

THE STORY OF MOUNT CARMEL

Primary Theme: Engagement Strategies with SICAP Target Groups/Communities

Context: Westmeath LCDC included Mount Carmel estate as part of the emerging needs category along with other local authority areas chosen which formed, *Action 1 “pre-development in rural areas”* of the Westmeath SICAP plan under Goal 1. The area is located on the right hand side off the Dublin road as you leave Moate going to Dublin. It comprises mainly families and includes 42 houses. It was built between 1979/1980.



Entrance to Mount Carmel Drive



Old Teagasc building at top of estate- a work in progress

DESCRIPTION OF WHAT WAS DONE AND HOW

On a rainy March morning in 2018, SICAP staff met with a representative of the estate in Moate Action group. The reason for the meeting was to explain what SICAP was about and to find out what the best time was to do a door knock in the area. From the very beginning Westmeath Community Development took the approach that including community views on everything was crucial, if we were to make any progress in the area. The representative was sure that he could ask 3 people that live in the estate to come with us on the door knock and suggested the best time to do it was about 6pm in the evening.

The following week on the 12th March, 3 staff from WCD visited Mount Carmel and was met by 3 volunteers. The 3 teams of 2 visited every house with the purpose of finding out the following:

- 1) Would residents be willing to come along to a community meeting
- 2) The purpose of the meeting was to find out what the needs were in the area
- 3) What time and day suited best to organise this and preferred venue

The day and time picked to organise the meeting was the most popular choice from the residents. A letter was subsequently drafted and delivered by the local TUS worker to each house thanking people for their time on the door steps and letting them know when the meeting would take place, Tuesdays at 6.30pm seemed the preferred choice.

One challenge in the area was there was no community facility that the community had easy access to near the estate. Based on recommendations from the 3 volunteers, WCD approached the Carmelite centre and secured a meeting room, which was paid for through SICAP.

The following week WCD set out for the unknown as there was no way of knowing if people would turn up. We had decided to invite residents from another SICAP area on the same night, as they were a neighbouring estate and residents from both knew each other well.

Staff were waiting and the door just kept opening with more and more people turning up for the meeting. After the initial introduction's we had to split the meeting into 2 meeting rooms as the numbers were so large, with 17 people from Mount Carmel attending and 13 from the other area. We were very surprised at such a large turn out and this was looking good.!

However, residents from Mount Carmel were very angry, not with us, but with the fact they felt they had been forgotten about for years by the council. We explained that we had been asked to help the area, but in order to do this we needed to get as many residents views and opinions as possible and explained about a needs analysis. Residents agreed with this suggestion and agreed to have an input to a draft questionnaire.(A sample one used was taken from the community development toolkit recently approved). A further meeting was organised for the following week to agree on the questionnaire. Just when we thought everything was going well on the 1st night, the chairperson decided to announce his resignation. This was a shock.

He maintained he had done the job for 22 years and wanted to hang up his boots and let someone else take the lead. Despite this, others that were in attendance agreed to come back the following week, however there was no guarantee they would and this was a worry.

At the second meeting, 15 Residents attended and had an input into the draft questionnaire and it was clear, even though the chairperson had resigned, there were a few other emerging leaders in the area. The questionnaire was re-drafted based on resident's suggestions. One question they wanted taken out was "What do you like best about your area". This was interesting. When asked why they wanted this removed the reply was "there is nothing good in Mount Carmel". This question was removed and another covering letter was designed to accompany the questionnaire and both were delivered to each house in the area by volunteer attendees at the meeting. A return date to WCD was set for the 9th April. The response rate was good at 45% and staff in WCD analysed the answers and a further meeting was planned for 24th April to feed back to the community. Again a letter was drafted and delivered to everyone's house to let them know what was happening.

A SCOT analysis exercise was also conducted on the 24th April to help the residents in a group setting listen to other views. Another reason for this was to try and gauge from the residents what strengths existed in the area as they had wanted a particular question removed from the questionnaire. From the information gathered a draft plan for the area was proposed with 6 actions deemed a priority: This plan was presented to a wider community meeting on 8th May and agreed. Action 7 was added in January 2019 when the plan was reviewed.

No	Action	Progress to date
1	Improve Estate Management	SICAP grants have supported community to improve environmental look of area, tools , flowers, shrubs, stimmers etc.
2	Reduce anti social behaviour	Meeting held with gardai Gardai attended community meeting Meeting with family causing the problem
3	Road Safety in estate	Issues brought through the PPN process
4	Health and safety in estate	Issues brought through the PPN process
5	Strengthen Residents Association	AGM organised and held Regular meetings taking place Training workshops organised and held
6	Activities for teenagers/children	Young people's views sought MT with Youth Work Ireland Midlands Application for Leader in process for amenity park
7 (2019)	Fundraising	Indoor markets, Rock and roll bingo, quiz nights- Ongoing- very successful with about €4k raised so far

There have been 27 interventions in 2018 and 70 so far in 2019.

OUTCOMES UNDER THE HORIZONTAL THEMES OF THE PROGRAMME

One notable achievement is that the group have stayed together and have been very active over the period 2018/2019.

