



Demonstration of Work SICAP 2018 -2023

DUBLIN SOUTH CITY PARTERSHIP COMMUNIVERSITY PROGRAMME

DUBLIN SOUTH CITY PARTNERSHIP Primary Theme: Goal Two Project

The programme falls under the following Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) programme goal, thematic area and target outcomes and group:

<i>Programme Goal</i>	Goal 2 – Supporting Individuals – ‘To support disadvantaged individuals to improve the quality of their lives through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market supports.’
<i>Thematic Area</i>	G2.2 – SICAP Clients Participate in Lifelong Learning.
<i>Target Outcomes</i>	G2 2:1.1 SICAP clients receive information about opportunities for lifelong learning.
<i>Target Group</i>	Unemployed individuals from disadvantaged areas. Individuals experiencing social isolation.

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Background

Aontas, Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation state that "community based adult education is learning which takes place in local settings, it is learner – centred and responds to the needs of the local community in a unique way within the tertiary education system."

Through the availability of SICAP funding, the Dublin South City Partnership Lifelong Learning team, have been able to promote and encourage community based adult education in some of the city's most disadvantaged communities.

By engaging SICAP clients in education within their own communities the Lifelong Learning team aim to;

- Negate any negative experiences that SICAP clients may have had previously within the education system.
- Encourage further progression and educational attainment.
- Build confidence and wellbeing, particularly those who are long term unemployed or socially isolated.

The Lifelong Learning Team provide a range of courses under SICAP Actions 6 and 7, examples include;

- Mindfulness
- Life coaching
- Gardening
- Dog Training
- Hair and Makeup
- Digital Literacy
- Irish Language
- Irish Sign language

These courses are offered in a variety of easily accessible locations, and at times that best accommodate childcare, and other needs of the most vulnerable within DSCP communities.

The impact of community-based education courses is highlighted in the *2021 HEA Study of Mature Student Participation in Higher Education*. "The report highlights the importance of pathways to higher education for mature students. Almost three in four mature students reported having participated in education and training prior to engaging in higher education. Over half participated in a FET course, while 21% participated in a community education course."

The study also notes that "for those who did courses provided by an ETB, or a community education provider, a majority of respondents indicated that they would have been unlikely or very unlikely to go on to higher education without having completed their courses."

In looking at the impact of community-based adult education specifically delivered under SICAP Goal 2, this case study will focus on the Communiversity Programme. Communiversity is a collaborative programme between Local Development Companies, Maynooth

University, and Dublin City Libraries. The programme enables participants to study academic subjects within their local communities.

Communiversities Inception

As outlined in the *2020 Communiversities Review Report*, the programme developed “out of necessity brought on by the economic downturn of 2008 and the ensuing years.” With severe austerity measures, came cuts to community services, and new funding mandates meant a focus shift away from “education for education’s sake” to employment skills and courses that would ensure job readiness for participants.

Despite this shift, an appetite for education and learning remained in local communities. As noted in the same 2020 Report, a small piece of research was carried out in 2010 in a number of local libraries in Kildare that suggested an interest amongst library learners to study academic subjects.

In 2011 a first attempt was made at delivering academic subjects in a community environment in Maynooth, however the programme was limited due to costs, particularly those associated with renting an external space.

Despite these costs, Dr. Derek Barter, the Head of Adult Education in Maynooth University, and his colleagues were committed to widening participation in higher education by providing these types of courses in community spaces. Using local libraries as venues was put forward as a viable option and supported by the Director of the Library Council of Ireland.

In looking at funding options, applications were made to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. Strict parameters on how Department funding could be spent led to partnering with Local Development Companies (LDC’s) as the best option. Local Development Companies have a remit for providing education to disadvantaged communities and a wide range of marginalised groups, and also has targeted funding to achieve these goals.

With partnerships established the aims of the programme were identified as.

Aims

- For the Department of Adult and Community Education and Maynooth University the aim was that the project would deliver affordable off – campus community education.
- The library council sought to develop the library as a focal point for learning and community engagement.
- The Local Development Companies sought to achieve social inclusion in their areas.

The first pilot programme took place in 2012 supported by partnerships in both Coolock Dublin 17 and Kildare. Since then, the programme has continued to expand and develop new relationships with partners such as DSCP.

Communiversiy Structure

Communiversiy in its current format is a 17-week programme. Four unique academic subjects are broken down into four-week blocks. Popular subjects include; Local History, Psychology, Politics, Economics and Philosophy.

As outlined in the *2020 Communiversiy Review Report*, Local History is usually taught as the introduction to the programme. Some participants may have had negative experiences with education and engaging in a subject that has some familiarity to them serves to build confidence before the programme moves on to more abstract topics.

