

Community Development Consultancy Course (CDCC) Evaluation Report



AONTAS

Community Development Consultancy Course (CDCC)

EVALUATION REPORT

**Provided by AONTAS, Meitheal and Community Action Network
Funded by The Equality For Women Measure (EWM) through
The Department Of Justice, Equality And Law Reform**

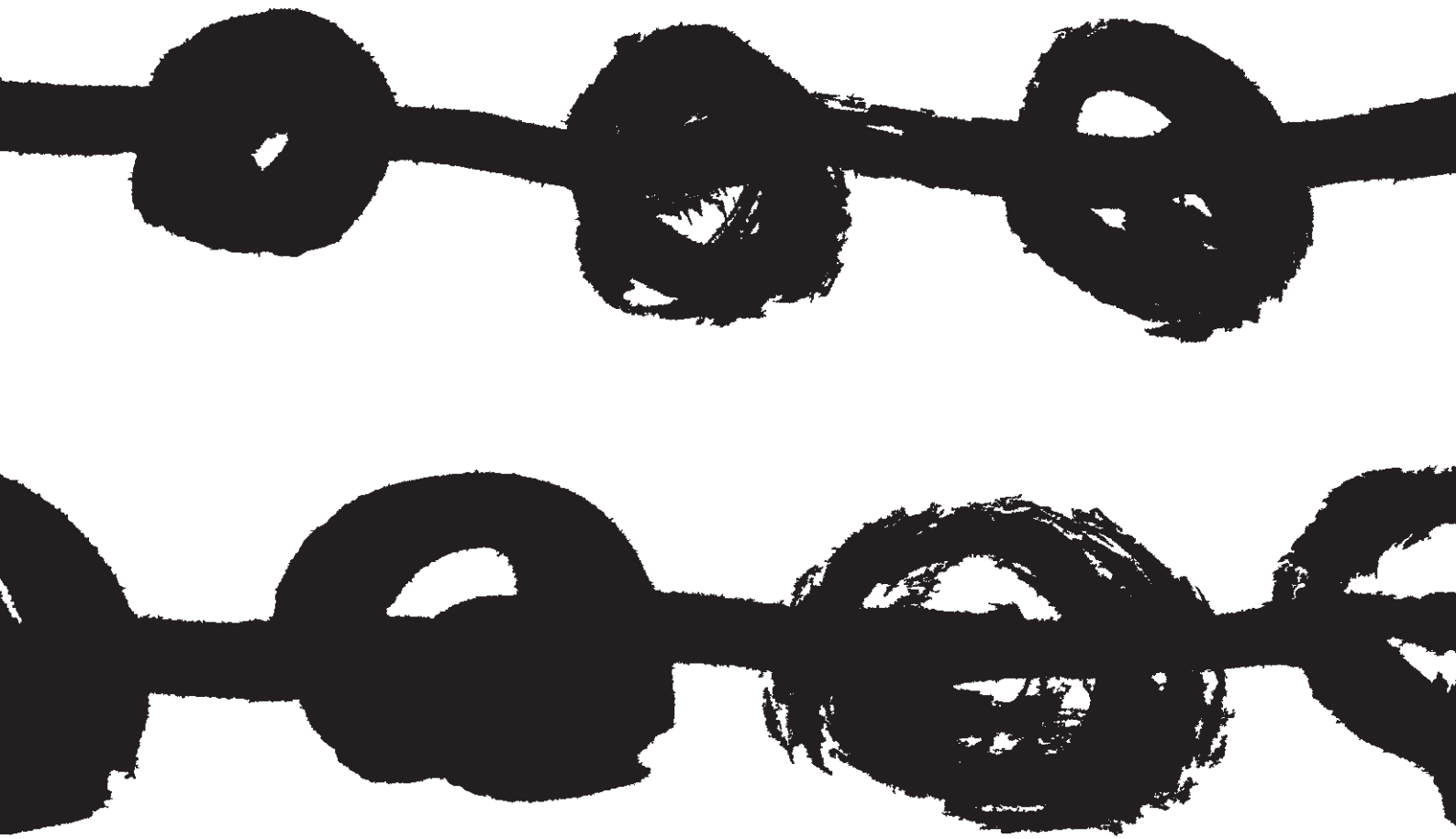
Evaluator: Hilary Tierney

Final Report December 2004



EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

- *To analyse the work of the project in relation to the achievement of its key objectives.*
- *To assess the impact of the course on participants in terms of its effectiveness in enhancing their work opportunities in this section.*
- *To identify key learning for the managing organisations.*



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INTRODUCTION

The Community Development Consultancy Course (CDCC), was provided by a partnership consisting of AONTAS, Meitheal and CAN (Community Action Network). It was funded under Strand C – “Entrepreneurship among Women”, of the Equality for Women Measure (EWM). The EWM is administered by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform under the National Development Plan 2000-2006. AONTAS made the initial application and acted as lead partner in terms of the contract with the Department.

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After years of piecemeal policy developments and poor funding, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw increased recognition and funding for community and local development, as well as an emphasis on equality and lifelong learning through various policy and programme initiatives. Social Partnership arrangements, various EU programmes such as NOW (New Opportunities for Women), policy initiatives including the White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity (2000), White Paper on Adult Education (2000), the Equal Status Act (2000), the Equality for Women Measure (EWM), the expansion of the Community Development Support Programme (CDSP), the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP), the Women’s Education Initiative (WEI) and the Qualifications Act (1999) appeared to herald a time of stability and enhanced recognition of the value and contribution of the voluntary and community sector by the State. These developments brought the voluntary and community sector into more direct contact with the State and State agencies. Increased funding meant more paid staff and the volume and complexity of the work contributed to a demand for consultants in the sector. The CDCC was conceived in a spirit of optimism about sectoral expansion and initiated as a response to the shortage of skilled community development focused consultants who could work effectively in increasingly complex situations. It was modelled on the earlier successful Advanced Community Development Consultancy Courses (ACDC) run in the mid 1990s by a partnership made up of CAN, Meitheal and the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA).

The CDCC was designed, developed, delivered and evaluated in the period October 2002 to June 2004. It aimed to contribute to greater equality and effective social change by training women to take on the role of freelance consultants in community development and community education settings. The course was run with a group of eighteen women, over seven, three day residential modules in the period April 2003 to April 2004. Fourteen women completed the course and are now in the process of making decisions about their future role as consultants in the sector.

Despite the earlier promise mentioned above, this time period also coincided with a degree of upheaval, structural changes and unprecedented uncertainty in the community and local development sector which had its own impact on two of the partners as well as on community development organisations. It may also affect the self-employment prospects of participants as there have been redundancies and organisational restructuring as result of the structural changes in community development.

Evaluation approach

Evaluation is a valuable tool of organisational and practice development and aims to capture, interpret and disseminate learning from actions undertaken. In the context of the CDCC the three aims of the evaluation process were to:

- To analyse the work of the project in relation to the achievement of its key objectives.
- To assess the impact of the course on participants in terms of enhancing their work opportunities in this section.
- To identify key learning for the managing organisations.

The evaluation process provided a useful opportunity to engage stakeholders in a reflective analytic process to capture and interpret learning. The approach taken was a mix of initial desk research, separate group discussions with participants and management committee members, individual interviews with participants and members of the management committee as well as questionnaires sent to participants approximately six weeks after the individual interviews. The interviews (individual and group) provided opportunities for participants, tutors and managing organisations to engage in a semi-structured, reflective and analytic process to explore the effects of the training. The focus of the evaluation was firstly, to get an overview of the course from different perspectives and secondly, to give people an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in order to identify some of the strengths of the course and any issues or themes emerging.

Structure of the Report

The report is presented in four Sections as follows:

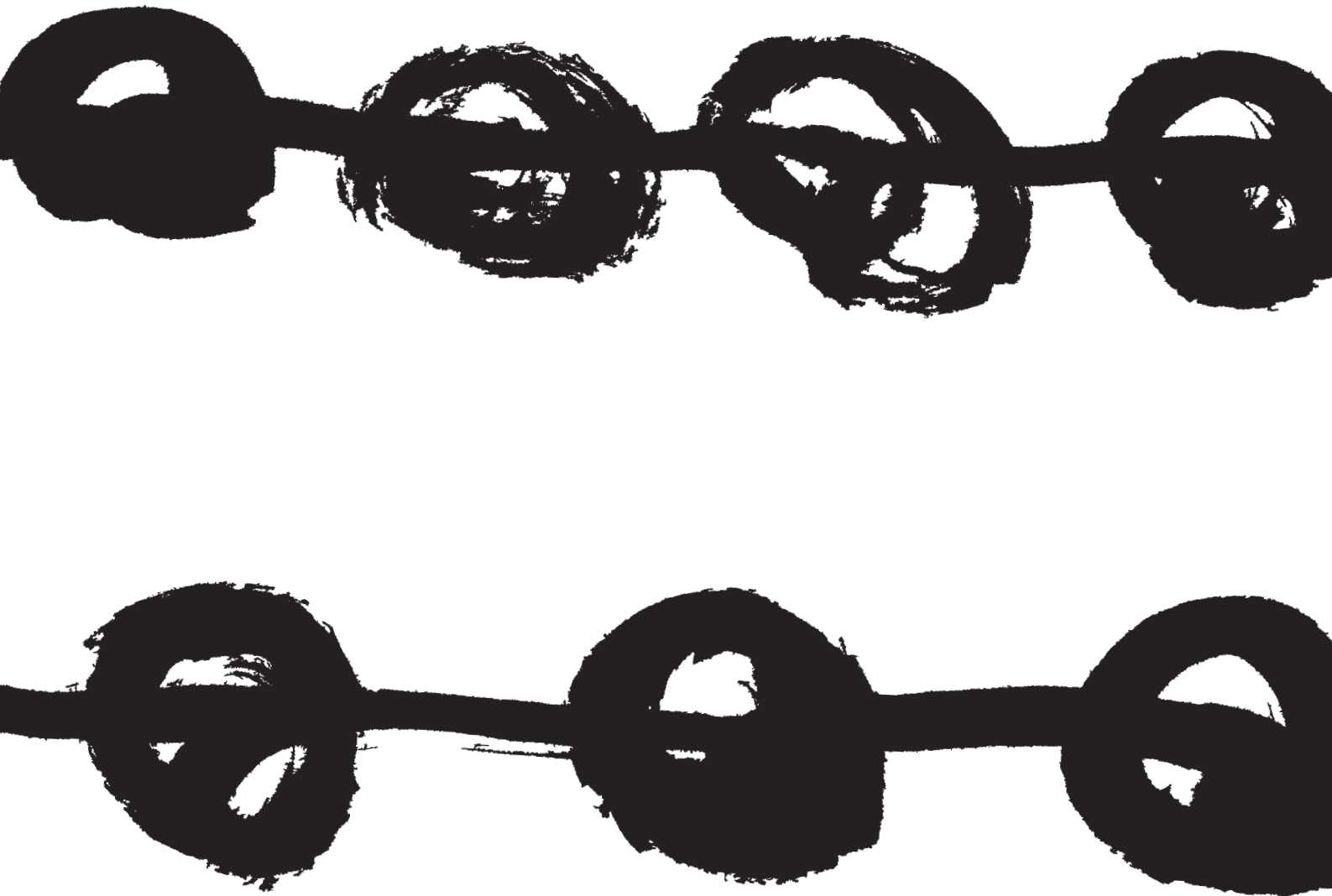
Section 1 describes the context within which CDCC was developed and implemented. It also outlines some of the key developments in relation to community based education and training and profiles the partner organisations.

