situation (e.g. lone parents) shared the learning experience with them as they felt it was less threatening and "*you were all in the same boat.*"

The second type of approach emphasises the importance of facilitation as a method for people to learn. One person described it as "*You were sitting in a circle, there was no boss, no head honcho, if you had something to say you did, if you didn't you didn't bother.*" In this situation, people talked about equality between learners and greater equality between the tutor and the participants: "*Working with the teacher and not for the teacher, it is a different approach I think because in community education you are not scared; you are given your input as well.*" A supportive learning environment that is created by providing a 'safe place' to learn is also strongly emphasized in this approach. People felt that having people from similar backgrounds and culture in the group was helpful, and this was seen as particularly important by those who had a negative education experience.

People also talked about the informality of this type of learning and felt that they were put at ease. While these situations allowed

people to share their experiences, the emphasis by learners was on personal awareness and development and sometimes heightened political consciousness. It was felt that the programme was not just about learning a skill but looking at the needs of the whole person. *"Community education provided me with hope and a creation of an awareness of the other world inside, my own potential, so it is a support network around a person's self esteem*." Another person compared the approach in community education to what she went on to experience in a formal education situation, identifying that the support network that is built into community education through a facilitative approach helps to retain people:
"[In college] I don't think any of us knew nothing really more about the person, it was very clinical, you sit, you ask questions and you have coffee break and you might have a bit of chat and really it was just about the product at the end of the thing. It really wasn't about the whole thing. If I had been doing that course [at the start] I would have dropped it in two minutes."

For others who did a legal studies course through community education, they also found that a facilitative approach worked best for them: "*the difference is that a lot of tutors go in with a formal class attitude … the way in community education is to engage with them, discuss the topics and discuss the cases and let us talk about the cases, that teaching method is far better*." A participant on a local history course reported "*There's more yarns spoken than anything else, but that's the fun of it."* This approach very much reflects a dialogical approach proposed by some community education theorists

"If people are flying out the door or whether people are hanging around to talk about things, it says a lot.."

people who had been through these types of approaches said that the experience has encouraged them to '*give back'* to the community and the community group that supported them. They have done this through becoming a volunteer on the management committee or taking on another role within the organisation. The sharing and building of relationships on these programmes, and '*empowerment of the individual*' through group processes, builds commitment in people to invest in the organisations which supported them.

A third approach, which also uses a facilitative approach, stands apart from the others because of its immediate concern with collective action and the creation of learning by the participants towards this end. With this type of programme there is no set 'curriculum'. The participants were given time to develop a relationship with each other and then share their concerns, they were then supported by facilitator to address these concerns collectively:

"*We found that we had a lot in common, we were all living in private accommodation and we had the same landlord …we decided to come together and form our own group, around housing.… We decided to get together and lobbied the council in Lifford and we done a play about our lives and we done that play for the councillors in Lifford…It was a very very powerful scene, everyone who did that play all has their own council houses now."*

The differences between the second and third approaches seem to reflect what is described as a liberal community education process as opposed to what is sometimes called a radical community education process. The immediate purpose of the 'radical' approach is to enable people to *challenge* power dynamics in the

community. In the liberal approach the emphasis is more on 'personal development' as part of a group dynamic which allows people to *question* the forces that they experience in their lives. Many of the women who had been through a personal development process expressed feminist sentiments in the focus group. They also felt that their experience of undertaking community education would allow them to further equality issues for women, simply by creating dialogue about this in their families and communities.

While the three approaches above are described separately, some participants had taken part in community education processes that corresponded to each of the approaches listed above. Particular types of programmes like computers were nearly always delivered using a traditional teacher-participant approach. Participants that took part in the (third) radical community education process began by first looking at personal issues. Others who had been involved in community education for several years had been through a radical process and now were more ready to take on more specific programmes that led to formal qualifications; however they favoured a facilitative approach to achieve this.

Participants who had been involved in the third approach were recruited exclusively through face-to-face and neighbourhood work. These participants indicated that they were coming from a position where they had a poor educational background and faced other barriers such as housing, poor accommodation, unemployment or discrimination.

Participants involved in the other approaches were also recruited through face-to-face work or they got involved in the courses by responding to advertisements or by hearing about them through word of mouth. These participants came from more diverse backgrounds, some with a good level of basic education, others without. The need in people from these groups to build their confidence and interact with others was very evident.

7. Community education participants: Realising the Potential

7.4 Impact of community education

- Engaging in community education to combat feelings of isolation and loneliness is given prominence in all of the focus groups
- Community education gives people confidence to go on to further education and jobs and acts as a 'bridge' to more formal programmes
- Many participants 'give back' to the community through voluntary and community work as a result of their learning experience
- Those who came out of community education 'politicised' see themselves as part of a wider struggle for equality
- Community education has a positive impact on families and on children's educational outcomes

Through discussions with participants, it became apparent that community education has had a marked impact on people's lives and on the lives of the communities where it takes place. A number of distinct patterns of participant outcomes can be identified.

In every focus group the experience of being isolated or lonely was discussed. Given that the purpose of the focus groups was to talk specifically about community education, this was an unexpected outcome. It appears that many people, from a range of age groups, are feeling isolated and alone, and this was particularly reported in rural communities. Modern life seems to have separated people from one another in a way that has not happened before. Community education has been a way for people to link up with one another in their own communities.
While everyone appreciated the skills that they have learned through community education, the impact of the 'social' element of community education on people's lives was very much emphasised. Because the education programme was based in their local areas it allowed them to develop friendships that lasted after the programme finished. People spoke about the "*camaraderie and support*", that it was a way of bringing people together, "*it keeps them out of doctors' surgeries and gets them out of the house*." For those who were retuning to education for the first time, this aspect of community education was very important and gave them the 'courage' to stick with it.

Community education as a gateway to other courses and to employment also came across strongly in all of the focus groups. Many people talked about how community education has provided a 'safe' space for them to return to education. This was very much linked to the emphasis that is placed (in community education) on building people's confidence and sense of self-esteem – other people described this as being 'supported' and 'pushed' to take on new challenges:

"I think the confidence thing is a huge part of it, you can know all these things but to actually go out there, it is good to meet like minded people, it gives you confidence."

All of the people who attended the focus groups had managed to 'move on' following their first programme in community education. Comments were also made about how you need to be 'in there' to know about other opportunities, otherwise you are out of the loop. For some 'moving on' meant going on to do another programme in the community, for others it meant going on to take up a place in a third level college.

The value of community education as a 'bridge' to other education opportunities came across strongly: "*As you said, it is the empathy and compassion [in community education]... last year I did a course in marketing... I enjoyed*

it and I was able to go back and do the assignments, but mainly because I had done them before in a safe environment, in a non-threatening environment. The course was good, but it was not about the person, it was about the goods produced."

Other people commented that they felt 'bolstered' by community education to go on to do other things and when they considered where they are now, several people said that they never thought that they would have made such progress:

"As time went on you realize that I have something to say and I have an opinion here and my opinion does matter. It gives you more confidence; it helps you build your self-esteem. You do learn and it gets you out of the house. We were learning Irish and we have learned the basic Irish for the wains at school... I was unemployed for fourteen years… it got me my job, got me back into the labour force, got me back into a wage, which is absolutely brilliant."

Community education was also reported as having an impact on family and community. In the Traveller community, many had gained employment through the community group and they were now working together to build the capacity of the wider community. People felt that this was important because they are able to empathise with what people are going through and have 'heart' when supporting others to access education. The potential for community education to build community capacity came through strongly in all of the focus groups. Many people, through their experience in various programmes, had become more involved with their local community organisation. In the voluntary sector, people who had benefited from programmes had gone on to organise their own programmes and to apply for funding.