In order to maximise inclusivity there are no assignments and no accreditation for participants of the programme. Communiversiy very much promotes peer learning and sharing experiences verbally during class time. As highlighted by the National Adult Literacy Agency one in six Irish adults has problems reading. This is very much accounted for in the delivery of the programme, with lecturers facilitating in a very visual way through PowerPoint presentations, and alternative source materials like podcasts and videos being promoted as well as traditional reading material.

At the end of the 17 weeks participants from each participating LDC join together in Maynooth University for a graduation celebration. This is a very rewarding experience for participants as many have never had an exposure to a university setting. Students at the graduation are presented with a certificate of completion. A photographer is also present to capture group and individual photos which are a meaningful keepsake for those who have completed the 17 weeks.

In terms of the organisation of the programme, the three-pronged partnership approach works well for enabling maximum impact. The key responsibilities for each partner as referenced in the *2020 Communiversiy Review Report* are below.

PARTNER ORGANISATION	ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES
Maynooth University	Provides tutors, coordination, and administration. Responsible for the organisation of the graduation event.
Libraries	Provide a community-based venue for learning to take place. Provide refreshments and logistical supports such as printing of resources when needed and acquiring books recommended by tutors.
Local Development Companies	Fund the programme through SICAP goal 2 funding. Recruit participants and engage with local communities informing them of the programme. SICAP Education Workers also support learners throughout the programme, linking them in with other relevant services and helping to alleviate any barriers that present for them and may

	impede on their participation in communiversity.
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Communiversity – Dublin South City Partnership Participation

As aforementioned, whilst looking for community partners and funding opportunities, Dr. Derek Barter and his colleagues in Maynooth engaged in strategic conversation with Local Development Companies. DSCP or Canal Communities Partnership at the time, played an integral role in these discussions. Although DSCP did not partake in early pilots of Communiversity, strong working links with Maynooth and the Adult Education Department remained.

In 2015 Canal Communities Partnership amalgamated with Rathmines Pembroke Partnership to form DSCP and roll out the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme. A larger catchment area, and new funding requirements prompted a period of evaluation and analysis.

The Lot 2.4 area, that DSCP covers is one that is extremely diverse. The 2016 census showed a population 130,015 in the entire lot area. It comprises of concentrated areas of disadvantage. In areas of Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 as well as settled areas with a large population of older people in areas such as Walkinstown.

A rethink on programme delivery was needed to account for this new and varied catchment area. Programmes needed to progress people on in terms of education and employment, but also deliver in terms of inclusivity. Communiversity ticked a lot of boxes for DSCP at this time in terms of meeting the needs of target groups.

COMMUNIVERSITY STRUCTURE	IMPACT FOR DSCP TARGET GROUPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered in local libraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessible for those who do not have access to their own transport. Accessible for those who may experience anxiety around travelling to new areas. Participants get to experience academic subjects within their local communities. Participants get to meet and connect with other locals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Accreditation/ No Assignments Visual Delivery Use of resources like podcasts/videos/Pictures/maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several DSCP electoral districts have low education progression. 2016 Census showed that of those residing in Rutland Grove, 45% are only educated to primary level.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No assignments or written element to the programme allows for the programme to be inclusive of those with low literacy. • Interactive learning methods engage those who struggle with reading. • Allows for maximum engagement for SICAP target groups.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSCP in partnership with Maynooth University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course is SICAP funded, allowing for the most marginalised SICAP clients to engage for free. • DSCP community connections allow for the programme to be targeted at those most in need. • DSCP Education Workers, work closely with participants and put supports in place to ensure maximum engagement in the programme.

DSCP Communiversity Roll Out

The first Communiversity programme was rolled out by DSCP in 2017. Since then, it has become an integral part of the Lifelong Learning programme, and one that is extremely popular with SICAP clients. During the 2018 – 2022 SICAP programme, 131 individuals have taken part in Communiversity. Locations have included Walkinstown Library and Dolphins' Barn Library, and a diverse range of subjects have been offered including.

- Local History
- Economics
- Politics
- Psychology
- Chinese Studies
- Philosophy
- Sociology

The DSCP programme is 100% SICAP funded, and participants are recruited and supported for the duration of the programme by SICAP Lifelong Learning staff.

Although the programme throughout its roll out has been offered to all ages and groups, the DSCP programmes have primarily attracted older citizens. Over 90% of programme participants have been over the age of 50. Many of these as previously outlined have had negative experiences with education, or as previous generations were often required to do, left school early to gain paid employment and contribute to their families. Communiversity

for many of these participants offered a second chance at experiencing education, and an outlet to explore subjects of interest.