Section 2 profiles the EWM and provides a detailed overview of the course in terms of design, recruitment and selection processes (including a profile of the participants), outlines the training process overall including structure and content, training methodology, materials, assessment etc.

- 10 **Section 3** provides details of the process of the evaluation and presents the feedback of key stakeholders (participants, trainers and management committee members) on their experience of the CDCC. It outlines some of critical factors that impacted on the training process as well as the reflections, challenges, impact and learning identified by those who participated in the evaluation process.
- Section 4** outlines the key learning from the CDCC experience for participants, trainers and managing organisations.

Section One

THE CONTEXT



1.1 INTRODUCTION

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This Section provides an overview of the context for the development of the CDCC. The community sector has grown significantly in the past twenty years, though the notion of “sector” is a contested one. Farrell (2001) suggests the use of the term to describe “the emergence of platforms or fora where diverse community organisations co-operate on an ongoing basis on a range of issues of relevance to the organisations”. He asserts that heterogeneity rather than homogeneity at local and national levels is a primary characteristic of a sector that consists of a wide range of organisations and groups of differing sizes with differing and sometimes conflicting aims, activities and resources. Nonetheless the term sector is one that is in common usage and it is used here in the sense suggested by Farrell, specifically in relation to the common ground between community education and community development with a particular focus on women’s contribution to both.

1.2 COMMUNITY ACTION IN RESPONSE TO POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE

It is fair to say that both modern community development and community education have been shaped by the social action movements of the 1960s and 70s, significantly by the first EU poverty programmes and subsequent equality focused initiatives such as NOW (New Opportunities for Women). Escalating unemployment, emigration and increased levels of poverty and social exclusion in the 1980s stimulated the emergence of a range of vibrant community based responses. Significantly, most of the responses that sought to tackle the consequences of poverty, unemployment, inequality and isolation were undertaken by women who themselves were experiencing the worst effects of social exclusion.

The 1980s also heralded the establishment of community resource centres and the emergence of a significant numbers of women's groups, many with a strong community education focus. Much of this work focused on the initiation of adult day time education opportunities by and for women. This was a unique development in that the providers were themselves the learners and the provision was specifically learner centred and led.

The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) was established in 1986 as the sole national statutory organisation in Ireland with a particular focus on the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion highlighting the role of community development in anti-poverty work. The CPA had a key leadership role to play in supporting community development activity and was instrumental in supporting successive EU poverty programmes and documenting some key community development learning. This work laid the foundation for the development of the Community Development programmes of the 1990s. It is also significant that AONTAS was actively supporting the women's education groups at this time, while both CAN and Meitheal were founded in the mid and late 1980s respectively as a response to the support needs of an emerging sector.

Community Education

From the early 1980s the soon to be familiar slogan "no crèche, no course" became a catch-cry as community based education initiatives sought to refocus the understanding of adult education into one more in sympathy with an analysis of the role of education, both in reproducing inequality and also its potential to challenge that inequality. A 1993 study (Inglis, Bailey, Murray, 1993) of what was called daytime education describes these local voluntary groups of women educating themselves as 'the major phenomenon within adult education in Ireland. The study identified three key characteristics of their work:

- daytime classes
- voluntary management committees
- run by women for women with childcare facilities

This type of education developed into what is now known as Community Education. Here learners are actively involved in organising and managing their own learning and thereby contribute to the development of new methodologies more appropriate for adult learning. Community education values individual life experience and builds on the group experience. Connolly (2003) suggests that a central function of Community Education has been the provision of 'a forum for listening to the voices of otherwise silenced people'.

WERRC (2001) asserts that it is their closeness to the learner that gives "voluntary management committees the edge in attracting and retaining people who have been failed by the education system elsewhere. This voluntary community based education has been successful in attracting large numbers of with an estimated 30,000 currently engaged in practice. An examination carried out by AONTAS of the difficulties facing women's community based education groups (Mulvey,1994) identified four key problems; funding, premises, skills and accreditation. Kavanagh added the issues of representation and access to progression routes and mainstream programmes to Mulvey's 1994 list of issues above.

Women's leadership at this local level has not often translated into public leadership roles for women. Commenting on women's invisibility at this public level Costello (1999) recommends that women need to engage in confidence building, leadership training and political analysis. Facing the range of challenges outlined above, it is not surprising that women's community based education groups began to develop support networks. According to Kavanagh (2000) these networks sought to:

- strengthen local group effectiveness
- address gaps in provision
- work collectively for policy change

There were some significant developments throughout the 1990s including NOW (New Opportunities for Women) Programmes, a EU Human Resource Initiative which promoted equality for women in relation to education and training opportunities. The WEI (Women's Education Initiative), a scheme specifically targeting educationally disadvantaged women was launched in 1998 by the Department of Education and Science (DES). This was expanded in 2000 to become the EEI (Education Equality Initiative) which targeted men's groups, disability groups and rural community groups in addition to women's groups. These initiatives applied some of the lessons of successful community education including the provision of childcare and support services.

Community Development

The serious social and economic situation of the early 1980s saw women to the forefront of community work focusing on developing issue -based approaches. These approaches located community work within a social change and social justice framework. While many of the community based women's groups were primarily involved in anti-poverty focused community development the mechanism they used was education. This posed and continues to pose some challenges for narrowly defined funding mechanisms as many of the groups are not recognised as providers of part-time Adult Education by the Department of Education and Science (DES). In recognition of their anti-poverty focus many women's community education groups were funded by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) and later by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA).

The 1990s heralded the most dramatic changes in community work due in no small part to the development of an expanded funding infrastructure under the auspices of the then Department of Social Welfare (DSW) soon to be the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA). The Community Development Programme, now the Community Development Support Programme (CDSP) and the Local Development Programme, now the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) was established. In 1990 the Department established specific funding programmes to support locally-based women's groups and community development projects and Core Funding Grants were introduced in 1994, to enable groups to employ a co-ordinator and to engage in planning longer term work with some security. Arising from the success of the Locally Based Women's Group Scheme, in 1993 CPA initiated a new pilot programme for the development of Women's Networks which was subsequently mainstreamed in 1995.

1.3 RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Since the late 1990s the backdrop to community education and community development activity includes the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000 – 2006 made up of a number of programmes including supports for community development, equality, childcare, Peace 2 in the border areas and youth services. The National Anti-poverty Strategy (NAPS) launched in 1997 and reviewed in 2002 aims to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach by all elements of Government to 'poverty proof' all major Government programmes and policies and perhaps more importantly to meet agreed anti-poverty targets in relation to educational disadvantage, disadvantaged areas both rural and urban, unemployment and income poverty. In the absence of sustainable resourcing of the sector good use has been made of EU funded initiatives such as New Opportunities for Women (NOW) and the various Employment programmes to fund innovative community development actions around the country. Unfortunately few have been mainstreamed. The establishment of the Equality Authority in 1999 and the Equal Status Act in 2000 has also been significant in supporting the sector's equality focus, particularly in

relation to women and traveller rights as has the introduction of actions like Equality for Women Measure (EWM), itself a positive action programme for women under the National Development Plan (NDP).

By the early to mid 90s it was evident that the work of the sector had become increasingly complex and in 1994-1995 CAN, Meitheal and the Combat Poverty Agency came together to run the first of two Advanced Community Development Consultancy training courses (ACDC). Traditionally, learning from community education and development activity had little credit or value in the national qualifications system and employment environment. However, training and accreditation came to the forefront partly due to demands from EU funded employment programmes that the sector accessed and partly to the expansion of work opportunities in the sector. At the same time AONTAS along with CPA commissioned a research report "Can you Credit it?" (1995), an examination of the accreditation needs of community groups. All three were involved in setting up the Community and Voluntary Accreditation Forum (CVAF) a network of community organisations concerned with issues of training and accreditation. Unfortunately CVAF was short-lived as it received no core funding and could not be sustained by the membership that was already under pressure in their respective spheres. However it did produce a report entitled, "Towards an Integrated Accreditation Framework" in 1996 which added to the earlier research conducted in this area.