At another level, people who had come through community education were more politicized about their communities' place in wider society – this was particularly apparent in relation to people who had come through community education programmes aimed at Travellers and programmes within the women's sector. People said that this awareness would help them to build a better life for their children and there was a sense that these people saw themselves as part of a wider struggle for equal rights. Women who felt this way mentioned the need for an appreciation of feminism, the work of women and the need to be on the Live Register. Travellers recognised the unequal place afforded to Travellers in society and the need for greater equity of outcome for Travellers in the formal education system.

At a familial level, people in all of the focus groups commented on how their experience in community education had affected their family. The confidence that people had gained contributed in a positive way to relationships between themselves and their children. People also spoke about being able to help children with their homework and understand what they are doing at school and being able to relate to their experiences. People also felt that it was good for their children to see them progressing and felt that they were setting a good example:

"*When I did my sign language and I passed and all, I was all proud, and I said Mammy can do this here, I was learning them how to do the alphabet.. But like, there is stuff out there that mammy can do.. To me that is important*."

7.5 Accreditation and Progression

- Community education has given people confidence to do accredited programmes
- Accreditation is important to those who have little or no previous educational qualifications
- Some participants are frustrated about the lack of progression through community education
- Traveller participants perceive that

progression outcomes from community education are greater than from other education routes

Distinct attitudes emerged in relation to getting certificates and the accreditation of community education. For those from an older age group, accreditation was not always seen as important especially for those who were doing community education programmes that they saw as a hobby, such as needlework or art classes. However, where a person had not received accreditation in the past, getting a certificate for the work they had undertaken became much more important, in old and young alike. Across all of the focus groups, the only people who did not place an emphasis on accreditation in community education were those who had already gained accreditation in the formal education system. Although people did say that learning was acknowledged in other ways, the feeling of achievement that people felt getting their 'certificates' was very strong as it gives 'legitimacy' to the learning that they have undertaken. At the same time, people were able to see the value of programmes that they did at the beginning of their learning journey and said that it helped give them the confidence to think about doing an accredited programme in the future.

In a couple of focus groups, the issue of progression through community education was raised, with a number of issues being raised. In one case, people were frustrated with the lack of progression options in their rural location – they felt that the first stage of a programme was always available but there was rarely

"I would have had a lot of trauma in my life, so I was coming along having no sense of myself at all, no sense of being able to talk or anything."

In another group, two lone parents who had taken part in a programme some years ago also felt that they had been left at the end with no follow- up. When they were invited to come to the focus group they hoped that it would be the course co-ordinator telling them about another course. One woman from the women's sector commented: "*Taking women away from the kitchen sink and raising their expectations and really making them feel powerful and then putting them standing back at the kitchen sink again..that can be a destructive process.*" Some other people who had just finished programmes commented that they are waiting to hear about funding as to whether there will be a follow-up programme.

For some who had come through a more 'radical' community education process, follow-up did not seem to be as much of an issue. People were still part of the group that they started with, but they had also started to move on into other work and training and education opportunities independently. In the Travellers group, people were also very happy with the progression routes through community education and they felt that Travellers had experienced better progression through community education than through other education routes due to what they felt was institutionalised racism in mainstream education programmes.

7.6 Male participation

- There is limited participation of men in community education
- There is a cultural belief that community education is a 'women's thing' due to gendered expectations and historical reasons

Discussions took place in most of the focus groups regarding the low participation of men in community education. Of the six men who did take part in the focus groups, one was an older person who had become involved in art classes because he used to drive his wife to them and instead of waiting outside in the car one day he decided to join

in; he has not looked back since. Now he spends all of his spare time painting and it gives him great pleasure. Another man was a Traveller and he had become involved in community education as a result of a joint scheme between a training centre and a Travellers project; the knowledge he gained through community education enabled him to access a full-time job. The third man who took part in the focus groups had taken part in a computer class so that he could get more up-to-date on technology. He felt discouraged that his youngest child knew more than he did about computers: "*I felt really bad that he could do things and I couldn't*." This computer course had led him on to take up a digital photography course in the North West Institute. The fourth man had taken part in a First Aid programme that had been organised by a volunteer in the community. As he was a sports coach, the volunteer contacted him directly as she felt he would benefit from the knowledge.

The two other men who took part in the focus groups had more of an organiser's perspective of community education. One man was an organiser in an adult education centre in West Donegal and one man was a community arts tutor.

From the limited information we gained from men themselves about their own participation, it is difficult to identify any patterns. All four men had come into community education in different ways – one 'by accident' but also with the support of his wife, one to learn a skill and one because of a training scheme

"You were sitting in a circle, there was no boss, no head honcho, if you had something to say you did, if you didn't you didn't bother."

However the question over male participation was spontaneously raised by the women at many of the focus groups. They felt that the reluctance of men to participate was an Irish cultural thing – it was seen as a 'women's thing'. When one woman did recount the story of a man joining a group, he had done so only after his wife had passed away, in a way he 'took her place'. In another instance a woman told a story of how her husband had taken part in a swimming programme with her and fourteen other women and had enjoyed it immensely!

Overall, women felt that men viewed community education differently to women. As many of the women saw community education taking place in a group context, they felt that it might be off-putting for men because "*women talk and men don't get involved in things the way women would do*." One person felt that it was not seen as 'macho' enough and another felt that men did not see it as a 'real' programme. When one woman was doing her course in community education she felt that her husband saw it as unimportant, a 'wee hobby', because it wasn't what he viewed as 'a proper diploma' as one would get in a 'real' education institution.

Despite this, women felt that men, especially young men, would benefit from community education. In one group, people felt that there were many young men around who could benefit from computer skills to help them access work. However they did not feel that the same opportunities were open to men as are to women in the community sector. In another group a person commented: "*I think too there are a lot of unemployed men around, but I guess society doesn't really support them in reaching out to get more education*."

7.7 Barriers to participation in community education

- Childcare was strongly emphasised as the main barrier to the participation of women in community education
- Transport in rural areas is also a problem; however having community education programmes in local areas helps somewhat in responding to this need
- Participants perceive progression programmes are not available due to a lack of funding to provide them

Childcare came up repeatedly as an issue that must be addressed to allow women to take part in community education. Many women who were provided with childcare emphasised that they would not have been there if it wasn't available: "*We could do the drama because they were there to watch the children, but if they weren't getting paid for it, we couldn't have done what we had done, not a hope in hell.*" Others felt that there were a lot of women who were not getting into community education because of childcare: "*There is a lot of women I know who would love to be here but can't, they'll not get out there, through separation or one thing or another*."

The availability of a crèche was also named as the best option for childcare by some women. In two programmes crèche services were available and it was felt that this was the best option for women. On other programmes where childcare money was offered this did not always solve the dilemma for women: "*If you have one kid but if you have four or five you are rightly snookered and sometimes if they give you money it doesn't always solve the problem because you need somebody to leave them with.*" Indeed the majority of women had come into community education after their children had gone to school. However, people appreciated that community education tried to take people's childcare needs into account, unlike other programmes in big towns that run on a 9-5 basis. The recent changes in funding and the introduction of the subvention programme for crèches were named as a potential problem in the future for community groups who currently have access to crèche services.

Transport was also named as an issue in rural communities. It was felt that many people in very rural areas do not have their own transport and so find it difficult to get into towns where community education programmes take place.

