Bray Area Partnership SICAP Case Study 2022

Bray Area Partnership Disability Network: working together to make a difference

Lot: Wicklow: Bray and Greystones 15-1
Goal 1: LCG Capacity Building
Theme: Engagement Strategies with SICAP Target Groups/Communities
Target group: people with disabilities

Bray Area Partnership's Disability Network provides a space for disability groups and services in the Bray and North Wicklow area to network, work together collaboratively and address issues for people with disabilities living in the local area.

This case study focuses on the work of Bray Area Partnership's Disability Network, to demonstrate how this SICAP Goal 1 work supporting Local Community Groups facilitates engagement with local people with disabilities and gives them a voice on issues affecting their everyday lives.

Background

The Disability Federation of Ireland's Disability Profile for County Wicklow (2018) showed that:

- 14% of the population of Wicklow or 19,244 people had at least one disability.
- In 2016, only 13% of people who had a disability were in education compared to 17% of the general population in Wicklow.
- 24% of people who had a disability were at work compared to 54% of the general population.
- 19% of people who had a disability did not have access to a car or van compared to 8% of the general population.
- 15% of people who had a disability lived in social housing compared to 10% of the general population.

There are a large number of local community groups providing supports and services for people with disabilities in the Bray and north Wicklow area, with Bray particularly being a major service hub for people with disabilities.

Bray Area Partnership's Disability Network was set up to provide a space for disability groups and services in the Bray and north Wicklow area to network, share information and resources, work together more collaboratively and identify and address common issues for people with disabilities in the local area.

This work provides the SICAP support worker with a chance to engage with local people with disabilities in a number of ways. The views and issues of members and service-users of member

organisations are represented in network meetings, via local decision-making bodies and in their active engagement in network events such as meetings with councillors. People with disabilities are also signposted to other Partnership supports and services – such as our SICAP training programme and IMPACT employment initiative for people with disabilities.

The support role of SICAP is vital, where network members are committed, but time-poor. SICAP staff administer and facilitate meetings and resource actions that the network takes. Members receive mail-outs with disability-related news, resources and events and their own news and events are featured on the Disability Bray website.

Cairdeas Clubhouse members and other network members marking Green Ribbon Time to Talk Day 2022

Collaborative approach to addressing issues for people with disabilities

By working together, network members can be much more effective in identifying common issues and service gaps and taking joint action that makes a real difference to the lives of people with disabilities living in the local area, supported by SICAP staff and funding. They also consult with, and represent the views of, their members and service-users on the issues that affect their lives. As well as facilitating that process, an important role of the SICAP support worker is to ensure that these issues are addressed by decision-makers – whether in meetings with councillors or, in some of these examples, by representation on key decision-making bodies.

This collaborative approach ties in with **SICAP Horizontal theme 3: developing collaborative approaches with stakeholders to improve how mainstream policies and programmes are delivered so that they impact more positively on the socially excluded**. Recent examples of this work are:

Accessibility in the local area

Local disability activists had been liaising with the network on beach accessibility. The issue was raised in the Disability Network and represented by BAP at the Wicklow County Council Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC). The Disability Federation of Ireland then carried out an accessibility audit of the seafront and beach in Bray and the DISC is now working on finding funding to make local beaches with challenging terrains more accessible for people with disabilities. The lack

of Changing Places facilities in town centres in North Wicklow was also represented to the DISC and it is now expected that there will be a Changing Places facility installed in Bray in the near future.

Barriers for people with disabilities completing housing applications

Network members had identified a number of specific barriers that their own service-users and members were experiencing when applying to get onto the housing list – such as not being able to get two healthcare professionals to sign the supporting HMD Form 1. At a productive meeting between network members and Wicklow County Council Housing staff pathways were identified to address this and a number of other issues at a local level, and this collaborative work continues.

Tackling the issue of younger people with disabilities living in nursing homes

Some years back, the network identified the issue of younger people with disabilities living in nursing homes in the North Wicklow area. Bray Area Partnership carried out research on this and the final report *Old Too Soon* presented a number of recommendations for change. The research was then rolled out nationwide by the Disability Federation of Ireland and in 2021 the Ombudsman produced a report, *Wasted Lives*, with a number of further key recommendations that will make a real difference in addressing this situation at a national level.

The collaborative 'Hive Mind'

Disability Network members are a great resource for the partnership's SICAP work as they bring a huge pool of knowledge to the table. When the partnership was re-designing its Disability Bray website, network members provided local information and consulted with their members and service-users on what information they'd like to see on the site and how they'd like it to look.

Views from two Disability Network members

Laura O'Callaghan is the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) Community Development Officer working in County Wicklow. Laura facilitates the Wicklow County Council Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC), which was set up to make County Wicklow as accessible as possible for people with disabilities. She is also an active member of the BAP Disability Network and has found the input from the network invaluable in helping to identify issues for people with disabilities that can be addressed at a local level by the DISC and also at a national level by the DFI.

"Disability organisations often don't have the capacity themselves to come together to work on common issues, so it's fantastic that the Bray Area Partnership is doing this at a local level. DISC has had a number of issues come up via the network recently – such as when local people with disabilities raised the issue of beach access. This went to the DISC and we're now working to find funding to make it more accessible for people to get onto local beaches. Network members also gave input on the need for Changing Places facilities in local town centres, making it more accessible for people with disabilities to get out and about – and we now hope to have one installed in Bray in the next year or two. The Disability Network also plays an important role in helping fuel the Disability Federation of Ireland's advocacy work at a national level."