In this context, there are three further policy milestones that deserve a mention here, firstly, the National Qualifications Act 1999, secondly the White Paper on Adult Education and finally the White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity 2000. Taken together these have and will continue to have a profound effect on the interface between Community Development, Community Education and Training and Education generally.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

The European Union has long been concerned with how to develop a framework of qualifications for education and training standards across a diverse range of educa-

tion and training settings. A generic framework of qualifications was developed at a European level and each member State was to develop its own national framework. The Qualifications Act, 1999 proposed the establishment of "framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners".

Three new statutory bodies were set up under the Act to carry out the work outlined above:

1. National Qualifications Authority Ireland (NQAI);
2. Further Education and Training Council (FETAC);
3. Higher Education and Training Council (HETAC).

These developments are significant for community development, education and training interests as they offer the possibility of addressing some of the sector's concerns about progression and recognition of qualifications. It is of particular relevance in the context of the CDCC as the issue of external accreditation was a concern for participants and management alike.

Two of the principal implications of the Act for providers of training programmes is that they must have a QA system agreed with the relevant Council and submit their programmes for validation prior to provision. The Act has major implications for the development of coherent progression routes in community based training. HETAC has validated a number of Community Development programmes in various Higher Education institutions including Dundalk and Waterford Institutes of Technology. Currently there are FE awards in both Community Development and Youth Work though the NCVA, though like all existing awards their placement on the new framework has yet to be decided.

White Paper on Adult Education (Learning for Life) 2000

The eighties and early nineties saw the birth of locally based Adult Education groups, which added a new dimension to Adult Education provision and provided the impetus for the development of community education. After years of lobbying, much of it spearheaded by AONTAS the long awaited White Paper on Adult Education (2000) highlighted the key role of community education in engaging with participants in a range of disadvantaged settings, developing innovative approaches to learning and in “taking the lived experience of the participants as a starting point.” (DES, 2000, p.110). The White Paper also highlights the fact that there are two differing views about community education. In one view it is simply an extension of traditional provision and be summarised as “education in the community but not of the community” (DES, 2000, p.110). In the second view, which is adopted by the White Paper and is closer to community development, community education is seen as a “process of empowerment and development at both a collective and individual level”. The White Paper also recognised that Community Education has been and still is essentially led by and for women.

White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity 2000

While having a much wider remit than education and training, the White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector was published in late 2000. It held great promise for an enhanced relationship between the voluntary sector and the State and more particularly, a commitment to some €9 million funding for the various schemes. The White Paper is concerned with the nature of the relationship between sector and the State and with the structures and principles that underpin that relationship. The publication of the White Paper could be seen to herald a “formal endorsement of community development as a favoured method of voluntary sector working and policies of social inclusion” (Harvey 2003).

With the change in Government Departments following the 2002 election, the White Paper came under the remit of the new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The broad community and voluntary sector has been disappointed with how the White Paper is being implemented by the Department, particularly in relation to an unanticipated cut in funding of over 50% and a perceived drawback from the commitment to training and accreditation. Harvey(2004) concludes that the “level of commitment (to implementing the White Paper) on the Government side, both at political and administrative level appears to be low.” More worryingly, the apparent stalemate around the implementation of the White Paper exposes the “weak political position of the voluntary and community sector... and (reflects) the urgent need for the Community and Voluntary sector to develop a political strategy to respond to this difficult situation.”

1.4 PROFILE OF AONTAS, CAN AND MEITHEAL

AONTAS

AONTAS, the National Association of Adult Education was established in 1969 as an umbrella body for Adult Education in Ireland. AONTAS is a voluntary membership organisation representing statutory and voluntary organisations as well as individuals. It’s mission is “to promote the development of a learning society through the provision of a quality and comprehensive system of adult learning and education which is accessible to and inclusive of all”. In the early days the membership was primarily made up of VECs which were the main providers of Adult Education in addition to some other groups with an interest in Adult Education such as rural groups, schools, church groups, libraries etc. As mentioned earlier since the advent of community based education in the 1980s and increased funding opportunities the community and voluntary membership of AONTAS has grown significantly. Since 1996 there has been an increase of sixty nine per cent (69%) in membership from the sector, which now totals two thirds of the AONTAS group membership.

In response to the demand for support from the growing number of community based women's groups who were providing education opportunities for the most disadvantaged women AONTAS became involved in a number of significant initiatives. It has accessed funding through New Opportunities for Women (N.O.W.) from 1992-1994 and 1996-1998 respectively, the Women's Education Initiative (WEI) and finally the STANCE project which was jointly funded by the DES and DSFCA. The Green (1998) and White Papers (2000) on Adult Education provided an impetus for an enhanced policy role in relation to Adult and Community Education. The work of AONTAS includes:

- promoting adult education as a key to lifelong learning
- participating in policy making
- organising networking among members
- establishing links with other key organisations
- collecting information and undertaking research

AONTAS has taken a leading role in lobbying for the full implementation of the White Paper on Adult Education and also has the role of providing support to the new Community Education Facilitators employed by VECs across the country. AONTAS through the STANCE programme has invested a good deal of energy and resources to enabling the women's networks to set up a National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks (NCCWN). The Collective continues to be supported by AONTAS "to enable it to work independently towards providing a collective mechanism for women's networks to participate in and respond to national policy development". The desire to ensure a quality consultancy service from an equality perspective, to the Networks around the country was part of the impetus for AONTAS to explore initiating what was to become the CDCC.

Community Action Network (CAN)

CAN was founded in 1987 by a small group of people who began offering specialised training and organisational support to community groups from a social inclusion and justice perspective. In recent years CAN has expanded greatly in response to the needs of community, voluntary and more recently statutory organisations and has a core staff of nine and a small number of associates.

CAN's mission is to “promote and contribute to greater equality in Irish Society by developing policy and good practice in community, voluntary and statutory organisations engaged in social change through community development” CAN uses the term Community Development to describe an:

“intentional process... that involves a community in identifying its own needs and then designing a development plan in response to those needs.... the community itself is both the subject and the initiator of the development and any help from outside must be taken only as complementary to the inner resources of the community..... it occurs over time and must be given the adequate inner and outer environmental conditions to develop human well-being, access to enough material goods to have a dignified life, but also control over the development of our mental, psychic and spiritual potentials” (CAN, 2001).

Training and organisational development have always been core elements of CAN's work, aiming to “develop and enhance people's individual and collective capacity to challenge inequality and promote social justice and “influence community, voluntary and statutory organisations to develop policy and good practice that will contribute to social inclusion and justice”. CAN has developed specialised courses in community leadership for activists and workers using the NCVA strand of FETAC, an awards Council for FE operating the National Qualifications Framework.

Meitheal

Meitheal was established in 1989 and opened its office, with meeting and training rooms in Dublin in late 1994. Its mission is to “create radical change through working for equality and social justice”. Meitheal is a community development training and support organisation working with groups and organisations in the community and voluntary sectors throughout Ireland in a range of roles including training and consultancy. It is a small, not-for-profit organisation with some ten staff in total. Its work is underpinned by community development and feminist perspectives with a strong emphasis on equality and organisational development in the community development sector, the cornerstone of its strategic direction. It sees community development as:

“a collective process through which members of communities and groups share, reflect on and analyse their own experiences, identify their needs and work towards making appropriate changes at an individual, community and society level”.

Meitheal has a particular focus on supporting, encouraging and developing the process of community development and working in the community development sector and has developed specialised courses in facilitation skills, group work, supervision and management for activists and workers. Meitheal is currently exploring external accreditation of some of these courses through FETAC.

In recent years both CAN and Meitheal have been funded as support agencies by the DCRGA as well as by programme specific grants from private funders. Both organisations are acknowledged to be leading and innovative community development training and support organisations committed to the development of best practice internally and in the sector generally.



Section Two

CDCC OVERVIEW



2.1 INTRODUCTION

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One of drivers for the development of what became the CDCC was the need to ensure the availability of highly skilled consultants to work with an expanding and increasingly complex sector. Of particular importance was the need to ensure that these consultants operated within an equality framework and understood the internal dynamics and the external issues facing the sector. While a lot of training has been going on, little of it is at an advanced level. Therefore, the CDCC also operated as a progression route for women within the sector to deepen their understanding and develop more complex skills in their work for change in their organisations and communities.

AONTAS was particularly concerned about this in the context of the nascent National Collective of Community based Women's Networks (NCCWN) and perceived an opportunity to build capacity both individually and organisationally to the benefit of all. AONTAS in its work with the women's networks identified a need for consultants to do a range of work including training, research, evaluation, planning and review. Network members had sometimes spent precious resources on contracting consultants and subsequently had experience of poor or inappropriate consultancy. The Womens' Networks needed consultants with skills appropriate to the sector, who were clear about their role and ability to work within professional and ethical boundaries.

Training to develop people to work at this level is time consuming and expensive. Secure and substantive funding is crucial to the successful development and implementation of any course. The National Development Plan 2000-2006 made a number of commitments to funding equality initiatives including the Equality for Women Measure (EWM) which became the funding source for the CDCC in late 2002, though the process had begun in late 2000 with the call for applications under the measure.

2.2 EQUALITY FOR WOMEN MEASURE APPLICATION

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The Equality for Women Measure (EWM) is funded by the Irish Government and the EU under the National Development Plan 2000-2006. It is administered by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform with the Work Research Centre (WRC) as the designated technical support agency. The EWM is a response to the reality that women do not participate on an equal footing in political, social, economic and cultural life in Ireland e.g. only 5% of senior management positions in private and public sectors are held by women, less than 15% of TDs and local representatives are women and significantly women experience the highest risk of poverty and still account for the majority of the low-paid. In addition, access to and equality of participation in education and training continues to be a problem for many women. The Measure is concerned with supporting women's access to the labour market and increasing their participation in decision-making at all levels in society and is designed to impact on policy and practice at local, regional and national level through tackling the “barriers to equality for women, including attitudinal, structural and institutional barriers”.

