

AONTAS Community Education Network Meeting

Thursday 8th November 2007

St Andrew's Resource Centre, Pearse Street, Dublin 1



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Introduction

The Community Education Network is a new platform for community education groups within the AONTAS membership and it will serve as a space for promoting community education and as a political platform for shaping policy. This work serves under the organizational development section of the AONTAS Strategic Plan. The need for such a platform came to our attention during the strategic plan consultation process; community groups voiced their concern regarding the need for a representative body for community education and to be a stronger voice for community education, and a more direct way to be a part of the policy work of AONTAS. As such the AONTAS staff team and very importantly a steering group, composed of our members from a community education background, guide the work and policy actions of this community education network. It is proposed that these meeting will take place 3 times a year so to ensure the momentum of the work.

The initial work plan set out to define the purpose of the Community Education Network as:

1. To act as a representative body for community education*
2. To strengthen the influence of community education groups in AONTAS
3. To work on lobbying initiatives locally and, through AONTAS, nationally
4. For media and publicity work and to promote the meaning and value of community education
5. To strengthen the capacity of our community education members
6. To act as an identifiable space for the smaller community education groups to feed into
7. To act as a space for exchanging information and for networking
8. To act as a space for dialogue on community education
9. As a starting point to initiate a broader debate on the definition of adult and community education
10. As a method of linking in with external agencies: trade unions, the Wheel, Pobal, EAPN etc.

The first meeting of the Community Education Network took place on Thursday 8th November at St Andrew's Resource Centre, Pearse Street, Dublin 1. The plan for the day was to create a relaxed informal environment that facilitated active participation of attendees and allowed critical reflection on the work of community education. The focus of the day was to establish the Network, its aims and objectives, and identify what opportunities are available for the community education network to effect change.

* To include development education groups

Content of the day

The day commenced with a brief background on the Community Education Network and an overview of the agenda for the day. Berni Brady gave an outline of the history of community education and AONTAS drawing on her vast experience of the sector. The importance of being part of the Network was outlined by Liz Waters, An Cosan, who as a member of the steering group emphasised the commitment she has made to the work and urged other groups to join this timely and significant venture that is vital for the future of community education.

As the Community Education Network is driven by the members, its aims and objectives are the collective responsibility of the participants. As such, an informal discussion between three to six participants took place and the aims and objectives were debated and fed back to the main group. The outcomes of this discussion outlined in the following section.

Four working groups were created and facilitated by Liz Waters, Elva O'Callaghan, Berni Brady and Niamh O'Reilly. The focus of the discussions centred on what opportunities are available for community education to effect change. The groups shared their experience regarding what activities they had done locally to highlight the needs of community education and through this work areas were identified for a national group, such as the Community Education Network, to carry out in the short and long-term. A number of discussions focussed on the issues that faced community education groups today.

There was an opportunity for groups to highlight and discuss their issues further over lunch by way of the provision of post-it notes for the 'wall of issues'. After lunch a participatory session with Ted Fleming, Lecturer Department of Adult and Community Education NUI Maynooth, took place which allowed participants to reflect on their issues and critically assess the space which community education occupies and its possible role in creating a more just and peaceful society.

The day concluded with an evaluation so to ensure that future meetings are shaped, influenced and meet the needs of the Community Education Network members.



Participants' discussion

1. Aims and objectives of the Community Education Network

The aims and objectives of the Community Education Network were discussed by the participants. Three themes emerged from this discussion: **Resource** community education, **Recognition** for the value and distinctive nature of community education and **Raise Profile** of community education and lobby for its needs.

Table 1 and 2 document the aims and objectives as identified by the participants at the meeting. The corresponding theme that runs through the comments is expressed in the first column. Although it is difficult to pull all comments into specific themes, it is hoped that the ideas of the network are represent fairly.