Sarah Boyd is the Manager of RehabCare Bray, who are members of the BAP Disability Network. RehabCare Bray staff and service-users have taken an active role in the network and its events and

actions over a number of years. Sarah has this to say about the benefits of being involved:

"We have been linking up with Bray Area Partnership for collaboration and networking via the Disability Network. As well as sharing resources and training, the network allows us to work together on the common aim of ensuring that everybody, regardless of disability, has the same opportunities in our community. It's about educating ourselves and the community on what we need to improve and making sure that we do make changes – it's all about the action at the end of the day."

Giving local people with disabilities a voice in decision-making

Under SICAP social inclusion means giving people a voice and a chance to take part in decision-making on issues that affect them. Through its support work for local community groups involved in the Disability Network, SICAP staff engage with local people with disabilities and facilitate processes that allow them to identify issues and represent them to key decision-makers – with the aim of effecting real change and achieving meaningful outcomes. This ties in with **SICAP horizontal theme 2: applying community development approaches to achieve the participation of disadvantaged and marginalised communities in the wider local development context**.

Speed lobbies and meetings with councillors

BAP Disability Network speed lobby of local election candidates

Innovative actions of the Disability Network have included **speed lobbies of local and general election candidates**, where local people with disabilities got to quiz the candidates on what they would do about some of their issues if they were elected. Network member groups engaged their members and service-users in advance in sessions to identify their issues under different thematic areas and elect a number of their peers to attend the events and present their key asks.

Again, the role of SICAP was vital in supporting this work – from promotion, planning and liaising with participants to funding and staffing the event and follow-up work with councillors on issues raised – as well as keeping the focus on desired outcomes that could actually be delivered by councillors.

Disability Awareness Workshops in local schools

These workshops have provided a chance for younger people with disabilities who are engaged with network member organisations to talk about their lives while co-presenting a disability awareness presentation to TY students in local schools – often going back to the school they attended themselves.

The workshops facilitate learning on the social model of disability, while being interactive and fun, and the feedback from learners is always very positive, with post-it notes on the wall at the end showing a positive shift in awareness and understanding. SICAP support here has been important in creating and refining the workshop content based on learner feedback and supporting the participation of people with disabilities. As well as giving people with disabilities a voice in their community, this work ties in **with SICAP horizontal theme 1**: **promoting an equality framework with a particular focus on gender equality and anti-discrimination practices.**

Cian's story

Cian O'Neill is a local disability activist and service-user of RehabCare Bray, who are members of the Disability Network. Cian has taken an active role in a number of different Disability Network actions. He made a presentation with images of himself out and about around Bray, and the obstacles he encountered as a wheelchair user, for the network's Big Chat with Councillors and continues to highlight local access issues around the town via the Disability Network.

BAP Disability Network's Big Chat with Councillors

Cian and a mate Billy visited Bray Bowl for a Wicklow Tourism blog video to show how accessible it is as a place for them to hang out and play bowling. Cian also went back to his old school, St. Kilian's in Bray, to deliver a Disability Awareness Workshop, along with Laura O'Callaghan, from the Disability Federation of Ireland. Cian recently joined the Wicklow County Council Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee, where he will have a real say on actions the council takes to make Wicklow more inclusive for people with disabilities.

"My name is Cian O'Neill. I attend RehabCare Bray day service. I often link in with Bray Area Partnership. Collaboration is great because it's given me a voice in my local community…I went back to St. Kilian's, my old secondary school, and talked about my disability. That was amazing for me – to be a student in that school and then to go back four years later and speak to a class – that was cool. I think that's really important, that people with disabilities can also be seen in their community."

SICAP leverage for a greater IMPACT

An important benefit of our SICAP work is how the connections made between groups, services and agencies can act as a lever to bring wider benefits into a community. An example of this would be when Disability Network members and local agencies engaged in our SICAP programme joined a coalition, led by Bray Area Partnership, that successfully applied for Dormant Accounts funding to set up a new employment initiative for people with disabilities. The **IMPACT Initiative** opened its doors in early 2022 and works with people with disabilities and local employers in Bray and north Wicklow to increase the participation of people with disabilities in employment and enterprise. Members of our Disability Network work collaboratively with IMPACT to achieve better outcomes for their members and service-users – one example of this would be collaborative Skill Building in the Workplace training programmes.

Lessons learned and future plans

1. The SICAP collaborative approach of bringing groups together has multiple benefits: from identifying common issues and having a stronger voice together to address them, to facilitating engagement with disadvantaged and marginalised people in the community on issues that matter to them.

2. It is important that this collaborative work and engagement with marginalised groups on issues is focused so it results in real and meaningful change, benefits and outcomes.

3. Facilitating the meaningful involvement of people from the marginalised group themselves directly in decision-making processes and bodies is vital to achieve the kind of positive change they want to see. This is consistent with the 'nothing about us without us' approach.

4. Developmental work can be slow and requires patience, fortitude and resolve. Collaborative pre-development work with the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) to facilitate local people with disabilities to set up their own independent DPO (Disabled Persons Organisation) in North Wicklow was affected by COVID restrictions, interrupting the planned process. However, this work is now back on track. The network is also planning to work collaboratively with the DFI to provide Active Citizenship training to a group of local people with disabilities to increase their capacity to lead action themselves to effect change at a local level.

5. The Disability Network will continue to be a conduit for feeding issues and service gaps into key local decision-making bodies such as the Wicklow Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee.

References
1. Disability Profile of County Wicklow (Disability Federation of Ireland)
2. Old Too Soon – Younger People with Disabilities Living in Nursing Homes in the Bray and Greystones areas of Co. Wicklow (Bray Area Partnership).
3. The situation of younger people with disabilities living in nursing homes in Ireland (Disability Federation of Ireland).
4. Wasted Lives: Time for a Better Future for Younger People in Nursing Homes (The Ombudsman)