Projects funded under the EWM are delivered across all sectors and by a diverse range of organisations from voluntary and community based, social and local partnerships, higher education institutions, local authorities, state and semi-state agencies as well as private companies and political parties. Seventy projects have been allocated a total of €14.1 million in the first phase of implementation of the Measure, between 2001 and 2004. There are eight key strands to the measure including access to education and training, up-skilling, career development, entrepreneurship, decision making, gender proofing, family friendly policy development and research.

2.3 CDCC APPLICATION FOR EWM

Invitations to apply for the Measure were advertised in late 2000 with a closing date of January 2001. AONTAS approached both Meitheal and CAN with a proposal to enter a partnership to seek funds under the Measure to run a Community Development Consultancy Course for women. The initial application focusing on

running something akin to the original ACDC (an intensive twenty one day course over seven, three day residential modules) for women was made in January 2001 and was considered by the applications committee of the Measure in March 2001. The initial application for funding was turned down by the Measure and while disappointed, the three partner organisations went back to their original work-plans. In late 2001, money that was unspent from the Human Resources Initiative was reallocated to the EWM under the entrepreneurship strand. An additional twenty-two applications were offered funding including the CDCC. The partner organisations considered the opportunity in the light of existing commitments and decided that it was too good an opportunity to turn down even though the timing was not of their choosing.

Objectives

The objectives for the project in the final Action Plan were to:

- plan, design and deliver a modular training course in women's leadership toward greater equality.
- enable women and their organisations to develop a critical analysis of the factors impeding greater equality.
- have local women leaders trained to a level that will enable them to become consultants to the community sector.
- up-skill women working at local level to access employment at greater levels of influence.
- document the learning and disseminate it as a model of good practice (Final Action Plan EWM, 2002).

The contract for funding was signed in December and the management committee was formally brought together and met a number of times. It was agreed that AONTAS would act as lead partner in terms of the financial and legal obligations and reporting to WRC as well as administering the course. A part-time project administrator was recruited and was located in AONTAS. CAN and Meitheal took on the training delivery role, though all were involved in interviewing and aspects of the assessment process.

The course content, plan, structure and promotion material were developed and agreed by the trainers and committee. A brochure was printed and disseminated widely by all three organisations, with over 1000 copies sent out as well as having it on the AONTAS website.

A recruitment and selection process was put in place to allow for application to close in the third week of January, interviews to take place in mid February and the course to begin on the first day of April 2003, with seven three day residential modules taking place between then and mid March 2004 for some eighteen participants.

Management Structure

The CDCC was managed by a management committee which was to meet ten times over the period of the course. The seven person management Committee was made up of representatives from the three partner organisations including the trainers and a representative of the participants. Joanna McMinn (CEO of the National Women's Council Of Ireland) was invited to join the committee as an external expert. AONTAS as the lead organisation and Maureen Kavanagh as project manager had responsibility for the day-to-day co-ordination of the project in conjunction with the trainers. The Committee delegated certain functions to the trainers and administration/financial staff in AONTAS.

30 The function of the management committee was to oversee the:

- overall aim of the course
- course design
- monitoring of course
- monitoring of finances
- selection of participants and assessment of participants
- overall management of the course while delegating operational management to the two trainers and administrator.

The role of the trainers was to:

- co-ordinate the training course
- plan and deliver the training
- report to the management group.

The role of the Support/Administrative Worker (part-time) was to

- carry out the administration work for the project
- liaise with the trainers and management
- handle information queries relating to the project.

2.4 CDCC ORGANISATION

The course was run over seven, three day modules, twenty-one days in total. Since the CDCC was drawing its participants from across the country, a central location for the residential modules was important. The Abbey Court Hotel in Nenagh was selected on the basis of its centrality, accessibility by public transport, value and its facilities. The course was free to participants. Public travel rate expenses and social care expenses were paid to participants for all modules.

Each module or learning event began on Tuesday mid-morning, to allow time for travel and completed on Thursday evening. The seven modules were spaced out, five in 2003 and two in 2004 as follows; April, May, June, September, November 2003 and January and March 2004.

Mid-way meetings between trainers and individual participants were held in September 2003. A final interview between individual participants and the trainers and members of the management committee took place at the completion of the course in April 2004.

2.5 CDCC AIMS

The final application to the EWM outlined the thinking behind the CDCC. The project overall wished “to create stronger agency within the individual and organisations working to create greater equality in Irish society”. The CDCC was designed with a specific group of potential participants in mind, primarily women activists “who wish to extend their leadership role further and explore issues to do with women’s style of leadership and issues to do with equality in particular”.

In designing the course the partners were conscious that many women, while very successful leaders and representatives within their own groups at local and regional levels are challenged to maintain their position and long-term involve-

ment when they move from this secure place, particularly in fora where different working principles and methods are employed. Therefore, the training course sought to “enable women to influence decision making fora and bring a feminist analysis and an equality focus to decision making fora as consultants and employees ... (as well as) being able to access better places/employment within community development and community education”.

Specifically the CDCC aimed to:

1. train and develop women to be powerful and effective agents for greater equality at individual, organisational and sectoral level enabling them to become free-lance consultants in the areas of Community Development and Community Education
2. develop the skills and competencies of local women activists to be consultants as effective agents for change and greater equality at individual, organisational and sectoral level

2.6 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE TRAINING APPROACH

As the sector has become more complex the work of the consultant of necessity, has become multifaceted, requiring integration of the various roles a consultant can take up. Prendiville (1999) points to tensions that have arisen in the sector in recent times about the ability of consultants to meet the challenges of the consultant function at different levels (Kelleher and Associates, 1996; Haase et al, 1996). Prendiville proposes a model of consultancy for the sector that requires a “process organisational development consultant outlook and a political social analysis of disadvantage and exclusion” based on an in- depth knowledge and awareness of the needs of the sector.

The Strategic Policy Framework for Equality Issues (NESF, 2002) was also influential both in its analysis of inequality and in the call to action at each of four inter-related contexts in pursuit of equality i.e. economic, socio-cultural, political and affective domain. In order to address those four contexts, the Framework proposes four key equality objectives relating to redistribution, recognition, representation and respect.

In order to engage with such a challenging agenda, the consultancy role requires a combination of the skills, knowledge, experiences and awareness of both the organisational and community development contexts as well as an analysis of inequality which in turn requires a range of specific skills and training (Prendiville, 1999). Taken together, the consultancy model along with the analysis and actions contained in the Equality Framework can be seen to provide the basis for the CDCC content and approach.

2.7 CDCC METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

In honouring the social change and greater equality focus, the training approach was designed to reflect action on three levels:

- individual participants
- organisations that participants work with, either as employees/activists or as consultants
- community and voluntary sector more broadly

In order to enhance opportunities for learning and informed by the theories of Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles, the trainers were keen to use a variety of training approaches. Among the methods used were:

- Presentation of theory and ideas
- Application to own experience and practice
- Critical analysis of theory
- Peer learning
- Reading
- Reflection on own practice
- Skills practice
- Critique and feedback

There was also a commitment that the course content would balance the presentation of new ideas and theories with responding to individual participant needs within a participative learning environment utilising community development training and community education principles and methodologies.

Participant Support

There was an awareness that participants would be coming into this course with a good deal of diversity in their backgrounds, experience, skills etc. It was also clear that to develop the level of knowledge and skill necessary to work as a consultant a high level of self directed learning between modules would be required, particularly in relation to preparing work for assessment. A number of supports were put in place:

- One to one support
- Mid-way joint reviews (feedback from tutors and opportunity to identify objectives for the second part of the course)

- Triads/Peer Support Groups
- Vision Groups
- Readings sent out between modules

Supports for self-employment

The entire course was designed to build participants' skills and capacity for self-employment. In addition to a module on self-employment, it was recognised that a range of supports would be necessary to develop the participants' capacity for self-employment as consultants:

- Specific technical support and information required for self-employment
- Building professional supports
- Mapping the journey of self-employment – individual business plans to provide a focus for self-employment start-up.
- Peer supervision and support
- Development of long-term support mechanisms
- Feedback on practice
- Feedback on consultancy work undertaken as part of the course requirements

2.8 CDCC CONTENT AND ASSESSMENT

The course process and content was structured in a cumulative modular format which supported the development of a cohesive and comprehensive knowledge and skills base from which to operate as a community development consultant. Particular themes were identified as being central to that role. A number of the

module themes were continuous, and others such as strategic planning were self-contained within one three day learning event.

Key course themes

1. Delivering consultancy within an equality perspective.

- a) Presentation of equality framework*
- b) Promotion of equality through community development
- c) Promotion of equality through organisational development consultancy
- d) Consultants as agents of change
 - hearing and working with all parts of the organisation
 - equality within consulting

** The equality theme was a central one that related to all others through the CDCC.*

2. Self-Employment

- a) Specific technical support and information required for self-employment
- b) Building professional supports
- c) Mapping the journey of self-employment – individual business plans to provide a focus for self-employment start-up.

3. Organisation Theory

- a) Theories of the development of organisations
- b) Systemic approach to organisations
- c) Strategies for highlighting equality within organisational development
 - for both organisation and consultant.

4. Team Development

Each 3-day learning event commenced with a session entitled 'Gathering for Learning' and ended with a session entitled 'Scattering' which were facilitated by course participants and formed part of the assessment. They were designed to demonstrate in practice team building and development. There were also two further three hour sessions on the theory and practice of team development, focusing on using team building as a strategy in organisational development, which provided space for reflection and feedback on skills and practice of team building.

5. Conflict and working with difference

- a) Consideration of power in working with conflict
- b) Diagnosing organisational conflict
- c) Role of the consultant in managing conflict
- d) Contextualising conflict and the 'hierarchy of inequalities' within social structures
- e) Processes to facilitate the management of conflict

6. Strategic Planning

- a) Opportunities to influence planning to include an equality focus
- b) Different types of planning and plans
- c) The right of consultants to influence organisations' planning
- d) Developing a personal strategy for influencing planning for equality within consultancy work.