Participants were also acutely aware of funding as an issue that is affecting the community education sector. Many people mentioned that they are hoping to do follow up programmes but that this is '*dependent on funding*'. Others wanted to apply for funding to do more community education programmes in their communities but were unsure of where to go or how to access it. Others felt that there was a failure by policy makers to invest in community education on a par with other education initiatives which aim to support the 'hard to reach', despite the fact that community education had proved itself. One group felt that the community education sector had lost a lot of the flexibility that made it accessible to marginalised groups and that there was more of push for people to go into mainstream courses, which do not always respond to needs in the way that a community programme can: "*So it's actually policies that is killing the community education sector.*"

Some participants had found that there were not enough places on programmes to accommodate them. In another area, people were signing up for programmes that would not take place due to inadequate numbers – this had the effect of dissuading them from going out to sign-up for the next programme.

Overall the perception of participants was that availability of childcare and transport were based on luck, and that progression programmes seemed to be offered on the same basis. While some people were able to do follow-up programmes in other locations,

those with childcare and transport needs have to stay 'local' and were frustrated by the lack of progression options available to them.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter described and analysed the findings from discussions with community education participants. Overall, community education has been a very positive experience for participants and it has impacted on their personal, social, family and community life.

The participants who took part in focus groups experienced different types of approaches in the programmes that they undertook. While for some, community education had been similar to traditional teaching approaches, for others a more facilitative approach was adopted. However, the community education programme having a social dimension was common to all programmes and the potential of community education to combat loneliness and isolation was frequently mentioned.

For people who were coming back to education for the first time or who had been 'disengaged' from education, the 'face-to-face' approach of the community or neighbourhood worker was acknowledged as the reason why they became involved. Some acknowledged that, at the start, the whole idea of a course was a foreign notion to them and that they started off in it "*for all the wrong reasons.*" While some people had responded to advertisements, these tended to be older people or people who had already gained qualifications through the formal education system.

Community education as a bridge to other types of courses came across strongly from participants. Nearly everyone who was interviewed said that since doing their first programme in the community they had gone on to do others, because of the self-confidence they had gained. People also reported very positive effects for their families and felt that their educational achievements had a positive impact on their children. At a community level, for people who had taken part in programmes with a 'group work' methodology, people generally seemed to have gained a more politicized view of society, through gaining an awareness of the structural inequalities that exist for their community. This was particularly apparent in people who had done community education through the women's sector and in the Travellers project. However people from all groups had been motivated by their participation in community education to become more involved with community development and 'give back' to their community.

While Travellers identified better progression for Travellers through community education rather than mainstream options, others felt that in some rural communities progression in community education was limited. This was attributed to the running of 'stage one' courses and not going on to do progression courses. In rural communities transport was named as an issue that prevents people from moving onto courses in bigger towns.

Childcare was named in every group as an issue. Overall the availability of childcare for women was greatly appreciated, however this was available on an ad-hoc basis and you were seen as 'lucky' if you were able to avail of it. Many people knew of women who were not able to access education due to childcare costs.

In general, participation in community education is very diverse, and in focus groups there was a large proportion of learners who had come from marginalised communities. The targeting of resources in encouraging these learners and making their needs central in the programmes offered is crucial to the success of attracting and retaining these individuals. At the same time, the wider community has also benefited from programmes that are offered in the community and it has a vital role in responding to the isolation and loneliness that people experience,

especially in rural communities. Men are seen as reluctant to take part in community education and this was understood by women as a result of the tradition of community education being a 'woman's thing'.

"It keeps them out of doctors' surgeries and gets them out of the house."

This research has shown that the community sector in Donegal is very active in providing educational opportunities, with at least three and half thousand participants in our sample alone. Therefore, the community sector in Donegal is making real inroads in the provision of life-long learning for adults in the county. This research has identified that the community sector employs a number of different approaches to engage participants and deliver education programmes. All of the different approaches used in community based education have value and respond to a number of different needs in the community, including isolation, up-skilling, returning to learning and community development. In a rural county with poor transport links, providing community-based education is vital. The provision of education programmes locally also has the 'knock-on' effect of building volunteerism and community work in the area, with participants 'giving back' to the community group that supported them, showing that education in the community builds community cohesion and active citizenship.

The provision of 'community education' in the county however, does not fit neatly into one theoretical framework for community education. The different approaches used have distinct aims and outcomes. The AONTAS definition of community education was identified by the Community Education Forum (commissioners of the research) as the benchmark for this study. This section provides an analysis of community education in Donegal in relation to this definition, and makes recommendations for its promotion in the county:

Community education is education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community. It is distinct from general adult education provision, due both to its ethos and to the methodologies it employs. (AONTAS 2000)

8.1 Community education is rooted in a process of social justice

There is a general understanding across the sector in Donegal that community education is open to everyone in the community, but that it is particularly responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups. Much community education provision aims to increase the skills of people to take a more active role in community and work environments. There are a range of programmes on offer across the sector, from once-off classes to accredited and non-accredited learning programmes. This research has demonstrated the meaningful contribution the sector is making to lifelong learning provision.

Survey results showed that the majority of community groups organize and deliver programmes that try to respond to structural inequalities in the community, such as unemployment, disability or gender inequalities. There is also a strong emphasis on the social aspect of programmes and the need for them to be enjoyable. However, the approach taken is similar to mainstream adult education provision, in that their aim is to support the skill development of these individuals. In focus groups it was found that participation in these education programmes has greatly enhanced the lives of individuals and opened up further education opportunities. It has improved the quality of participants' lives, increased their self-confidence and helped them gain entry to the job market, in addition to supporting the formation of community networks.

However, if social justice is understood as a process which challenges the *roots of oppression and injustice*, part of a community education response is giving participants the opportunity to analyse *how* they came to be in the situation in which they find themselves and be empowered to take action to try and

change the status quo. This aspect has not been evident in most of the community education approaches in Donegal. However, some participants demonstrated that they had been through this type of process, by being able to identify the structures that limit the opportunities for them and their community. It was also apparent in the 'distance' they had come, compared to where they started out. For these people, their lives had been utterly transformed through their community education experience. By engaging in a creative facilitative process, they have been allowed to question the structures in society and the different power dynamics that exist. The analysis they have gained has empowered them to change their own lives but has also motivated them to change the inequalities that exist around them. This appreciation has led some to challenge institutions in relation to their own community needs, including the provision of housing and education:

*"We found that we had a lot in common, we were all living in private accommodation and we had the same landlord and the same landlord owned the two shops, but you couldn't complain because if you did you wouldn't have got out to the shop… it was like Brigadoon and the conditions were bad in some of the housing..we all wanted our own houses, we wanted somewhere for the wains to play, not the cars, there was no back gardens, so we all decided that this is not good enough." (*Community education participant, Raphoe Focus Group, February 2008)

"Years ago Travellers were put in a class with other Travellers, 18 or 19 of them.. that is pure discrimination.. never taught Irish.. when your education is taken away half of your life is taken away because you can't educate your children and you can't educate yourself, you can't get a job, you have to have paper, paper, paper a paper trail behind you before you can go on, but the community sector allows you, but it takes time… what falls down in a lot of agencies is that they think they can do it in a year or two." (Community education participant, Letterkenny Focus Group, February2008)

A desire for social justice is not exclusive to community education participants and many people who come through more formal education routes also hold this aspiration. However the desire for 'social justice' is often more acute for those who are aware of the inequalities that exist and of how their own life is affected by an unequal position in society.