Table 1. Aims of the Community Education Network

Resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Resource the sector independently ○ Department of Education recognition/resource community education ○ Supportive framework for all community education providers ○ Human Resources – structures, in-service and training
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify and distinguish between community education and adult education ○ All elements of community education should be considered important ○ Clearer definition of what community education is ○ To be seen as a separate entity from other formal education which is complimentary and not in competition ○ To be seen as an equally important element of lifelong learning and not the poor relative ○ A central database of information about other community education providers in the network ○ Agree a definition of what community education is and where different organisation fit into that definition ○ To achieve recognition of community education as the bedrock of lifelong learning, community development and active citizenship for all, regardless of background ○ Be recognised as a specific sector in education with a definite funding stream ○ Identify what change is needed and moving that forward actively and collectively ○ Value from community education – not just accreditation but also the soft outcomes
Raise profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Raise the profile of community education ○ To get a stronger collective voice and to air our issues ○ To have a distinctive voice for community education ○ Highlight the achievements and contribution of community education to society ○ Higher profile for community education through more networking ○ Ensure we are put on a the political stage ○ To disseminate best practice ○ Disseminate information



Table 2. Objectives of the Community Education Network

Resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lobby for appropriate resources - independent - BTEI is not always easily accessed for people slightly outside the remit ○ A stronger commitment from the Department of Education ○ Lobby to draw down core funding ○ Arrange contacts outside of these meetings - agency visits, use of internet forums ○ Reduce bureaucracy e.g. piecemeal funding
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reclaim community education and put the VEC back in their box ○ Avoid ghettoisation ○ Acknowledge lay terms, trans-generational nature of the work ○ Holistic approach ○ Database of information on community education providers ○ Data collection ○ Agreeing criteria for data collected ○ Agree a definition of community education
Raise profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a stronger voice ○ Heighten awareness of community education ○ Communication - changes and implications ○ Share good practice ○ Work on the White Paper – Learning for Life (2000) ○ Dissemination of information ○ Raise awareness of community education ○ Promotion & development of the network – meetings, emailing ○ Strive for larger participation in the network ○ Involve media to bring education to the wider public – plug community education network where possible ○ Revisit the community education section of the White Paper ○ Promotion and development of measuring systems of soft outcomes

1.1 Summary of outcomes

The Aims of the Community Education Network are:

1. To **lobby** for the independent resourcing of the community education sector (finance and human resources).
2. To ensure **recognition** for community education in terms of its distinctive nature, value and role in lifelong learning, community development and active citizenship.
3. To have a strong, collective and distinctive voice for community education that **raises awareness** on its achievements and contribution to society.

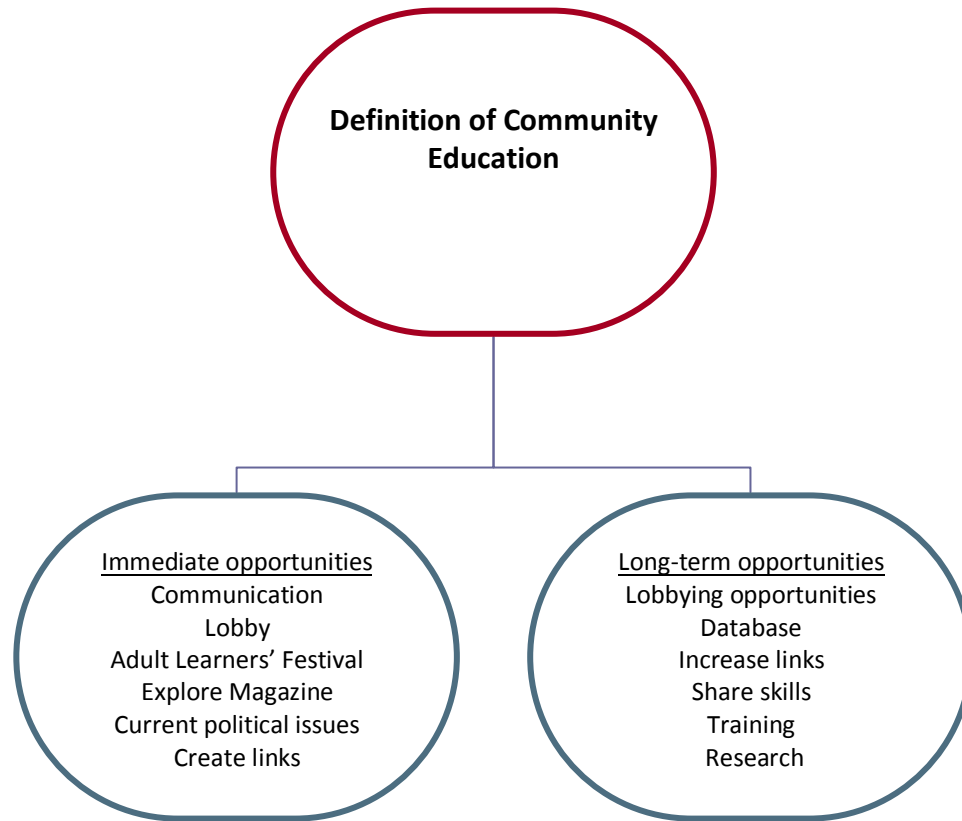
The Objectives of the Community Education Network are:

1. To ensure community education is **resourced** appropriately by gaining commitment from the Department of Education for core funding of activities which will be carried out by **lobbying**; including that of specific departments.
2. To gain increase **recognition** through data collection and an agreed definition of community education.
3. To increase **awareness** of community education through: increased communication; linking with the media; revisiting the White Paper; sharing of best practice and; promotion and development of the Network.



2. Opportunities for the Community Education Network to effect change

The working groups discussed what opportunities are available for the Community Education Network to effect change in the short and long-term. The outcomes of this discussion are summarised into the schematic representation below.



The initial step for the Community Education Network is to define 'community education' taking into account the following factors: there must be discussion and agreement within the Network on the definition; it must use qualitative information from research to capture other outcomes from the learning; it must be reclaimed on 'our' terms; look at what it is and what it isn't; and reclaim the radical element. The definition will be the basis for the lobbying and promotional work of the Network including the promotion of a greater understanding of its value in terms of being a tool for democratic participation.

From this initial step a number of strands of work have been identified for the Network in the immediate and long term. A number of issues arose during the workshops, this information will be fed into our policy work, however this report will focus on where we, the Network, will go next. It can be viewed as an initial work plan.

**Immediate opportunities for the Community Education Network**

Theme	Description	Way forward
Communication	Increase the flexibility and accessibility to the Community Education Network by using: emailing list, online forum, website, online wall of issues, create a video of the network meetings/AONTAS online	A Community Education Network section on AONTAS Website is available www.aontas.com
		An emailing list will be set up - all emails of participants in this report
		Access to an online forum is available on Clare Lifelong Learning Network - www.clarelifelonglearning.org
		Video - To be discussed with Network
Adult Learners Festival	Host a Community Education event at National Level	AONTAS Member to host a day event for Community Education - Possibly An Cosan
	The festival is a huge opportunity to profile community education	Encourage community education groups to host an event during the week, collaborate with local groups to increase capacity to do so.
	Host a political event at the close of festival to look at solutions to issues facing community education groups	To discuss
Explore Magazine	Use Explore to profile community education providers/groups	Members of the community education network to discuss writing an article contact our Communications Officer: Niamh Farren nfarren@aontas.com
Current Political Issues	The childcare subvention issue is in fact an opportunity to raise the issue and build alliances with other organisations. This is needed as soon as possible in order to be placed firmly on the political agenda and kept there.	To discuss
Lobbying	Identify clear priority issues - interdepartmental and elections (local & national). Set criteria and present solutions.	To discuss
Create Links	Bring the Network to a greater audience. Bring representatives from government department and relate their work to that of community education	To discuss
	Link in with existing networks of community groups across the country	All participants of the network to identify any networks locally and invite to next meeting/share information/ask to communicate through email/website. Link in with Community Education Facilitators.