Learning Event Template

Each module or learning event followed a similar format(see below) over the course of the three days, allowing the opportunity to suit the requirements of the theme and stage of the course. All learning events had team building as a theme, and some had a further two themes, while others had a single focus. In order to foster the development of professional supports triads or peer support groups were formed to meet between modules. The purpose was to provide support and peer supervision for the participants in the implementation of their business plan between events with some support from the trainers at the third and sixth module.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Gathering for learning (1.25 hours)	Reading seminar and skills workshop related to theme of learning event. (3 hours)	Theme contd. (4 hours)
Peer supervision and application of learning to practice (3 hours)	Theme. Presentation of ideas. Small group exercises. (4 hours)	Scattering (1.25 hours)

Assessment

While it was originally intended to explore the possibility of external accreditation in the original application in early 2001, it was not possible to pursue this option when the funding was allocated in late 2002. There were therefore five key elements to the assessment of the CDCC.

1. Consultancy Vision

- A Consultancy Vision and its Implementation formed part of the practice and written evidence of the course. This was to be completed by Module 3, and submitted in August 2003.
- Participants were asked to develop a vision for themselves as consultants. This involved an analysis of themselves at the beginning of the course, identification of the steps they would need to take to realise their vision as well as naming what might help and hinder the realisation of the vision. Guidelines were provided by the trainers.
- Individual progress towards the agreed learning objectives was monitored by both the participant and the tutors through individual interviews with the course tutors.
- There was a mid-way 1:1 session with each participant to provide a feedback opportunity and to direct the learning in the remainder of the course.
- There was a final interview during April 2004, after which participants received written feedback (see 4 below).
- On-going support and assessment of progress on the implementation of the Vision Plan was provided throughout the modules, and in between the modules in Vision Support Groups which were created on a geographical basis.

2. Facilitation of Group Gathering and Scattering.

Parts of the course were organised around opening (Gathering) sessions to reconvene the group and closing (Scattering) sessions to provide opportunities for reflection on the module as a learner and group member. Participants, in pairs, facilitated those sessions for each of the modules. Guidelines were provided and participants met with trainers during the module for reflection and feedback. Participants were assessed on their preparation, facilitation and learning from the experience.

3. Organisation Development Consultancy

Participants undertook a piece of organisational development consultancy work. This had an equality focus and integrated the theoretical learning. In the write-up of this work, participants were expected to refer to the theoretical learning, the individual reflection on the relationship and the location of the work within the range of interventions available within the organisation. This piece of work was submitted in December, 2003.

4. Final Interview

Interviews with each participant were conducted at the end of the course by a trainer and a member of the management committee. Three themes were addressed:

- learning in relation to the overall learning objectives
- definition of the role of consultant
- response to, and learning from the feedback offered by course staff on their consultancy work above

5. Attendance

There was an 85% attendance requirement.

Grading of Assessment

Assessment of items 1-4 above was graded using the following schema; Fail, initially termed Insufficient, Sufficient, (subsequently changed to Pass), Merit and Distinction. It was also decided that in the event of a grade of “Fail”, a participant could be offered the opportunity to re-submit course material, at the discretion of the course tutors. Criteria were developed for grading.

2.9 SELECTION PROCESS AND PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The course was widely advertised and initial application required the completion of a short application form for short-listing purposes. This was followed by a stringent selection process for those called to interview.

One hundred and twelve applications (112) were received for the course with just over fifty from western, south and north western counties. Thirty-two applicants (32) were short listed for individual (30mins) and small group (8 people) interviews in February 2003 based on the following criteria:

- at least five years experience in community development/ community education
- basic facilitation and group work experience

Two trainers and two members of the management group conducted the interviews to assess both the individual and their interaction within the group setting.

Skills	Knowledge
Appropriate level of: Analytical; Facilitation; Planning; Organising; Group-work.	Of most or all of: Equality issue; Social justice issues; Community development; Group-work; Organisations and how they operate.
Experience	Experience
At least 5 years of at least two of the four below: Leading; chairing; facilitating groups; Community organising; Working in a community organisation; Equality and social justice issues.	Motivation towards becoming a consultant: Motivation to improve employment prospects; Ability to take initiative; self organise; build supports and work alone; Ability to commit to a long course; Commitment to working from an equality perspective in their consultancy work; Readiness to commit to working in consultancy role either internally or externally.

Primary or Secondary Priority Group Membership

The applicant's membership of the primary or secondary priority group also featured in the selection criteria from the EWM perspective. The primary priority group were those women who had some experience in community development work and training and who wanted to become consultants and the secondary priority group were those women with some previous consultancy experience who were not necessarily historically involved in community work as activists/workers.

CDCC Participant Profile

Following the interview process eighteen women were offered and took up places on the course. The participants ranged in age from 28 -55, with thirteen of the group aged over 40. Twelve had completed third level education to degree level or beyond while the remaining six had either specific skills training in community development and education/training or pre-degree level qualifications. Seven of the participants were from Dublin and Wicklow, while the remainder came from Cork, Galway, Carlow, Donegal, Mayo and Monaghan.

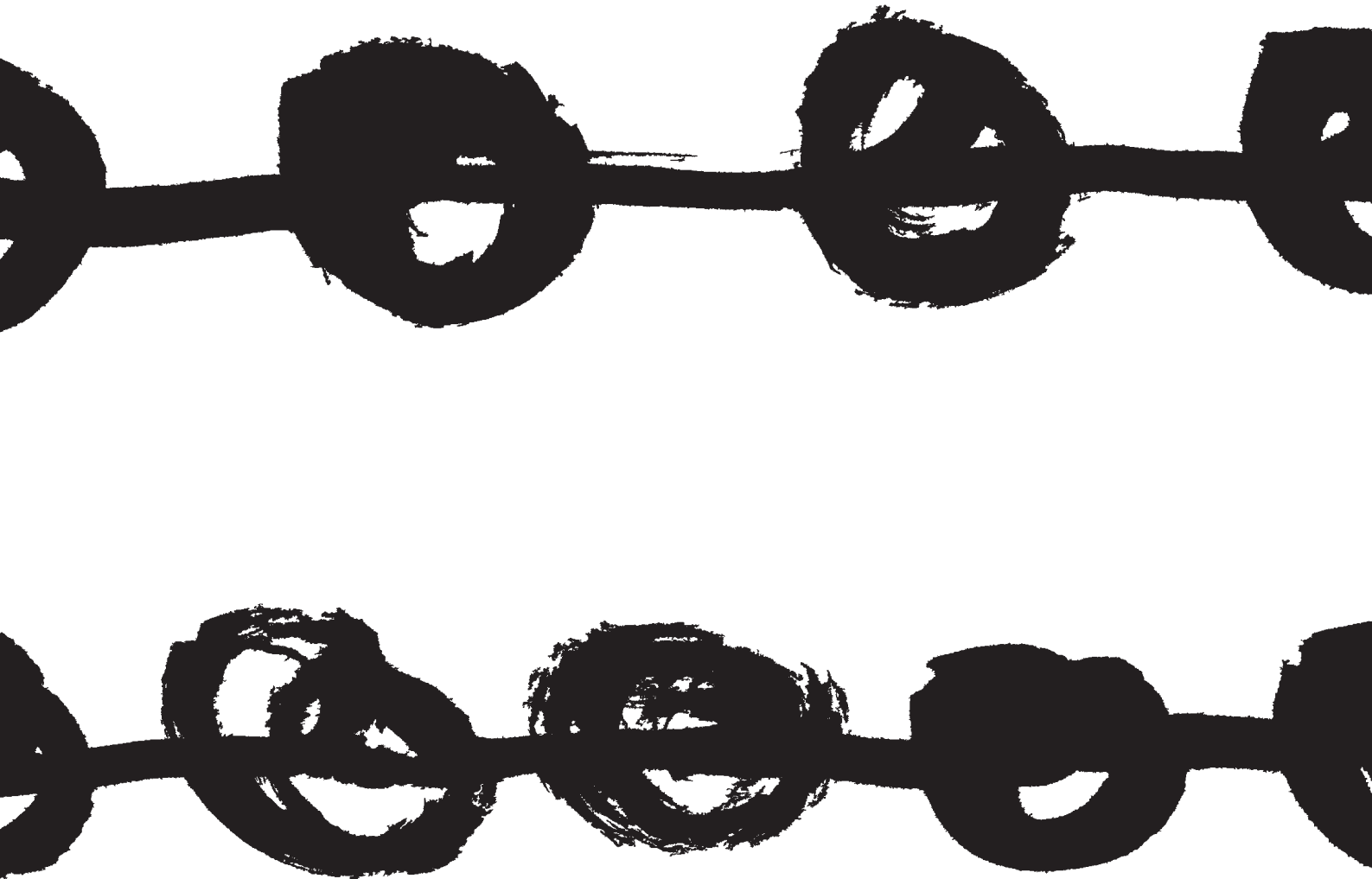
Prior to starting the CDCC the participants were working in a range of contexts in the voluntary and community sector including project management, policy and education work, women's networks, community development, community arts and other specific contexts e.g. rape crisis centre, asylum seekers. A small number were already self-employed to a greater or lesser extent. All had a vast range of voluntary work experience in addition to the paid work already mentioned.





Section Three

EVALUATION PROCESS



INTRODUCTION

46 Three distinct groups were involved in reflecting on the CDCC experience, exploring the issues arising and identifying learning to inform any future developments. These were the participants, trainers and the management committee members (past and present). In the case of trainers and management, with the exception of the administrator, the process involved semi-structured interviews. The participants were involved in two semi-structured group interviews, individual interviews and questionnaire. The interviews (individual and group) provided opportunities for participants, trainers and managing organisations to engage in a semi-structured, reflective and analytic process. The focus was firstly, to get an overview of the course from different perspectives and secondly, give people an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in order to identify some of the strengths of the course and any issues or themes emerging. The key learning from all stakeholders is presented in Section 4 of the report.