The examples quoted above show how community education has worked with groups collectively to '*take part in decision-making and policy formation within the community*' and how investment in engaging excluded groups through face-to-face work, encouragement and group work processes has made it possible for those groups to participate. The provision of childcare has also been a crucial element to enable their participation. In this way, community educators in Donegal have been able to deliver '*education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness*'. (AONTAS)

In the focus groups we saw how participants of these kinds of programmes had gone on to do further education programmes (community and mainstream) and to employment as a result of their learning experience. Part of the delivery of this vision has been an appreciation that there are people in the community who are deeply marginalised and through links with other services, community groups *seek out* these people. While the limitation of

funding to the sector restricts this activity, a distinction is drawn between groups who target individuals on an ad-hoc basis and those who plan and allocate resources to the specific recruitment of excluded groups.

In the survey we saw that many groups used broad advertising approaches in the hope that this strategy would give everyone the same opportunity to participate. Despite this, many groups indicated that they had difficulty in engaging men, younger people, lone parents, people with low literacy levels and ethnic groups. Data from the focus groups show that those who had had a negative experience in the formal education system had been recruited exclusively through face-to-face work. Community education providers said that the networks and relationships that they had built up in the community helped them in supporting the involvement of these groups. Where there was a planned process in place for the engagement of marginalised groups, this outlook reflected organizational values. In all cases, (from focus group evidence) where this was happening, it was occurring on a small scale basis with a limited number of participants due to the resources that needed to be invested. In addition, some community groups would deliver specific programmes for 'excluded groups' alongside adult education provision such as computers or art.

8.2 Community education is 'in and of the community'

The research findings have shown that community education in Donegal is understood in a range of ways by different education providers in the county. In the focus groups, three broad approaches that are used in the sector were identified. The first approach identifies with a traditional teacher-participant relationship, with an additional emphasis on the programme being social, friendly and supportive. The second approach focuses on a facilitative process with the emphasis on personal outcomes and awareness of social issues. The third approach is based upon group-based action learning approach where the agenda is set by the participants. The third approach is delivered by a small number of providers. This approach has the most in common with the community education approach outlined in *Learning for Life* (White Paper on Adult Education, 2000) and with Freirian methodology.

At a voluntary and community level the provision of once-off courses, organised and delivered by voluntary committees, is responsive to the need for a social outcome as well as skill development and increased self-confidence in the individual. At another level in the voluntary and community sector, people see the need for skills that will benefit the community such as First Aid and Local History. These programmes offer very positive outcomes for community members and help build community.

The sector is making a key contribution in tackling isolation and loneliness in the community and this was named as a major issue in the focus groups with participants. People are being up-skilled and accessing further education provision as a result of their community education experience. More than anything else people are gaining confidence through their interactions with others and this is enabling them to '*reach their potential*', enhance their quality of life and access new

opportunities. Community groups have shown that the programmes they deliver are '*within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale*." (AONTAS 2000)

The emphasis on holistic educational outcomes comes across strongly from providers and participants. While many providers go to great lengths to offer accreditation on programmes, they also acknowledge that community education is about more than that. Participants also hold this view, and many emphasised the positive impacts that their community education experience has had on their family and relationships. It has also helped to build social networks, which contribute to social solidarity and cohesion.

> *"Women talk and men don't get involved in things the way women would do."*

education has led to a greater level of active citizenship'.

8.3 Responding to educational and structural disadvantage

An analysis of data from providers and participants reveals that all providers are bringing education opportunities out to the community with the expectation that people will '*be treated equally and without prejudice*'. However the evidence shows that community members do not take up educational opportunities equally due to a number of educational and structural issues.

Providers were able to demonstrate that they *are* conscious of the barriers facing individuals to taking part in programmes. Both providers and participants highlighted that '*low self-confidence*' was a real barrier to participation. Where participants had a background in education, this was not so much of an issue, but where participants were coming to community education following a long breaksince school or work, this was much more of a problem.

Many providers had gone some way in trying to overcome this situation. Through community networks they had gone to speak to people or phoned them to invite them to participate – this seems to have been extremely effective, with a large number of participants saying that this was the way that they got involved, despite feelings of apprehension. Other providers had also developed programmes for specific groups, for example older people or lone parents. In focus groups, participants said that this created a supportive environment because '*you were all in the one boat*'. Where these two approaches were married, it seemed to have the biggest impact in encouraging hesitant or disadvantaged learners.

In these cases, the advantages of having the community group as the deliverer of education came across strongly. Community groups have established committees that are trying to be representatives of community interests. This enables community organisations to have 'tentacles' that reach out into all parts of the community and engages them with diverse groups. Where community workers are employed, the relationships that they build up with people on the ground helps them to assess the needs of the community as well as support people to take part. In this way, in responding to educational and structural disadvantage, the community sector has a very important role in engaging the 'hard to reach' in a non-threatening and supportive environment.

As well as the issues mentioned above, providers were also conscious of "*keeping costs of courses down*"', a need for childcare provision, transport and social care. Through the focus groups we also learned from participants that these were real barriers for them and a number of women related how they would not have been there only for the provision of a childcare service while they were doing their programme. In addition, the researcher was informed that four women who intended to come to one of the focus groups were unable to do so because of the difficulty in making childcare arrangements (despite the provision of a childcare allowance). Participants and providers also highlighted the difficulties of people with disabilities, carers and older people taking part in programmes where social care provision is not made or when transport is not provided. While many provided free programmes, some providers did set a nominal fee for the programmes they delivered; their community knowledge and networks allowed for situations where this fee could be waived for people on limited incomes.

8.4 Taking part in decision making and policy formation within the community

As mentioned earlier, in all of the different types of education programmes in the community, many participants 'give back' to the community group by becoming a member of the committee or volunteering in their community group. In addition, some participants have gone on to organise and deliver their own adult education programmes in the community with the help of funding from the VEC Community Education Support Programme budget. In this way, participants are taking part in decision-making and policy formation within the community.

However, not all community education providers are delivering programmes with the direct intention of participants taking this kind of role. A minority of providers engage participants with this purpose and develop learning programmes with this specific aim in mind. One of the key differences that differentiates community education practice in Donegal from more 'Freirian' approaches is the limited use of facilitative learning approaches. Although there are a small group of providers who are using these approaches well, they do not seem to be used or understood by all providers, where traditional 'teacher', 'student' and 'classroom' models are used.

By undertaking this research, the Community Education Forum set out to explore community education practice in Donegal. They began with the view that community education is a process by which people can think and act to change society and build a more equal world. One Forum member commented "*giving people information and telling them things, that is not what radical community education is about, it's about enabling people and building humanity and compassion for each*

"We could do the drama because they were there to watch the children, but if they weren't getting paid for it, we couldn't have done what we had done, not a hope in hell."

other."

This research has shown that the majority of community education providers in the county do not hold this view. While the majority want to improve opportunities for people affected by marginalisation (through disability, unemployment etc.), they do not engage in a dialogical process with learners to achieve this. Most providers who were surveyed appeared to identify with a community-based adult education model rather than community education per se. Despite this, the feedback from participants shows that learners have had a very positive experience in *all* types of education provision. By taking part in a range of education programmes in the community, people have gained skills that have enabled them to enhance their personal, work and family lives and build community networks. The social aspect of provision, common to all education programmes in the community, appears to contribute greatly to these outcomes.

A smaller number of providers are delivering community education using facilitative processes, with the intention of enabling participants to take collective action or change local policies. Where this is taking place it has transformative effects. People who have been completely marginalised from the education system have been able to participate in community education programmes, and make significant changes to their own lives and the lives of those in their families and communities.

The process of bringing diverse members of the community together (rich and poor, men and women, different ethnic groups etc.) to allow community members to hear different perspectives and understand more about each other's lives, is also seen by the Community Education Forum as a goal for community education. Once again, this perspective of community education is not held generally by the community sector; nonetheless some education programmes in the community do end up having this outcome. However, facilitating learning groups to take action in response to inequalities in the community is the intention of just a small number of community groups.