Longterm opportunities for the Community Education Network



Theme	Description	Way forward
Database	Use database as a resource for community education users and practitioners. Use the Network as a source of information regarding the service in their area.	In process
	Develop the database to: identify community education groups, facilities available, commonality and diversity, develop a template for participants, research questions and resource needs for media work	In process
Lobbying opportunities	Local elections 2009	Create community education network election campaigns in preparation for the events - possibly with focus group from within the Network
	Budget 2008	
	EU Constitution	
Research	Dialogue with 3rd Level Institutions	To discuss
	Explore possibilities for funding - local and international	To discuss
Capacity Building Projects	Mentoring incubation programme between well established groups and small start ups	To discuss
	Arrange training for the Network as required	To discuss

The immediate opportunities represent what the Community Education Network can do to increase the capacity of the Network and avail of the current lobbying opportunities. A number of themes were identified that can be addressed straight away e.g. communication, the Adult Learners Festival, Explore Magazine. However other areas must be discussed to set out work plans for each of the areas e.g. current political issues, lobbying and creating links. The opportunities highlighted identified as long-term will be integrated into the forthcoming Community Education Network meetings and used by the steering group in creating specific strategies for work.



Community Education Network

In order to maintain momentum taking action on the specific areas is required. This report sets out to highlight the aims, objectives and opportunities of the Community Education Network. It is not an exhaustive list or a set of definite rules but a guideline for further discussion and action. AONTAS will continue to work in supporting the Community Education Network but in order to create a network that is effective, is recognised as an expert body in the field of community education, is strong in its diversity, challenges perceptions, is inclusive and is a leading network for representing community education groups in terms of raising their profile and lobbying for their needs, all participants are encouraged to take on specific tasks as outlined in the 'way forward' column of the 'Opportunities for the Community Education Network to effect change' section.

Proposed ways forward:

- To agree to work on/discuss further the issues which rose from the workshops and put in place a plan of action for each
- For Network participants to maintain contact and strengthen ties for lobbying on common issues
- To raise awareness about the Network and distribute promotional material to local community groups – See attached poster.
- To attend/participate in future meetings of the Network.

AONTAS will host the next Community Education Network meeting in the spring. It will be shaped by the outcomes of this meeting and with the assistance of the steering group. Feedback from the participants on the day has been collated and will feed into the structuring of future meetings.

Some final thoughts from the Community Education Network Participants:

'Enjoyable, great networking experience and invigorating as a movement for change.'

'Continue to promote reflective thinking and a climate of open sharing and collegiality.'



Attendance List and Email Information

	Name	Surname	Organisation	Email
1	Jane	Sharpe	Parents Education Programme	jane_c_sharpe@hotmail.com
2	Colm	McCourt	O'Fiaich College & Further Education	eveningclasses@ofiaichcollege.ie
3	Joe	Murdiff	MAIN/DMC	mainjoe@gmail.com
4	Billy	Ryan	St Andrews Resource, Adult Education	billy_ryan@standrews.ie
5	Catherine	Bates	SAOL Project	catherine@saolproject.ie
6	Loretta	O'Brien	Ballynanty Family Resource Centre, Limerick	<i>Not available</i>
7	Anne	O'Dwyer	Loretta Centre	lorettacentrecrumlin@eircom.net
8	Liam	Kilbride	Presentation Education Office	liamkilbride@eircom.net
9	Liz	Waters	An Cosan	l.waters@ancosan.com
10	Julie	White	Co. Limerick VEC	juliewh@hotmail.com
11	Siobhan	McDonnell	SAOL Project	siobhanmcdonnell@saol.ie
12	Meg	Murphy	The WEB Project	megmurphy@yahoo.co.uk
13	Elva	O'Callaghan	NCCWN	nccwn@eircom.net
14	Pauline	McGaley	Warrenmount CED	pmcgaley@iol.ie
15	Anthony	Murphy	Navan Traveller Education	platinumflux@hotmail.com
16	Jacqueline	Joynt	Respond Housing Association	jacqueline.joynt@respond.ie
17	Sharon	Kennedy	Southwest Wexford CDP	swwcdp@iol.ie
18	Heidi	Bedell	TARGET	info@targeteducation.net
19	Andrea	Dalton	St Catherine's	andreadalton@stcatherinescarlow.ie
20	Jen	Donohue	The WEB Project	jenndonohoe@hotmail.com
21	Kate	Morgan	Second Chance Education Project for Women	<i>Not available</i>
22	Yvonne	McCarthy	HACE	ymccarthy@stvincentstrust.ie
23	Siobhan	Madden	Longford Women's Link	siobhan@longfordwomenslink.org
24	Dave	Barry	MAIN/DMC	087 6994843
25	Patricia	Howlin	CTEC	ctec@eircom.net
26	Evelyn	O'Sullivan	Catalyst	evelynbarr@eircom.net
27	Maureen	Murphy	St Catherine's	maureenmurphy@stcatherinescarlow.ie
28	Robbie	Harrold	NACE	adulted@malahidecs.ie
29	Colette	Spears	LYCS	colette.spears@lycs.ie
30	Maeve	O'Grady	Waterford Women's Centre	maeveograde@eircom.net
31	Eithne	Payne	Cork Adult Education Council	epayne@gofree.indigo.ie
32	Marguerite	Thornton	DATE	adte04@eircom.net
	Niamh	O'Reilly	AONTAS	noreilly@aontas.com
	Berni	Brady	AONTAS	bbrady@aontas.com
	Jenny	Gunning	AONTAS	jgunning@aontas.com