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

The evaluation focused on the three key objectives of the CDCC which were to:

1. Develop participants' critical analysis of the factors impeding greater equality
2. Develop participants' skills and competencies as an organisational development/social change consultant in the community sector
3. Provide training that enables participants to set up as free-lance consultants and take up the role of a consultant

A group interview was held with the participants during the sixth module in January, 2004. This session was designed to introduce the evaluation, negotiate their participation in the evaluation process and to begin the process of reflection and issue identification. A second group interview was held during the last module in March as were eight individual interviews. It is important to note that much of the participants' reflection and feedback during the group and individual interviews was centred on their experience of the training and group process itself and

not so much on the impact of the training on their skills, knowledge, competence and motivation as consultants. Of the initial eighteen who began, fourteen attended the final interview in April 2004, one left because of pressure of work, a further two left because of changes in family circumstances/illness and one did not attend the final module and didn't submit all course-work.

A detailed questionnaire was developed after the group and individual interviews and provided an opportunity to explore some of the emerging issues raised as well as gather some quantitative data. It was sent to all fourteen participants who completed the CDCC and was returned by all fourteen.

Evaluation Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to elicit information in six key areas as follows:

Section 1: Factors Influencing Participants' application

Section 2: Course Objectives and Impact

Section 3: Content, Methods, Trainers

Section 4: Assessment and Accreditation

Section 5: Administration and Organisation

Section 6: Recommendations

These headings provide a structure for the participants' feedback. All fourteen returned questionnaires with all the ratings completed except for some minor omissions which are noted as they occur. The key findings from the questionnaires are presented in this section of the report.

3.2 ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

Positive Aspects of the CDCC

Generally the feedback about the course was very positive with participants noting that it was run in a very professional way with rigour and integrity and had demystified consultancy. In particular there was praise for the quality of attention from trainers and an acknowledgement of the usefulness of the tutors' experience and expertise. There was also a very positive attitude to the provider organisations particularly those directly involved in the training indicated by comments such as "if CAN, Meitheal are doing it it'll be good".

In terms of content, the focus on equality was very useful as was the learning about contracting and negotiating the consultancy role. Both the vision planning and dance and movement were praised with one person saying that the movement helped her "feel strong in the group".

The fact that the course was fully funded was a key consideration for many participants as was the provision of social care expenses.

Undertaking a course with women for women was very attractive allowing as it did an opportunity to explore both the commonality of experience on the one hand and diversity among women on the other. There was an acknowledgment of the potential to explore barriers and opportunities for women as consultants and to develop a network of consultants after the course.

Some Issues and Concerns

The modules were very intense and long with little personal time. Some participants were not prepared for the amount of reading and other work between modules. There were varying experiences of vision groups, some worked really well, other's did not work so well. This was also true of the different creative methodologies especially movement, which didn't suit everyone and was resisted strongly by some. There was some frustration at the experiential style of training and learning adopted; there was an expectation among some that that they would be told what consultancy was and how to do it. At least one participant would have liked more specific input on gender and gender analysis.

One of the recurring themes was the issue of assessment and accreditation. There was a shared sense that level of work, assessment and commitment warranted external certification which would offer further credibility to the consultants who completed the course. The willingness on the part of participants to pay for external accreditation illustrates the value placed on such accreditation by participants, particularly in a context where the vast majority of participants indicated that the fact that there was no fee influenced their decision to apply for the course and nearly half of participants indicated that the provision of social care expenses was very influential in their application for CDC course.

The other recurring theme was related to group process. There was a perception from some that the course was much more process orientated than the information brochure suggested. There was shared sense of struggling with the time set aside for group process and a lack of common understanding about its purpose. Some people didn't expect it to be so personally demanding. There was a sense that some theory might be useful to help understand the group process. Some expressed a need to explore the nature of the group and a have a clearer knowledge about how the group might use experiential learning and theories.

There was also a perception that there was a good deal of competition in the group that was not acknowledged. This may have contributed to what some participants called a culture of self-reliance or individualism. It is also worthwhile noting the possible impact of the reality that many of the participants would in effect be competing for work in a shrinking market on completion of the course. Some of these tensions were also exacerbated by tensions between individual participants, different levels of group process experience among group members; as well as differing expectations of the role of trainers by the group; and of the group by trainers specifically in relation to group process. It is also possible that participants concerns or anxiety about practice based assessment exacerbated some of the tensions inherent in the group's exploration of issues of equality, participation and process.

Impact of CDCC

Participants were asked to reflect on the impact of the course to date. There was an acknowledgement of the cumulative nature of the learning and of the complexity of the consultancy role. Participants cited increased self awareness, bravery, confidence and an affirmation of their own skills and knowledge particularly in relation to going out and looking for work and doing consultancy work outside of the course. There was also an increased awareness of the equality agenda and the need as consultants to promote equality within organisations. At the end of the course half of the participants were active in community development consultancy. In order to assess the true impact of the course it would be necessary to do a follow-up piece of research after a year in the field. Since the project has only been funded until its end in June 2004, the management committee regarded this as a separate piece of work which would require additional funding.

3.3 TRAINERS REFLECTIONS AND FEEDBACK

Both trainers have substantial experience of training at a high level with over twenty five years experience in the sector between them. Each organisation was very conscious of the needs of the sector and had been involved in various attempts to meet these needs by increasing the number of competent consultants available nationally. The funding under the EWM offered a unique opportunity to embed the equality dimension in consultancy training at practitioner or professional level. The trainers' reflections are grouped under a number of headings.

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Roles

The initial working relationship between the partner organisations was very positive and collaborative. From the trainers' perspective it does appear that the relationships between the training partners and the organising partner became somewhat strained over the course of the training. Some of this may have been due to the pressure to get started, lack of clarity about the role of AONTAS in relation to the WRC, the fact that CAN and Meitheal had the higher profile training roles etc. It might be useful to look at the issue of equality in the partnership, how do the different roles get fulfilled, can opportunities for all partners to be involved in content/delivery be created? There is a sense from the trainers that role differentiation between the partners became too rigidly defined and that it might have been better if AONTAS also contributed to the course content. There was also an acknowledgement that the trainers in this instance fulfilled a number of challenging roles; as trainers, as the main contact with participants and also as members of the management committee.

Selection and recruitment

It was acknowledged by the trainers that eighteen is a large group, possibly too large a number for a course that encourages and requires high levels of active participation. A group of sixteen might work better for a course of this duration and intensity. A smaller number may have helped retention of participants to course completion. As with any course that is funded by a particular funding stream the

weighting of particular selection criteria meant that some excellent candidates didn't get a place because they were not part of the priority group. There was also a perception that there were gaps in some applicants' theory and understanding of the conceptual framework for the work that needed to be addressed to prepare them to engage successfully with training at this level.

Content

Initially, at the project application stage it looked as if the course was in the formation stage and that there was some opportunity for the trainers to influence the content and focus. The trainers had originally planned to have eight modules. It emerged that there was insufficient funding for eight and that participants could not be charged for their participation. The vision support groups were included to serve some of the same purpose as the eighth module, as well as providing an opportunity to network and get support, a key need of freelance workers. While the tensions that emerged in the group cannot be attributed to the course duration, it is also possible that the shorter duration affected the pace of the course, lessened the opportunity to respond to emerging issues and perhaps meant that learning needs were not identified in depth at the beginning of the course. The trainers were also concerned that there was not enough time to go into each theme in depth, to address adequately theory, skills and application.

Methodologies

The trainers had also intended to introduce a number of creative methodologies, including dance into each module, in part to expose participants to other ways of doing things and to take a break during the intensive reading workshops and have a physical stretch. The other motivations included an acknowledgment of the range of intelligences and of learning styles in any group. The introduction of movement prompted quite a negative reaction and resistance from some participants. While it was not intended that movement would be the primary creative method, it became a central theme of the training rather than an introduction to a variety of

methods. The trainers acknowledged that some people can be very self-conscious about movement.

The discomfort may have been exacerbated by the fact that many participants had an expectation of a particular style of training and were surprised by and, to some extent, resisted the introduction of movement. The resistance began to have a ripple effect and some of those participants who enjoyed it found it difficult to assert that in the face of others' profound resistance. There is now a sense that more time devoted to introducing creative methods might help allay any concerns and support people to participate.

One of the other tensions mentioned by the trainers was participants' different understandings of the role and power of the consultant. Their sense was that some wanted to be told how to be consultants rather than learn how to be consultants. This concurs with some of the participants expectations of how the training would be delivered e.g. lectures.

Finally, while the devolving of responsibility for the "gathering and scattering" to participants was very valuable for them, the format may have also made it difficult for the trainers to weave the threads and connections across the modules. It may have exacerbated the "authority" role of the trainers who assessed the participants' facilitation of the gathering and scattering sessions in addition to being responsible for the content and process.

Group Process

The trainers were attempting to work with processes at three levels, personal, interpersonal and group. The dynamic of the group was challenging for all concerned at times. There appeared to be diverse levels of awareness of group processes which may have contributed to some of the issues that arose subsequently in the group. From the trainers' perspective, some of the tensions in the group dynamic were a personal/interpersonal process rather than a group process though this did impact

significantly on the group. The trainers' sense now is that the resultant group process reflected the reality of what happens in the consultancy situation and offered an opportunity to work with issues in the group.

Co-training

Both CAN and Meitheal have collaborated very successfully in the past, though the two trainers had not worked together before the CDCC. Organisationally, they have different perspectives on the issue of external accreditation. The co-training relationship received a good deal of attention from the trainers in terms of support and supervision, checking in between sessions, planning together, self and other awareness.