Community education, in all its forms, makes a valuable contribution to individuals, families and communities in Donegal. In particular, the role that it plays in supporting the needs of marginalised and disadvantaged groups has been particularly emphasised. Given the distinct issues facing Donegal as a border county, with one of the highest levels of education disadvantage and unemployment in the country, there is a particular need for this type of education provision.

9.1 Promotion of community education methodologies in community based practice

In conversations with participants, community education was always discussed with reference to *the group* and the part that other group members played in the learning experience. This research has shown that community education opens doors for ordinary people and has remarkable impacts on the lives of the individual participants, their families and the wider community. The face-to-face approach used to recruit participants and the use of group work processes have been shown to be major factors in enabling participants to reach their potential and gain an ability to critically analyse the world around them. In addition, community education is a preferred access route for marginalised groups to more formal education systems, because of the emphasis on the supportive environment, understanding and analysis of the issues affecting the community and flexible timetables.

The survey results showed that all providers hope participants will gain individual and collective outcomes from community education. However, just under half of them hope that they will change or inform local policies (as community education theory would advocate). Where participants have been engaged in group processes that emphasise questioning and critical reflection, it has been shown that they gain an understanding of the factors that affect their lives and through this understanding are empowered and enabled to overcome barriers they face. The tutor plays a crucial role in allowing this dynamic to happen by engaging the group in a facilitative process and acknowledging that everyone's opinion is valid and has meaning. In this study, people have told stories about the transformative effects that community education has had on their lives and those around them.

Recommendations:

- Train and support tutors working in the community education sector to develop their understanding of social analysis and facilitation skills.
- Promote and develop understanding of community education methodologies in the statutory, voluntary and community sector as a tool for supporting the needs of marginalised groups in the community.
- Support community groups and volunteers to develop skills to use 'neighbourhood work' approaches and face-to-face work in the recruitment of people to community education.

8. Summary Analysis of Community Education Provision in Donegal

9.2 Funding for community education

The issue of funding was raised repeatedly in the survey and in focus groups with participants and providers. Participants noted that progression routes were being thwarted by a lack or withdrawal of funding and the funding of community education as a 'short term' measure was highlighted. While this method of funding sometimes suited voluntary organisations who were hosting 'social' or skills-development courses, it did not meet the needs of those who were trying to address issues of educational or structural disadvantage.

As the main available source of funding for community education is through the provision of funding aimed at 'once-off' programmes, VEC Community Education Support Programme in the county strongly reflects this trend. Where a community education programme is designed with more strategic goals (over a 2-3 year period) funding has come mainly from EU sources. For these groups, current funding sources are coming to an end, due to the ending of of the Peace II Programme and new funding routes have not yet been identified. EU funding sources account for the activities of eight projects in the sample, outlining the particular contribution community education is making to peace building as well as social inclusion objectives. The imminent loss of EU funding to the sector is going to result is a sizeable reduction in the amount of community education provision in the county.

Voluntary groups who did not have resources to fund a community worker were very unsure about where to look for funding. Groups who were resourced commented that they spent a lot of time seeking funding for community education and they were continually filling out application forms.

While government departments such as the Department of Education & Science and mainstream agencies such as FÁS have provided opportunities for community groups to develop strategic community education programmes, for example the 'Community Response Programme' (FÁS) and the community strand of BTEI, the availability of these programmes is extremely limited and featured only once in the sample of projects involved in this study (revealed in a focus group). In addition, no provision is made in these programmes for the face-to-face work, which in this study has been recognised as necessary to engage the most marginalized and educationally disadvantaged members of the community. In the survey results, two-thirds of community groups stated that the engagement of their target group was a key challenge for them.

Recommendations

- Agencies and providers should work together in a more cohesive way to look strategically at how community education funding can be used more effectively to meet the range of costs associated with the delivery of community education.
- Providers and agencies should develop a strategy to lobby for the enhancement of funding for community education in the county.
- Providers and agencies should consider the 'ethos' behind community education funding and identify clear indicators for community education provision.

9.3 Childcare and social care

The arguments for the provision of accessible, affordable childcare have been exposed clearly in this report. A minority of providers (in the survey and focus groups) felt that childcare provision was not a big issue for them; however, given the amount of attention this issue received in the focus groups, this would apprear to be due to a lack of awareness of the issue. In focus groups with participants, the issue of childcare was raised again and again as a barrier to the participation of women. For many, a childcare allowance was sufficient to support their participation; for others, the provision of a crèche or childcare service where they could leave their children was a more workable solution. While many community education providers reported holding classes when children are at school to try to accommodate participants, this is not a solution for parents who are working during the day in the home or outside, or for parents who have very young children.

Costs associated with the participation of people with disabilities, such as the need for social care and the costs associated with using accessible venues, were also emphasised in both the survey results and focus groups.

Recommendations

- Policy makers and funding bodies should recognise the provision of childcare and social care costs as an essential component of any community education programme that aims to engage with marginalised people.
- As part of a strategy to address childcare needs in the county, the provision of accessible, affordable, community-based childcare (including sessional childcare) to enable adults take part in ongoing education must to be addressed .
- Consideration should be given to an integrated 'family' approach to community education, where parents and children can engage in complementary programmes that are family-centred and consider the holistic needs of all family members.

9.4 *Inclusion of men in community education*

The results of the survey showed that a large majority of community education providers are concerned about, and unable to solve, the very limited participation by men in community education. This finding was from both people involved in broadly based education work in the community and in more specific community education programmes. In focus groups, reasons for this were attributed to the long history of women's involvement in community education and the cultural norms which surround this. Despite this, people felt that men could benefit from community education although only one project seemed to be actively targeting men specifically. Overall many programmes appeared to be targeted and aimed at women and not as much work appears to be taking place to actively engage men other than offering the 'once-off' male-oriented course such as woodwork or fishing.

At the same time questions were raised by some people about whether the need for community education was as great in the male population, due to gender dynamics and the availability of greater social networking opportunities for men. In a society where men are over-represented in political and public life, questions were raised about giving equal emphasis to the participation of men in community education. However, the research also recognised that many men are deeply marginalised at a community level and that the barriers facing them need to understood and addressed.

Recommendations:

- Real discourse needs to takes place in the community sector about the targeting of programmes for marginalised men, especially with reference to the changing role of men in society.
- Support the creation of a men's community education forum.

9.5 *Evaluation and Accreditation*

Overall, the community education sector in Donegal is diverse and vibrant. A clear outcome from the research is that one cannot be prescriptive about the outcomes that learners will achieve from a programme. People appear to have gained far more from their participation in the range of community education options available than would have been anticipated. People who have undertaken computer courses have built friendships in the community, shared local knowledge, become involved in the management committee on their community group and learned how to cut and paste! Women who have undertaken personal development programmes have reclaimed their power and become activists for social change. Women who have taken collective action have new houses and parents read to their children at night and help them with their homework. This process of change has not taken place as a result of an eight-week evening programme (although it often starts here). It comes about as a result of years of interventions, the building of relationships and ongoing programmes by community groups and through the on-going efforts of voluntary committees.

Given the nature and unpredictable outcomes of people's involvement in community education as outlined above, it is difficult to evaluate progress using the current systems. At the moment most providers evaluate using an end-of-course evaluation form, despite their belief that it does not meet their needs. However, they also use additional ways of assessing the value of a programme, including monitoring attendance, observing sessions and participant 'call-backs'. Silence from participants was also recognised as a sign that things might not be going well.