Promoting an Equality Framework

- Residents Committee consists of 2 male and 5 female and all members of the community are provided with ongoing information and invited to get involved.
- Group organised a Christmas party for the children and a recent sports events for all
- Training needs analysis was carried out inviting all members of the area to participate
- The members have also engaged in various training workshops such as
 - Committee skills, Funding workshops, Media skills
 - Information about drugs, Community wellness workshops and volunteering
 - Employment skills, linking with SICAP goal 2
- The group have linked with other groups in Moate and therefore feel more included and valued in the wider Moate community.

Applying Community Development Principles

- WCD from the very beginning began the work using CD principles, being guided by the voice of the community
- Group have consulted with the young people themselves in the estate to find out what they would like to see happening .
- Group organise regular community meetings to keep others informed and all members are invited to attend
- Group have recently set up a Facebook page to keep people informed about what is happening.
- All members of the community had the opportunity to participate in the survey and attend meetings and agree on the Action Plan.
- AGM was held in 2019 and other members of the community had the opportunity to put themselves forward for the committee

Developing Collaborative Approaches

- Availed of SICAP funding in 2018 and 2019 to assist with small projects in their estate such as buying tools, shrubs, flowers, xmas party and ground works for a new shed.
- Also availed of Community Enhancement funding from Westmeath County Council for computer equipment and a storage shed.
- Group have met with Garda in Moate to try and find solutions to the anti -social behaviour occurring in the estate.
- Group have met with Youth Work Ireland Midlands in relation to trying to get services for young people in the area.

- Group joined the PPN in 2018 and made a submission to the 2019 budget estimates highlighting some of the issues in their estate that require funding from the council. Some of these issues are being dealt with in 2020.
- Group have applied for Leader funding to develop a section of green space in their area into an amenity park for young people and older people. The planning permission for this project has just been granted.
- Due to the matching funding need for Leader funding they have showed their entrepreneurial skills by organising various fund raising events, such as rock and roll bingo, quiz nights and the very successful 3rd indoor market has just taken place.
- They have liaised with their local councillors and invite them to attend local meetings
- Group won a Westmeath County Council Caoithleachs award in 2019 for voluntary effort. This really empowered the members.

SICAP CONTRIBUTION

The main SICAP contribution included the paid staff who have worked with the community since 2018. Initially this involved the expertise of the Community Development Co-ordinator and a development worker. Their role was to support and develop this community to come together, develop an action plan and support the community to have their issues addressed.

Both staff involved have a wide variety of experience, skills and expertise with the Co-ordinator having over 22 years' experience in the community sector. Skills include research, facilitation, conflict resolution, action planning, sourcing funding, people skills, delivering Workshops etc. As work began progressing the Co-ordinator was able to take a step back and the development worker has remained working with the group.

Mount Carmel also availed of 2 €1,500 SICAP grants and been supported to apply for other funding such the Community Enhancement and Leader. The group successfully leveraged €4,730 from the former over 2018/2019 and an application for €75,000 is underway through the latter. Members had no experience of applying for funding previously and the learning has been extremely valuable in terms of how to write a funding application and how to account for the monies received.

The training workshops were also delivered by SICAP staff or paid for out of SICAP funds. The information workshops were organised by SICAP staff through their knowledge of agencies working on the ground using the Volunteer centre and Midlands Regional Drugs and Alcohol Taskforce. The link between Goal 1 and 2 was very successful as residents living in the area looking for training, education or help with a job, could access information in their local area and knew who to contact as outreach clinics were also provided in the Carmelite centre.

TESTIMONIALS FROM RESIDENTS REGARDING SICAP SUPPORTS

"Hi Caroline, I hope you are well. I'm just sending you a quick email to let you know how much your help and the very much appreciated help from SICAP, has benefited Mount Carmel drive. With the encouragement from Linda Jo and yourself from Westmeath Community Development I took on the role of Chairperson for Mount Carmel drive.

Myself and the other committee members decided we would like to build a playground for our children and grandchildren to enjoy and also include an area for the adults and older generation living in Mount Carmel. For the past year and a half we, with the help of Caroline have worked tirelessly fundraising and campaigning to achieve our goal.

Through the huge help from SICAP to date we have been able to run 3 indoor markets, provide ourselves with our own burrka for making teas and coffee. We bought a lawnmower, strimmers, had groundwork put in for our new storage shed. We are in the process of buying wheelbarrows and more gardening supplies. All of which will help us keep our environment clean and safe and healthy for our residents to live in.

Through Linda Jo and yourself Caroline you have helped us come a long way. Please God I hope ye continue to work with us in the future and also that we can continue to avail of the great help SICAP offers us.

I'd like to take this opportunity to convey on behalf of myself and the rest of our committee a heartfelt massive thank you for all your help from Westmeath Community Development and SICAP. Especially to you Caroline, you've worked very closely with us all over the last year and a half. You gave me great encouragement at times when I felt like quitting.