Assessment and Accreditation

The trainers acknowledged the challenges associated with assessing process oriented training. Being part of the process and then assessing can lead into stormy waters. It was recognised that participating in a course at the level of the CDCC can contribute to participants' initially feeling deskilled during the learning process. Perhaps this contributed to a culture of judgement and fear of making a mistake in the group.

There were also some concerns about the language of grading the assessment, sufficient was used as in "sufficiently" skilled to do the work. However this was subsequently changed to the more traditional grade of pass. In relation to assessment, honesty and transparency are two of the key principles that should underpin the formal process of assessment. There needs to be an awareness of the sensitivity of participants at assessment points like the mid-way review. It was also acknowledged that there is not much of a history in the sector in relation to assessment, in fact there is a culture of not assessing and not being explicit about the abilities and skills required to work at any given level. Assessment of learning can have an intrinsic value in its own right separate from external accreditation as a way of benchmarking standards of practice.

One of the trainers felt that there was too much work for the course not to be externally accredited, though at the same time she was very clear that there were insufficient resources and time to pursue external accreditation for the CDCC.

Readings

The readings between modules were designed to challenge and deepen participants understanding of various aspects of community development consultancy. The trainers wanted people to have a specific resource to take forward from the training (approx 50 articles and 10 core books) and attempted to select readings that were relevant and up to date. In a context where there is not a lot of Irish material available, they did a trawl and provided two very specific readings (article or book chapter) for each module which was posted in advance to participants for discussion at the residential. Each module also contained a reading workshop to help participants to come to grips with the material.

The trainers provided more reading at the modules and had books available for the participants to borrow during the module, though one trainer noted that there was not a high level of interest in the books that were available. While acknowledging the hectic pace of peoples' lives the trainers nonetheless felt it would be unrealistic to think someone could simply attend the residential modules without putting their learning into practice between each. Participants need to think through the commitment required to participate and succeed in the course and in particular their expectations in relation to coursework, like the readings that were not particularly assessment oriented.

Key Learning for Trainers

The trainers' regular supervision along with participants' module evaluation gave an opportunity to reflect on the course and identify learning on an ongoing basis as is evident in the feedback. This allowed for incorporating any learning from one module into the next. The trainers' learning in terms of the CDCC overall related to

a range of issues including partnership, selection of participants, the need for additional training pre-CDCC, course content, group process and accreditation. The details are incorporated into Section 4 of this report.

3.3 MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REFLECTIONS AND FEEDBACK

The interviews with the management committee members and the administrator focused on exploring their understanding of the roles of the organisations and committee, identifying issues arising from the training and pinpointing key learning both in operational and strategic terms. The key themes that emerged for the partners from the evaluation process are summarised below. These include inter-agency partnership, working as a management committee and issues to do with funding, administration, training process and accreditation of the CDC course.

Inter-agency Partnership

Initially, when exploring the need for a training course for women community development consultants, AONTAS recognised the value of individual agency expertise and sought to bring that expertise together into a partnership. The CDC course was submitted as an equal three way partnership with AONTAS taking on the administration and financial responsibility in relation to the funder. One of the significant issues mentioned was the fact that the first proposal for the CDC was initially turned down and each of the organisations had gone to other work. The offer of funding under the Entrepreneurial Strand of the EWM came at very short notice for all concerned. There was a sense of urgency to get started, of finding it hard to turn down such an opportunity though conscious that all organisations had put the application to one side and moved onto other work.

Funding

One of the big challenges was how to negotiate with and within the funding requirements. By the time the project was approved, the original budget applied for was out of date but could not be changed even though costs had increased in the meantime. This created some difficulties in relation to budgeting for childcare, accommodation and travel.

Nature of Partnership

The initial broad partnership agreement put in place for the original application referred to the organisations as equal partners with AONTAS “having total financial and legal responsibility for the project”. It appears that the initial partnership agreement was not re-visited in the pressure to get started when funding was allocated. Different understandings and expectations of partnership emerged as an issue later in the management committee process.

There seems to be some agreement that that the partnership initially worked quite well then became strained over time. There was some sense that the lines of communication, processes and timelines for decision making did not work as well as they could have for all concerned.

Working as a Management Committee

The committee met ten times between modules over the duration of the course. Terms of reference for the management committee were developed in the initial project planning phases and included in the final EWM application. There were also a number of smaller meetings between different members during the planning and assessment stages of the course. While the committee worked very well together initially, there appears to have been a build up of frustration arising from different understandings of the role of the committee and ways of working together.

The participants were invited and encouraged to join the management committee at the first module. However, it appears that participant representation on the management committee did not reach its full potential. Those participants interested and available offered to attend meetings on the dates that had been set. The idea was that time would be found at the residential event outside the formal course timetable to give feedback from the meetings and identify issues from the participants to be brought to the management committee. Three meetings were attended by three individual participants. It was very difficult for participants from outside Dublin to attend.

Issues for the Management Committee

It is unfortunate that the evaluation meeting for the management committee was attended by only two members namely the AONTAS representative and the CAN trainer. The absence of the Meitheal trainer was explained by the fact that she had ceased to work for Meitheal. The fact that just two of the six member committee participated in the session may have contributed to the participants' focusing on the challenges in the management committee processes, rather than on the successes of the project overall.

There was a perception of lack of clarity about the focus of meetings, issues to be addressed and a concern that the committee did not build in time and attention for the strategic dimension. It appears that the terms of reference for the management committee were not adopted formally or amended by the committee as a whole when the project began. This led to different perceptions of what the committee would focus on.

Role of Trainers in the Management Committee

The trainers participated as full members of the committee, and reported on the progress of the training as well as being part of the decision making processes. One member interpreted the terms of reference in ways that had the trainers reporting

to but not being part of the committee. The member was concerned that perhaps the trainers' dual roles contributed to the focus of the committee on operational issues. On the other hand the trainers felt strongly that the trainers needed to be part of the committee, that a reporting function would leave significant gaps in understanding and functioning of the committee.

Training Process

The challenging dynamic that emerged in the training group also had an impact on the work of the committee and contributed to the fact that it put a higher emphasis on the training content and process rather than overall strategic direction.

Assessment and Accreditation

In many ways the questions raised by the committee members in relation to assessment and accreditation are not rooted in the internal or external accreditation debate. They were issues of principle that relate to practitioner training and benchmarking best practice, both in the training and post-training environment. These questions still remain to be considered in broader forum. There was also a deep appreciation of the tensions inherent in assessing courses where there is high level of personal participation and group process. The importance of ensuring that participants are clear about the training providers' expectations of them and the consequences of not meeting those expectations was underlined.

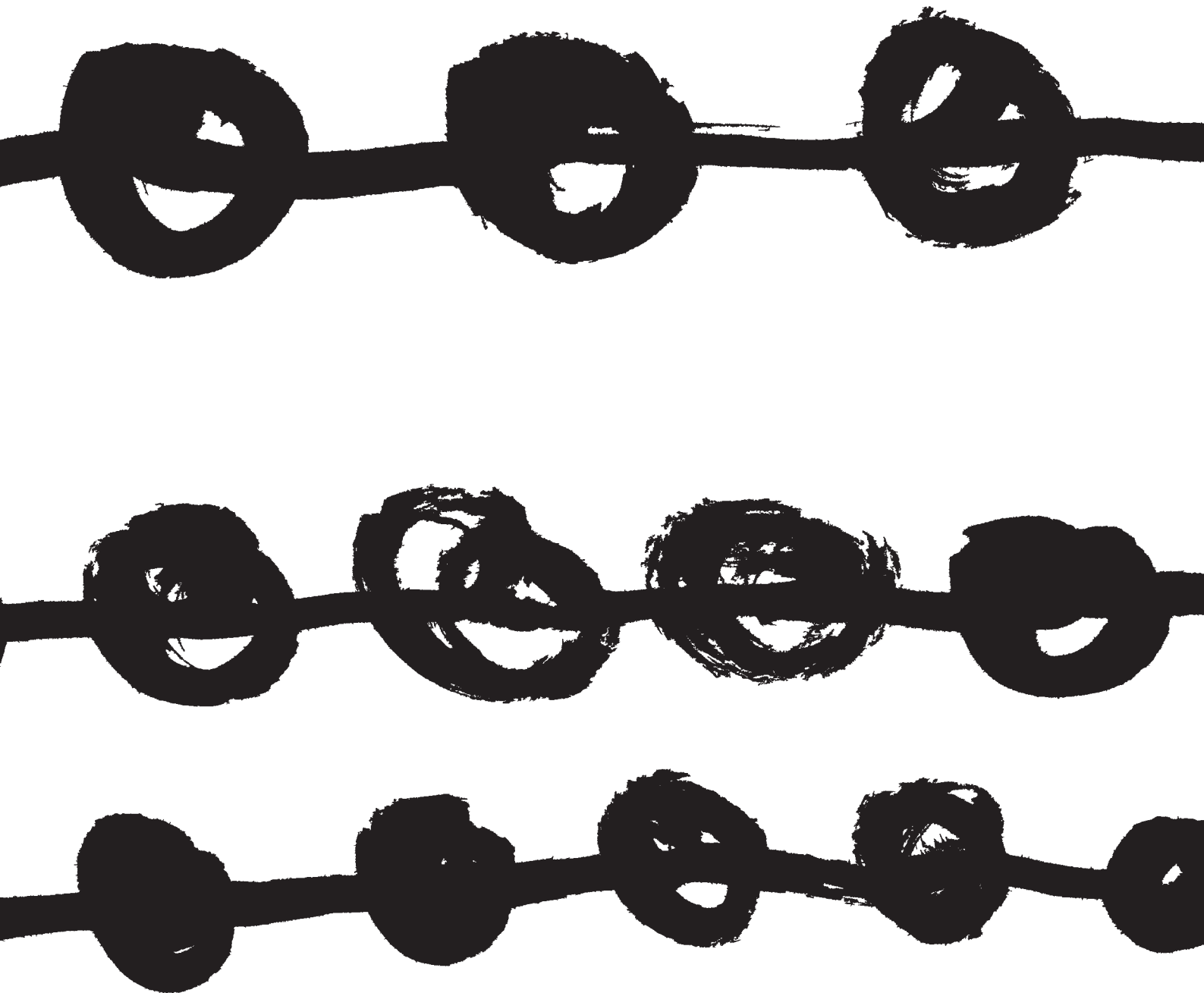
Key Learning relating for the Partner Organisations

Despite the challenges noted in the previous sections, it is important to note that some valuable learning emerged for all partners. There is a sense of the course providing a useful and important function. The partners are glad that the course took place and was both successful and challenging. There is an acknowledgement of the crucial role of the trainers in holding that for both the partners and the participants. The CDCC achieved its aim of training equality focused consultants and has increased the pool of trained consultants outside Dublin. It also gave all partners an

60 experience of partnership and has further enhanced their expertise and capacity in the sector. Partnerships of true equality are complex and there needs to clarity of expectations, roles and working agreements with review as part of the process. Some of the key learning of the committee is summarised in Section 4 of the report.