In Donegal, the route people take in community education is not linear – people in community education often move out into other programmes. They tend to move round between the various programmes that are provided locally by the community, VEC or other provider. In the focus groups there were many people who stayed with the community group throughout or who came back to the original community group following learning experiences elsewhere. While current evaluation methods are unable to record this dynamic, they also fail to capture what people gained from a programme. Many participants and providers commented that people often do not see the value of their learning until some time after a programme has finished.

The relative importance of providing accredited programmes is weighted differently across the sector. Responding to needs in the community, maintaining the 'social' element of community education and holistic outcomes are perceived by many providers as being of more importance than providing accredited programmes. In addition, some providers felt that 'accreditation' sometimes has the impact of 'putting off' people who are educationally disadvantaged or who have left school early. Providers also expressed the view that many of the accredited programmes available do not meet the needs of their participants and that the cost of delivering accredited programmes is prohibitive. However many participants, while acknowledging the value of beginning with non-accredited programmes, did express a wish to move on to programmes carry certification.

Recommendations:

- Funding for community education needs to include the provision of resources for realistic planning processes and evaluation, which will include all of the stakeholders (providers, facilitators and learners)
- Current evaluation methods for short term programmes need to be reviewed and amended
- Qualitative evaluation methods are needed for assessing individual and collective outcomes. Any evaluation process needs to consider the contribution made by facilitators in terms of the methods used. This process needs to take into consideration that trial and error is also part of a facilitative approach.
- Flexibility around accreditation options needs to be maintained and built into all community education provision. While community education has holistic goals, it must also recognise the desire of some learners to gain accreditation

9.6 Greater collaboration in the Community Education sector

In Donegal, there is a high level of activity in the community education sector but on the whole groups tend to work in isolation from each other. One contributor said that *'we make barriers between ourselves'* by not looking at how we could develop community education provision between '*parishes*'. While one of the strengths of community education is that it is locally-based, and this is

especially important in Donegal given its weak public transport infrastructure, there may be opportunities arising from greater sectoral collaboration. Issues were raised about groups not being able to fill programmes that were more 'unusual' but responded to the needs of a specific group. In addition, very similar programmes are being run in close proximity to one another.

Recommendations:

- Ways of improving collaboration within the community education sector itself should be explored
- Strengthening of relationships between the community education sector and other sectors should be explored

The community education process is under-pinned by a commitment to the principles of social justice and equality. Therefore the goal of community education is the equal participation of learners in the education group and in wider society.

This model for community education has been developed by drawing on the research findings of "Community Education & Social Change" which names the characteristics of community education and identifies what 'works well' in community education practice. While it is acknowledged that a wide range of factors can impact on the delivery and outcomes of community education, this model outlines *seven* key steps that community education providers and facilitators can take to build community education programmes for social change.

1. Seek out your participants

Community education responds to the needs of those who are marginalised from formal education opportunities and those affected by poverty, oppression and exclusion. Enabling these groups to come together to share their experiences as part of a learning process is one way of enabling participants to break out of that cycle.

Those who are most marginalised do not tend to respond to public advertisements. One of the core strengths of community education is that providers in the community can reach out to people and actively try to engage them.

Providers …

- Liaise with people in your community who work with people – public health nurses, community Gardai, voluntary organisations etc. to assist you in identifying potential participants

9. Implications for the sector

- Build relationships with individuals who have knowledge of people in their area and can make 'introductions' for you

2. Get to know potential participants

Getting to know your potential participants, listening to them and building trusting relationships ensures people's interest and puts the learner at the centre of the process. If people are uncertain about what they could get out of a community education process or how it might benefit them, give them information and encourage them.Participants with previous negative education experiences are much more likely to respond to face-to-face contact.

Providers …

- Do neighbourhood work, knock on doors and go to where people are
- Meet people and listen to them
- Bring people together around the kitchen table or the pool table
- Talk to people on a one-to-one basis and in small groups
- Give and take – try to establish trusting relationships

3. Put supports in place to address the overall needs of learners[9]

The findings of "Community Education & Social Change" clearly outline that learners are often faced with barriers like childcare, transport and social care. In addition low self-confidence and low self-esteem are real issues for people returning to education.

Providers …

- Identify barriers facing learners from returning to education and try to address these. e.g. childcare, social care etc.
- Give consideration to the family, not just the individual
- If anyone leaves the group, find out why and make changes to support their return if it is appropriate
- Appoint tutors who can use a facilitative approach and ensure that they:

✦ Are aware of literacy needs of learners and can adapt to these needs; tutors should also be aware of specialist services
✦ Make the programme enjoyable and sociable
✦ Set up an environment where learners are encouraged to support each other
✦ Understand the power dynamics at work inside and outside of the group

4. Start with 'lived experience'

Allowing participants to share their own experiences and listen to each other allows learners to participate equally in the community education process and build self-esteem. Through group work and sharing, as well as through inputs from the facilitator, learners will be able to influence the direction of the programme.

Facilitators …

- Keep the approach informal
- Share experiences and allow the group to build trust
- Listen to participants' needs and allow this to direct the programme
- Introduce 'taster' learning sessions
- Facilitate and encourage collective learning

5. Converse, question and debate: Develop critical thinking

Community education participants are not '*empty vessels*', they come to the table with a vast amount of knowledge and understanding from their own lived experiences. People can learn from listening to each other and valuing each others' experiences. Allowing participants to discuss common concerns can help them to understand and come to terms with the issues they face in their everyday lives.

Facilitators …

- Encourage questioning, debate and discussion
- Create a safe environment where people can challenge each other
- Enable different perspectives on a topic

to be heard from inside and outside the group
- Allow participants to direct the learning process

6. *Take action and effect change*

It may not suit people who are alienated from the formal education system, to undertake learning in the traditional 'school' way. The community education approach values people's personal experiences and allows participants to share the learning they have gained from life's experiences. Creating opportunities for participants to use this knowledge to effect change for themselves or their communities distinguishes community education from other adult education approaches.

Facilitators ....

- Support the group to take action to respond to issues they are interested in
- Start with small manageable actions
- Facilitate the group to set goals and support them to reach these goals
- Support the group to find the information they need to help them reach their goal

7. Celebrate and evaluate

The more people learn, the more informed they will become about their own learning needs, the possibilities of learning and their own and the group's future direction. Building evaluation and review activities into community education work will enhance the learning outcomes for all concerned and allow learners to influence the community education process.

Facilitators ...

- Before you begin, agree with the group how the programme will be delivered and evaluated
- At regular times during the process encourage learners to 'look back' and review the work they have done
- Celebrate achievements together
- Facilitate the group to consider and decide upon the 'next step'

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Research objectives as outlined in the terms of reference

Background:

Community Education is education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change,

challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community. It is distinct from general adult education provision, due both to its ethos and to the methodologies it employs. (AONTAS 2000)

Some groups organise with the intention of developing a social justice response. Other groups come together in the community to learn a skill or engage in an activity. While not initially intended, this may result in a similar outcome.

A range of organisations involved in Community Education in Donegal have been meeting with the aim of recognizing, promoting and advocating Community Education and its resourcing in the county. As part of this work they have identified a need for research to explore the current nature of Community Education in the county.

The aims of the Research are ...