The programme also provides a meaningful space for those experiencing social isolation, particularly those who have retired and have lost those everyday connections that we experience during our working lives. During Covid 19 the programme moved online and took on a new significance for those who were further isolated. It provided a weekly routine for participants and a way to connect with others when we were advised to keep our distance. Below are some statements from the 2021 group who took part in the course during the height of Covid 19 restrictions.

“It helped in that it gave an opportunity to meet with people in a safe (Covid) and supportive way.”

“Just what I needed to keep the brain ticking over during a difficult COVID time. Knowing that the library could be such a valuable resource was a pleasant surprise!”

Communiversality since its implementation has fostered a renewed love of learning amongst its participants. Since DSCP first introduced the programme to the Lifelong learning schedule, it has gained in popularity due to word of mouth, and oftentimes participants who had already completed the programme apply again. Such was the demand presented by previous participants for continued learning in a similar model that DSCP set up an Adult Learner’s Group as a continuation on from Communiversality. This group facilitated by the DSCP Lifelong Learning staff, and 100% funded by SICAP have engaged in numerous subjects and projects since its inception in 2019. Subjects studied by the group include; anthropology, architecture, Irish literature, and sociology. During the Covid-19 pandemic, no-face-to-face sessions took place. Individual assistance was given to every participant who needed it so they could participate in online sessions via Zoom platform. This assistance included a laptop lending scheme and personalized guidance in accessing Zoom and understanding its features. 5 participants participated in an online course on Research Methods. After theoretical introductions, 3 participants conducted their own mini-research and prepared presentations on places of interest in their local areas (Augavanagh Road cemetery, Walkinstown area and Tymon Castle).

In the second year of the lockdown (2021) his online group then progressed to starting a more detailed research project on community groups and supports operating in the area. Learning the basics of Google sheets along the way, the participants created a list of over 130 groups and activities available across Dublin 12.

2022 Communiversality Programme

The 2022 Communiversality Programme began on 28th January and ran for 17 weeks. In a deviation from previous years the programme did not take place in one of the local libraries due to lack of availability. The venue for the 2022 programme was St. Bernadette’s Parish

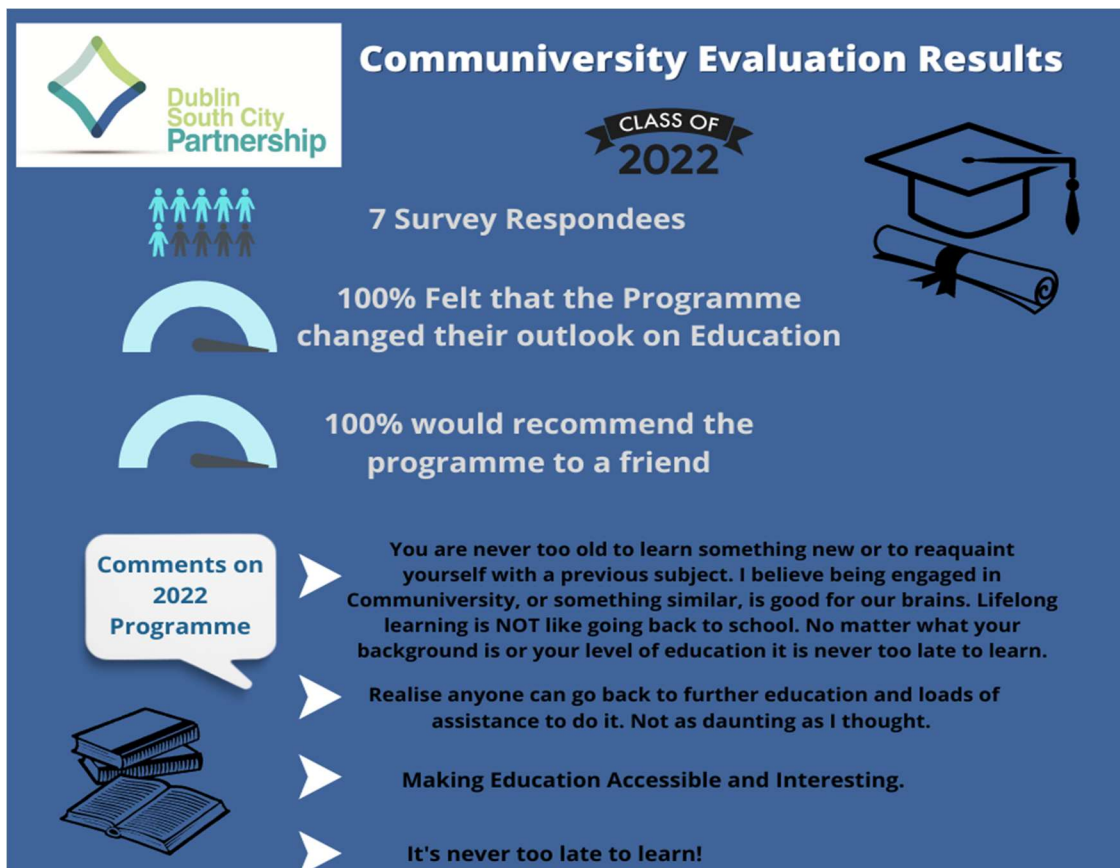
Hall in Crumlin. Priority was given to having an accessible space that was well serviced by public transport.