Section Four

LEARNING FROM THE CDCC



INTRODUCTION

A range of key learning points were identified by participants, trainers and members of the management committee during the evaluation process. These are grouped under six headings:

1. Partnership and Management
2. Funding and Funders
3. CDCC Organisation and Administration
4. Selection and Recruitment
5. Content, Process and Methodologies
6. Assessment and Accreditation

4.1 PARTNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- It is important to attend to the partnership process in the early stages, particularly taking into account expectations, experiences, and constraints affecting each partner.
- Develop a documented working agreement including a review point to determine how the partnership is working and the extent to which it is meeting the partners' expectations.
- Develop a clear rationale and model of participant representation on the management committee.
- Clarify roles and functions of the management committee, especially relating to creating a stable membership, clear functions, agenda setting etc.

- Create management systems that support all to do their job whether that be training, administration, operational management or strategic development.
- Consider and decide on the role and responsibility of the partners in referring graduates after the completion of the training. Make this explicit to graduates.
- Ensure that the committee attends to wider strategic agenda from the beginning, connecting the course to overall sectoral issues and responding to and engaging with changes in the sector/external environment.
- Explore how to bridge the gap in professional level qualifications in the voluntary and community sector including exploring opportunities to mainstream courses such as the CDCC.

4.2 FUNDING AND FUNDERS

- If it is not possible to access the total funding needed to run a course such as CDCC, consider saying no to funding that may constrain the training provision. In this instance an initial module might have avoided a lot of the issues that subsequently arose.
- Ideally, participants' needs should drive content and process not funder or provider interests. Providers need to engage with funders to reconcile the tension between the training the funder wants to pay for and the training that is needed. Funders need to find ways to be more flexible to responding to the training needs of the sector.

4.3 COURSE ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION

- Make sure that participants have access to and understand all the relevant information about the course, the expectations of them and the commitment required to participate successfully in the training.

- In any future courses, meetings should take place between the trainers and the administrator to establish clear expectations and protocols on the administration of the course, including how information would be relayed from tutors and course participants to administrator.
- Particular attention should be paid to inter-agency communication and the time needed to make decisions, transmit information, documentation etc. In particular information for distribution between modules should be sent well in advance to administrator with a clear indication of whether more information is to follow and from whom.

4.4 SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

- Explore how to address the challenges and tensions relating to selection criteria and group size. This relates to a potential misfit between those who need and want the training and the funders' requirements in terms of priority participant profiles.
- Consider recruiting small numbers for intensive professional level courses. A smaller number may have helped retention of participants to course completion.
- Explore ways to establish the level of group process skills and self – awareness participants bring to a course of this nature.

4.5 CONTENT, PROCESS AND METHODOLOGIES

- It would be useful to provide a foundation module in group work theory and practice which would also serve as a course induction, provide a basis for group building and cohesion, introduction to differing methodologies, as well as providing opportunities to clarify expectations, roles and boundaries.

- Provide more opportunities for people to get to know each other and make connections, find out about each other's work, network, set the scene and create a collaborative culture.
- Consider taking more time for each theme or less themes if time and resources are limited.
- Make the model of CDCC more explicit from the beginning and explore the implications of that model for the role of the trainers, group process, boundaries, methodologies, dealing with conflict and diversity etc.
- Address the tensions between content and process in the CDCC and how they might be shaped by the group's dynamic and experience.
- It might be useful to introduce, explore and practice the concept of "group process" very early on the course, perhaps at a foundation module.
- Ensure that everyone involved in the training process recognises that working with issues of equality is highly complex and will be challenging for all concerned since it relates to issues of access, participation and outcome.
- Clarify the trainers' expectations about participation in group activities using different methodologies. Be clear about process/consequences if participants choose not to engage.
- Consider mentoring system or small practice group facilitated by a member of the partner organisations/training team to embed some of the learning, build cohesion among participants and guarantee some consistency of experience.
- A peer reading club or forum where participants could discuss reading material with each other might be usefully considered. Make sure to provide a list of reading at the outset for the course (where possible from Irish/voluntary sector sources).

- It would be useful to explore the possibilities of developing a manual or text for community development consultancy as a resource for practitioners.
- Include more opportunities for participants to practice constructive peer feedback e.g. giving feedback based on analysis, receiving feedback both negative and positive.
- Review content and methodologies and assess if more needs to be included on those issues raised by participants e.g. role of supervision in the work, boundaries and taking care of yourself as a consultant, use of case studies, role-plays, analysis of situations etc.

4.6 ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

- It would be useful to introduce the topic of assessment early in the group and support participants to explore possible issues or concerns that may arise for them particularly in the context of ongoing group process and where the trainers are also the assessors.
- It is important for trainers to balance the need to assure consistency of practice through assessment with the capacity of participants to engage effectively with those assessment processes.
- Providers need to consider the impact of multi-faceted assessment on adults learning part-time at practitioner level, workload and study requirements vs. work, home and other responsibilities etc.
- Given that the partnership is quite short term, the question of the role and responsibility of the partners in recommending/referring the fourteen graduates from the CDCC must be addressed.

- The sector needs to address the provision of more quality training for those who work (voluntary or paid) at different levels in the sector including group work and facilitation, training trainers and in-service training for existing consultants.
- The sector needs to address the issue of standards of practice and how best to validate or credit the capacity to work to that standard through external accreditation.
- Those concerned with education and training in the sector need to engage with other stakeholders, including awarding bodies to ensure the provision of accessible and credible external certification. It is important to benchmark the standard for CDCC practice in a way that also values and includes diverse backgrounds and qualifications of participants.
- The issue of sectoral endorsement of training for practitioners needs to be addressed to ensure professional standards of work in the sector as it grapples with increasingly complex issues of policy and practice.

4.7 POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF THE CDCC

Given the external and internal challenges to the CDCC it is a credit to all concerned that the course was as successful as it was in meeting its objectives of:

- developing participants' critical analysis of the factors impeding greater equality
 - developing participants' skills and competencies as an organisational development/social change consultant in the community sector
 - providing training that enables participants to set up as free-lance consultants and take up the role of being a consultant
1. Fourteen participants completed the training. The CDCC achieved its aim of training equality focused consultants and has increased the pool of trained consultants outside Dublin.

2. The CDCC course enabled participants to feel competent enough to take up the role of community development consultant. In June 2004, some six weeks after the completion of the course, half the participants were active in community development consultancy.
3. The participants have a clear analysis of the factors impeding greater equality and are confident of their ability to promote equality through their consultancy work.
4. The CDCC has demonstrated a need for the community sector to engage with participants' demand for meaningful external accreditation.
5. Three influential organisations in the sector had the opportunity to work together, offer a course that otherwise would have not taken place and learn about partnership.
6. The CDCC and other courses have highlighted a gap in professional level training and qualifications in the voluntary and community sector that benchmarks the standard for consultancy practice and also values and includes the different backgrounds and qualifications of participants.

4.8 FINAL COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

"...hopefully another course will run, based on the learning from this one .."

"Overall an excellent course. Glad to have had the opportunity to be a participant".

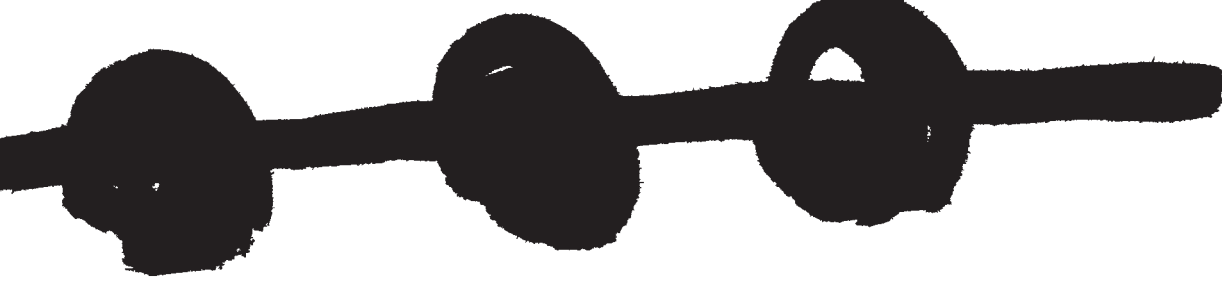
"It is hard to offer or suggest changes to a course that worked well in most aspects. I enjoyed and learned from my participation in the course and really appreciated the honesty, skill and experience of both Pat and Patricia. While at times I found the experience daunting, and hard going at times, I learned a lot about myself as a worker in the field. My co-learners added to this experience both by their challenges and their support".

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