1. To highlight elements of 'good practice' and name the elements that contribute to good community education practice
2. To engage with Community Education providers and Community Education participants in 20 different community education settings. It will concentrate on participants who are currently and formerly engaged in community education.
3. To explore the relationship between community education and community development
4. To identify the outcomes from community education
5. Carry out a content analysis of courses on offer in the 20 Community Education Settings
6. Carry out a short literary review to set the context for the research

Research Objectives

The consultant will engage with community education providers to …

1. Explore how organisers perceive their role
2. Explore the role of the management committee in the direction of the project
3. Explore how community education respond to poverty, unemployment and other equality issues such as ethnicity and gender
4. Explore how participants are targeted
5. Explore how courses are decided upon by the course organisers
6. Explore the barriers to community education
7. Explore the motivations/intentions of course organisers
8. Explore how tutors/facilitators are targeted
9. Explore the issues that influence their choice of tutor/facilitator
10. Explore the challenges in providing good community education
11. Explore the outcomes of community education
12. Explore who is not accessing community education
13. Explore issues of accreditation
14. Explore issues around funding

The research will engage with community education participants to …

15. Explore reasons why people access community education
16. Explore how community education responds to poverty, unemployment and other equality issues such as ethnicity and gender
17. To consider the education status and background of participants
18. Explore the relationship between community development and community education
19. Explore participant outcomes
20. Explore how organisers 'intentions' are perceived by course participants
21. Explore issues of accreditation

Research Outcomes

- The research will provide an analysis of the nature of community education in the county by using the Aontas 2000 definition of Community Education as its benchmark.
- The research will highlight good practice and name the elements that contribute to this
- The research will highlight the barriers and obstacles faced by the participants and organisers in the community education sector
- The research will act as a 'guiding' document for organisations and agencies involved in the community education sector
- The document produced will highlight the funding and policy implications for the sector

Copy of community education survey

Qualitative Survey for Community education Providers

Donegal VEC and a range of Community education stakeholders are investigating the extent and range of community education taking place in the county. The purpose of the research is to highlight good practice and highlight the barriers and obstacles faced by community education providers. It is hoped that the final document will be useful to providers, community education funders and policy makers.

Claire Galligan, a social research consultant has been contracted to carry out the research. The research will take place in two phases. Stage one is a qualitative questionnaire. Stage two will be carried out by hosting six focus groups with community educa-

tion organisers and participants in the county.

We would very much appreciate, if you could take some time to complete this questionnaire. We are very interested in the range of community education taking place and we would like to hear your 'story'.

For administrative purposes we are asking you to identify your group on the questionnaire and provide contact details. However, **no groups will be identified, in relation to the findings, in the final research document.** The only person to view the questionnaire will be the research consultant.

The questionnaire is divided into six sections:

A. General details
B. Targeting
C. Accreditation
D. Tutors
E. Funding
F. Summary

You will have an opportunity at the end of the survey to name any issue that you feel may not have been addressed in the questionnaire.

You can return the questionnaire via email or mail by **FRIDAY DECEMBER 7th 2007** to Claire Galligan, Social Research

A. General Details:

Please write answers in the boxes provided

Name of your organisation:

Contact Name:

Contact address:

Contact phone number:

Contact email address:

Website Address:

1. Is your organisation involved in providing COMMUNITY EDUCATION?

Yes ❑ No ❑

2. Over the past year, can you estimate how many people have taken part in your community education programme? (PLEASE TICK ONE)

❑ 0-25 people ❑ 26-50 people
❑ 51-75 people
❑ 76-100 people ❑ 101-300 people
❑ 301+

3. Overall, please describe your main reason for providing a community education programme?

4. What is important to you when deciding on the community education programme that you deliver? (PLEASE CIRCLE)

(i) Courses that offer accreditation (certificate)

Of no importance 1 2 3 4 5 6 Of great importance

(ii) Courses that are requested by the target group

10. A community education model for social change

Of no importance 1 2 3
4 5 6 Of great importance

(iv) Courses that respond to an identified need in the community
Of no importance 1 2 3
4 5 6 Of great importance

(v) Courses that are popular
Of no importance 1 2 3
4 5 6 Of great importance

5. Please outline examples of community education activities/courses you have provided in <u>the last year</u> (MAXIMUM OF 4):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

6. Have you tried to address any issues in the *community* through your community education programmes?
Yes ❑ No ❑

If yes, what were these issues?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

B. TARGETING

7. Over the past year have you actively targetted specific people to take part in your community education programmes?

Yes ❑ No ❑ **(if you ticked no go to question 11)**

8. Over the past year, to what extent have you come up against any of the following issues when trying to target/recruit people? (PLEASE CIRCLE)

(i) *Need for transport/childcare for participants*
To no extent 1 2 3 4
5 6 To a very large extent

(ii) Need for extra resources to target people
To no extent 1 2 3 4
5 6 To a very large extent

(iii) People are not informed or do not understand community education
To no extent 1 2 3 4
5 6 To a very large extent

Any other issue not named above:

_____
_____
_____

9. Over the past year, what groups have you <u>actively</u> targetted?(PLEASE TICK)

1 Men ❑
2 Women ❑
3 Young People ❑
4 Older people ❑

5 Early school leavers ❑

6 Unemployed ❑

7 People from different ethnic groups ❑

8 People with disabilities ❑

9 Other, please specify _____

_____

_____

10.Are there any groups which you find difficult to attract onto your community education programme?

Yes ❑ No ❑

If yes, who are these groups?

_____

_____

_____

_____

11.How do you go about getting people onto the community education courses that you run? PLEASE TICK

1 Notice/add in a newspaper ❑

2 Posters in public areas ❑

3 Door to door calls ❑

4 Neighbourhood work ❑

5 Phone calls to possible interested parties ❑

6 Community Newsletter ❑

7 Word of mouth ❑

8 Email details around ❑

9 Other (please state)

[9] Also see appendix 2

C. ACCREDITATION

12. Do you offer *accreditation* (i.e. a certificate awarded by an external agency) for the courses that you offer - please tick the one that most applies

We offer accreditation on all courses ❑

We offer accreditation on half of the courses we run ❑

We offer accreditation on a third of the courses we run ❑

We don't offer accreditation ❑

13. How are your courses accredited? please tick the answers that apply.

1 Not applicable ❑

2 FETAC ❑

3 HETAC ❑

4 Third level college certificate ❑

5 OCN (open college network) ❑

6 Other ❑

If 'other' please specify:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. How important is it to your organisation to offer accreditation for the courses you deliver? (PLEASE CIRCLE)

Of no importance 1 2 3 4 5 6 Of great importance

15. Do you face any barriers in providing accredited courses? (PLEASE CIRCLE)

Yes?

No? (if you ticked no go to question 17)

16. To what extent are the following issues a barrier in providing accredited courses?

(PLEASE CIRCLE)

(i) Accredited courses out there do not respond to our needs

To no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 To a great extent

(ii) We do not have the resources to develop good accredited courses

Bibliography

To no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 To a great extent

(iii) Lack of good tutors to deliver accredited courses
To no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 To a great extent

(iv) Lack of funding to deliver accredited courses
To no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 To a great extent

D. TUTORS

17. How do you find tutors for the community education programme you provide?

From the list below (PLEASE TICK 3 THAT MOST APPLY)

		TICK 3 ONLY
1	A member of staff usually delivers the course	❑
2	We are recommended tutors from other groups	❑
3	We advertise for the specific tutor	❑
4	We draw from our database of tutors	❑
5	We are recommended tutors by the VEC	❑
6	Personal Experience of a tutor	❑
7	Other, please specify	

18. What three things do you most look for in a tutor?

1.
2.
3.