The subjects chosen for the 2022 programme were.

- Local History
- Economics
- Politics
- Psychology

The 2022 programme had particular significance in that it was one of the first in person courses since the introduction of Covid 19. For the period 2022 – 2023, DSCP has named those facing social isolation as a specific target group. During 2020, when DSCP provided food supports to local communities, the level of social isolation experienced, particularly amongst older residents was observed by SICAP staff. As previously outlined, Communiversality has always been a popular course with older citizens within the DSCP catchment area, and it was hoped that having the course in a safe space in compliance with Covid 19 safety measures would help these residents reacclimatise back into the community and build confidence in doing so.

16 individuals took part in the 2022 programme with the majority of these over the age of 60. Below are some of the findings from the post programme evaluation, which highlight the positive impact of the programme for this group.



On 30th June participants of the programme travelled to Maynooth University for the graduation ceremony. Participants were presented with their certificates, and one participant took an opportunity to speak to the larger group about her experience.

Those who attended received a guided tour of the chapel located within Maynooth University. The day was very special and allowed participants to reflect on their learning journey and liaise with another Partnership group who had the same experience.

Outcomes for 2022 Communiversity Group

- Reengaged back into the community after Covid 19 restrictions.
- Engagement with peers and new connections developed.
- Exposure to new subjects and better understanding of these.
- More confident in pursuing new areas of study, and further solo exploration of the concepts examined during the programme.
- Enhanced relationship with DSCP Lifelong Learning staff.

Communiversity 2022 Group Pictured 30th June at Graduation Ceremony in Maynooth University



Learning

Over the course of rolling out the Communiversity Programme DSCP have noted the following learning outcomes.

Opportunities

- The collaborative nature of the project works well and ensures the best possible outcomes for participants.
- Enhanced relationships and cooperation between DSCP, Maynooth University and Dublin City Libraries.
- The inclusive nature of the programme allows for DSCP to target the most at risk SICAP clients.
- Participants get to experience university level subjects in their own communities.
- The programme has changed perspectives on learning and provided a new experience for those who have had negative experiences in the past.
- Communiversity acts as a steppingstone for individuals and has inspired a new love for learning amongst many participants.
- The length of the programme allows for meaningful and stimulating engagement, whilst not preventing commitment from participants.
- Enhanced relationships between DSCP and Communiversity participants.
- The course has enabled DSCP to engage with at risk target groups, particularly older people who are experiencing social isolation.

Challenges

- The DSCP Communiversity Programme has so far failed to attract younger SICAP clients, who would benefit greatly from exposure to a university style programme.
- The programme is expensive (roughly €170+ per hour x 34 hours).
- Not all libraries have a big study room. Libraries opening hours determine when the course could be run (limited evening availability comparing to day-time availability).
- Communiversity needs a dedicated follow-up programme – this audience wants to do something similar – intellectually stimulating. They come back for and attend climate change workshops, educational talks, and walking tours. Our traditional community courses are perhaps not academic enough, or long enough to encourage engagement with this group.

Conclusion

This case study has highlighted the impact of the Communiversity Programme on DSCP SICAP clients. Although this programme is not about activation, and DSCP do not measure progression, the outcomes of the project are clear. The programme has fostered a new appetite for learning among its participants and allowed for many to have a positive experience of education for the first time. The programme has served to attract some of SICAP's most vulnerable target groups, particularly those experiencing social isolation. Participating in the programme has allowed for those who are isolated to build confidence, and meaningful relationships with their peers, as well as SICAP staff. DSCP's participation in the programme has further enhanced relationships between Maynooth University and Dublin City Libraries resulting in further collaborative projects. SICAP funding allows for the DSCP Lifelong Learning team to continue to include the programme as part of its annual

schedule. For further roll outs LLL staff will strive to enhance participant experience, and work on new and innovative ways to entice new target groups such as younger people who are not engaged in employment or education.

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