*Again thank you
Fondest regards
Mary Greally Chairperson "*

"I just wanted to say that I am delighted that SICAP is helping our community. We just had a really great sports day where the whole community came together and the kids and adults all enjoyed it. Since SICAP and Caroline along with our committee came on board there have been great improvements with a new shed, hanging baskets and if there's any issues the committee have been great to go to help sort it all out. also I'm delighted that our community will have a new playground picnic area for residents. From chatting with other residents the majority are happy with all the improvements. Hopefully SICAP will continue to support our community.

Thanks. Louise"

ANALYSIS OF OBSTACLES, CHALLENGES AND FAILURES

The word failure does not really fit with the ethos of Westmeath Community Development because over our long history if an approach or strategy does not work, then we go back to the drawing board and creative thinking to try something else. In the case of Mount Carmel it is great to be able to say there are **NO** failures only continuous success and growth. However, the journey was not without obstacles with the mains ones listed below.

The 1st obstacle encountered was the lack of a community facility in the estate to hold meetings. Luckily the Carmelite centre agreed to rent a room and SICAP have funded the cost since 2018. Without this support the group would have had nowhere to meet as they had no funds to pay. There is no option closer to gain access to a community house.

The 2nd obstacle was the anger from the people against Westmeath County Council on the 1st meeting. It took a lot of skill on behalf of staff over a period of time to diffuse the anger and support people to think in a more positive way about the council. Inviting local elected representatives to meetings has assisted in breaking down the barriers.

The 3rd obstacle is lack of funding as whilst the group have put their issues that require attention through the PPN process, Westmeath County Council only have a certain budget and it is not possible for them to fund everything Mount Carmel require in one year. However, it has also helped Mount Carmel residents understand a little better of how things work which has also assisted in reducing the frustration.

A challenge for the future is keeping the group going and sustaining it. At present the good progress on the Leader project for the amenity area is keeping people motivated. However, it also involves a lot of voluntary work, fundraising to match funds required for the Leader grant. There is only so much time people can give and the danger is always that people burn out as they all have busy lives with work and family.

It is disappointing that Youth Work Ireland Midlands do not have resources to run youth work in the area and the level of volunteering required is not attractive for residents to take this on.

STORY IN PICTURES



Caroline Lawlor, WCD with Mary Greally Chairperson, Annie Fox and Marie Fleming Residents Group May 2019



Examples of flowers sown with SICAP Grant



PPN issues committed to be resolved



Planning Permission finally granted for Playground (leader project)



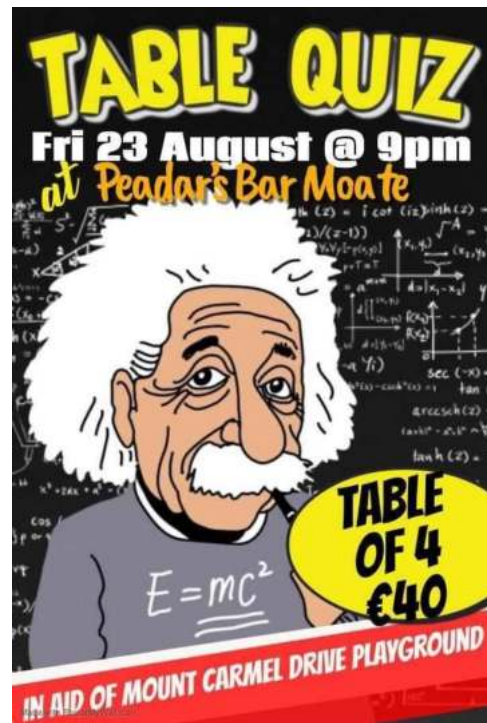
Indoor Market advertising



Indoor Market- example of stall



Indoor Market - Ariel View



Fundraiser for Mt Carmel Playground

LEARNING

What is clear, the support from SICAP has been crucial to the success of the achievements in Mount Carmel . Using the horizontal themes as a guide to form the work has proved useful and resulted in many positive outcomes as highlighted above. In addition paying for a venue for the community to meet was crucial to success.

This case study has demonstrated that actively engaging with the community at ground level on the doorsteps works, despite the fact it is time consuming and requires adequate resources.

At every step from the onset the community were informed by a letter in each house what was happening and invited to meetings.

It is important for the committee to meet and do their business but equally important to feed back to the wider community, to let them know what is happening and this has proved positive. The creation of the new Facebook page will enhance this going forward.

It is an advantage to work with other groups/agencies in the area and this can help communities get their issues sorted. Prior to SICAP Mount Carmel felt out on a limb and now they feel more included in the wider Moate Community.

Elected representatives attending meetings has also proved useful as communities have clear links with the council.

Organising training workshops in the local area at a time that suits people, is more effective than having it in another town and expecting people to travel. The Carmelite centre was used for all workshops and events in relation to this group. Important not to get stuck on certain numbers required for each workshop, as often smaller workshops are better.

The volunteers we are working with have busy lives and families outside of the voluntary work so it is always important to be available for what times suit them.

Without the support of SICAP, the group would not have had the confidence to apply for Leader funding towards the amenity area

Last but not least, continue to listen to the voice of the community and encourage other agencies to do the same.



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