E. FUNDING

19. Over the past year, what has been your main source of funding to support you in your community education courses/activities

1	CDP funding	❑
2	FRC funding	❑
3	FAS funding	❑
4	VEC community education grants	❑
5	One off grants (not the VEC)	❑
6	Peace 2 funding	❑
7	Other funding	❑
8	No funding, participants pay	❑

If 'other funding' please specify

_____

_____

_____

_____

20. Over the past year, has your funding allowed you to … (PLEASE TICK√)

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
1. Provide a room for delivering community education	❑	❑	❑
2. Provide staff to organise community education	❑	❑	❑
3. Provide travel/childcare to participants	❑	❑	❑
4. Actively target individuals to take part	❑	❑	❑
5. Provide an external tutor to deliver community education	❑	❑	❑
6. Develop courses that suit your needs	❑	❑	❑
7. Other, please specify:	❑	❑	❑

If you answered **NO** to any of the above, please outline how the issue was dealt with

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

F. SUMMARY

21. Overall, what are the three main challenges that you face when trying to provide community education?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

_____

Appendix 1

22. Overall, what do you hope participants will gain out of community education?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

23. Any other comments you would like to make about community education?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

THANKYOU FOR TAKING TIME TO FILL OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE
RETURN TO:
Claire Galligan, Social Research

The second phase of this research will involve:
a) Interviews with a staff member or volunteer responsible for community education in community organisations
b) Focus groups with community education participants

If your organisation would be willing to take part in this phase of the research please tick the box. This is not a formal commitment.

Equality Framework for community education

Sample template for combining the equality framework with community education. From Kavanagh, Maureen, *The role of adult and community education in promoting equality in education :Flexible and Friendly'* For the Bray Partnership Conference on Equality and Education: Across the Spectrum of Lifelong learning. 4th October 2007

Appendix 2

Issues identified by providers as barriers to community education

Lack of resources

1) Not having staff to co-ordinate a programme
2) Providing adequate support for participants when they are onboard.
3) Transport, childcare and materials
4) Lack of adequate funding, lack of accessible venue
5) Accessing and engaging the target group
6) Funding funding funding
7) Lack of childcare
8) Funding and maintaining numbers
9) Transport to education venues
10) Cost of accredited courses – no funding available
11) Lack of resources – space, staff and running costs
12) Now that our funding is finished it is securing funding
13) Lack of resources for transport/childcare/eldercare
14) External supports are also essential and must provide supporting the necessary funds
15) Lack of affordable accessible venues and/or resources to hire same
16) Good venues and finance.
17) Resources and the whole process of accreditation is currently not an option for the network given our limited number of staff for such a broad geographical area
18) Financial & human resources – especially when trying to support marginalized women. Personal assistant costs for women who require this level of support to participate.
19) Lack of accessible affordable childcare provision in conjunction with an accessible warm & welcoming venue
20) Funding.
21) Funding for course, childcare costs and travel
22) Long term funding
23) Value for money
24) Premises suitable to run the course.
25) Funding
26) Lack of administrative support in house.
27) No childcare to support training.
28) Venue that is suitable for activities/admin support planning and delivering funding issues.
29) Premises which are accessible and big enough.
30) Funding for accreditation
31) Funding funding and funding
32) Finding suitable accommodation for a class - issues around caretaking etc.
33) General marketing is always an issue around budgets / effectiveness
34) Transport.
35) Childcare/eldercare
36) Sourcing funding
37) Funding
38) Having to draw funding from different funders
39) Lack of staff to coordinate the courses, issues within our own group
40) The need for funders to see the value of social courses in the development of the individual and the community

Reaching and engaging target groups.

1) Sourcing participants.
2) Making people realise that community development skills are very relevant to everyone, not just local activists
3) Building up of confidence of the participants to enable them to participate
4) Participants sometimes difficult to source
5) Support from the community when courses are tailored to meet their needs
6) Hard to get people involved to organise community education time
7) Targeting participants
8) Apathy amongst protestant denominations to engage in community development
9) Lack of awareness of one's ability to improve community life
10) Lack of the word community in their vocabulary
11) Funding to enable excluded people to participate
12) Persuading participants to do accredited courses
13) We would need a full-time development worker to encourage our more disadvantaged members of target groups to participate in our community education programme.
14) Getting the appropriate people involved and engaged.
15) Consistency from potential participants, trying to hit the target group (men) and organising the perfect day and time to suit potential participants.
16) Ensuring an open access to courses and childcare for participants and organisers
17) Getting enough people to come forward for ten per class
18) Fear of accessing a facility in the community for the first time.
19) Motivating people and networking.
20) Getting in touch with those most in need
21) Getting sufficient numbers to provide a course
22) People think the courses might be difficult. Afraid they won't enjoy the classes
23) Apathy
24) Sourcing participants for planned courses.

Accessing Suitable Tutors

1) Lack of tutors
2) Access to skilled community education tutors for rural and outreach education
3) Tutors or people who can facilitate the learning of others, learning for life and social issues
4) Good facilitators are key in the delivery of community education. It can be very difficult at times to access women in the north west region with the expertise required
5) Securing a tutor
6) Good tutors
7) Accessing tutors for different identified courses.

Meeting Participant needs

1) Trying to satisfy everyone
2) Suitable course for all,
3) The main concern has to be that the programmes deliver what they are intended to do;
4) To offer access to continuing education to communities and populations who have traditionally been denied such access.
5) To identify courses which we believe are best tailored to the specific interests of people in our locality
6) Correct topic for course
7) Finding out exactly what people want
8) Time to do it right including the time to support participants

Information

1) Knowing where to access funding and tutors.
2) Information about what is available
3) Local co-ordination of complimentary provision
4) Provide tutor,
5) Database of good tutors
6) Finding a tutor to deliver a course
7) Hard to decide on a course.

Other

1) Tutors who do not wish to be paid through official funding.
2) Good practice models.
3) Lack of accredited training
4) Distance
5) Administration and reporting

Courses that participants (in focus groups) had undertaken

Primary Health Care
Legal studies FETAC level 5
Community Development
Art
Computers
Neighbourhood Work
Listening Course

Irish
English
Crafts
Sign Language
Digital Photography
Card Making
Personal Development
Older Persons Computer Programme
Steps – Programme For Lone Parents
Women's Back To Work Programmes
Women's Enterprise Training
Swimming
Creative Writing
Counselling
ECDL And ECDL Advanced
Occupational First Aid
History

Appendix 2

Framework	Respect and Recognition	Love, Care, Solidarity	Resources	Power	Working & Learning
Learning centre	What do you know about the Learner's experiences, values?	Do you understand how difficult it is to return to learning	How can you make the room friendly? What can you spend?	Who controls Resources? Can you influence them?	Does centre look inviting? Is it warm? Is centre accessible?
Learning Environment	How is room set out? Is it like a school room?	Is learner made welcome? Is learner encouraged to participate?	Look at lighting, furniture, materials. Is tea/coffee available?	Who decides how room is set up?	Would like to learn here?
Curriculum	Are the experiences of the learner taken into account? Is difference looked at?	Are the learners need understood? Is emotional learning valued?	Are the materials user friendly? Are they relevant to learner? Is there one for every learner? Do they cost anything?	Who decides the content? Do the learners have a say? Who decides what type of course?	Does the course enable question-ing? What type of learning is most valued?
Educator/ Tutor	Do they understand community education processes? Have they empathy with different groups?	Do they understand difference and value it?	What skills/ knowledge beyond the subject skill do they have?	Do they understand power in the learning set-ting? Do they facilitate learning?	Are they inclusive of experience as a learning tool? Is learning related to the experiences in the group?
Supports	How is the learner targeted? Advertisement or outreach?	Are the barriers that learners face understood?	What is in place as support-childcare, learning etc	How is the decision on support made?	Do the supports work? Is evaluation used?

(Kavanagh 2007)

Appendix 3

Appendix 4