An Cosan
 Exciting new Degree developed in Leadership & Community Development
 Community education courses for 60 adults

LYCS
 Childcare youth programme. Community Training Centre
 Community development and development education

Respond Housing Association
 Education & Consultancy
 Community Development

Catalyst
 Providing a pleasant learning environment through after-care & rehabilitation

MAIN/DMC
 Personal effectiveness - stepping stone project
 Mediation

SAOL Project
 FETAC Level 4 Personal Development

Co. Limerick VEC
 Community Education
 Adult Education

NACE
 Chairman of NACE - 55 schools in the community and comprehensive sector
 Director of adult education in Malahide Community School and Teacher

Southwest Wexford CDP
 Back to education initiative
 Adult evening education courses

Cork Adult Education Council
 Arrange lunchtime lecture
 Organise exhibition annually for adult education givers

Navan Traveller Education
 FETAC/Junior Cert. Programme
 BTEI Programme

St Andrews Resource Centre
 Computer training
 Adult Education

CTEC
 Adult training & education

NCCWN
 Provide them with information and analysis re: women's issues at policy level
 Bring together women's network around the country

St Catherine's
 BTEI courses under the community strand
 Moving On Programme for Young Mothers - FETAC level 4 and personal development
 Offer adult education courses according to needs and wants of local community

DATE
 Adult education classes (approx. 60 classes each week)

HACE
 Support adults in realising their won learning potential and achieve their learning goals
 Provide Basic Adult Education Programme in North Inner City

O'Faich College & Further Education
 Provide an extensive adult evening classes
 Second level and PLC College & adult education evening class programme

TARGET
 Literacy Programme (FETAC)
 Adult education courses (ECDL)

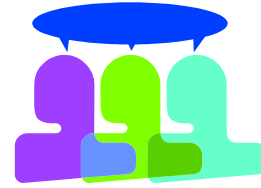
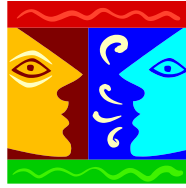
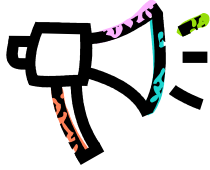
Longford Women's Link
 Political Campaigns e.g. 16 Days of Action Against Violence Against Women
 Gateway Programme & Women's Studies

Parents Education Programme
 Provide psychological support services to enable those most at risk to access the programme
 Provide an opportunity for educational re-engagement for parents of children attending designated disadvantaged schools

The WEB Project
 Community Development
 Adult and community education

Loretta Centre
 Personal Development
 Women's Studies

Waterford Women's Centre
 Apprenticeship training for facilitators
 Pre-development education



AONTAS Community Education Network

strengthen the Voice of the Community Education Sector!

If you are involved in community education and want to have a forum for networking with others in the sector and the opportunity to work together for the advancement of policy work in community education – join the Community Education Network!

The Network is open to all AONTAS members involved in Community Education.

Further information is available from our website www.aontas.com or by contacting Niamh O'Reilly 01 4068220 or email noreilly@aontas.com