

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION NETWORK MEETING



**Date:** 13th June 2018

**Time:** 10.00am – 3.30pm

**Venue:** ENGINE, Upper Cecil Street, Limerick City

**Theme:** Reaffirming the Values of Community Education



## Agenda

<b>10.00 – 10.30:</b>	<b>Registration, tea &amp; coffee, networking</b>
<b>10.30 - 10.45:</b>	<b>Introductions and updates Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator</b>
<b>10.45 - 11.10:</b>	<b>Case study: Maintaining values in challenging times Ann Flannery (Larkin Unemployed Centre)</b>
<b>11.10 – 11.30:</b>	<b>Sharing learning from An Erasmus+ study visit to Lisbon Caroline McEntee (Killucan Area Services)</b>
<b>11.30 – 1.00:</b>	<b>Group discussion: Reaffirming community education values and principles Facilitated by Noel Fitzgerald</b>
<b>1.00 – 1.45:</b>	<b>Lunch, networking and a tour of images from LCEN ‘Journeys’ Art Trail</b>
<b>1.45 – 3.15:</b>	<b>Group discussion: Building on the strengths of CEN Facilitated by Noel Fitzgerald</b>
<b>3.15 – 3.30:</b>	<b>Wrap up and close</b>

## Limerick Community Education 'Journeys' Exhibition



The meeting opened with a welcome from Helen Flanagan, Chair of the Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN) and an introduction by Catherine Aylmer to a recent LCEN project, 'Journeys' which showcased community education art and craft across Limerick city. The project gave local people the opportunity to travel collectively to different locations across the city to see the art and craft work of community education groups. Some feedback from the Art and Craft trail was captured and displayed by the LCEN on the day, and can be seen below.



**Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN) 'Journeys' Art and Craft Trail**

**The reflections of participants**

It was lovely to visit other centres and see all the things they do

Great camaraderie and support on the journey of learning. Rewarding work

A beautiful journey depicting the amazing talent of the participants and the wonderful tutors. Well done to all

Excellent morning. Never realised that there was so much going on around the city. A real eye opener and great for each community. Loved it all.

Very interesting journey with a wonderful variety of art, crafts. Lovely helpful community spirit in all centres.

So much creativity. Great Lovely work, every piece means so much

Very good and a great boost for Limerick

Wonderful displays and congratulations to all involved. Arts & Craft Trail that delighted the eye

This is the best thing to happen for a lot of us who are just trying to do what we can to change ourselves

Great display of crafts and the works and stories behind them.

Great work. Very Well organised day. Congratulations to all involved

Uplifting to look at

Excellent. Very sociable. Men's Shed, Children's seats and wordings for children. This should be sent to every school in Ireland. Many thanks to all for this day

What a wonderful day. I can't believe there are so many artistic people. Everyone I met was nicer than the next.

Absolutely fantastic to see such creativity in so many different mediums. I was blown away by the items and how beautiful they were

Wonderful displays and congratulations to all involved. Arts & Craft Trail that delighted the eye

## **Hanging in and trying to hold true - but for how long? The impact of increasing regulation and control on the ethos & practice of Community Education**

### **Presentation by Anne Flannery, Larkin Unemployed Centre**

Ann Flannery of the Larkin Unemployed Centre discussed the history, philosophy and practice of the centre. She highlighted the programmes they run, the rationale behind their provision, the numbers of learners engaging with their projects and their target groups.

Ann also spoke about the following projects of the Larkin Centre:

- Grundtvig project: Learning, Life Histories, and Citizenship which aims to capture the subjective experience of participants in a community education learning environment
- A Community Arts project
- “In Our Hands” Community Education Project
- A Peer Mentoring in Community Education programme
- A Men’s Health and Wellbeing Programme which resulted in the creation of a community garden
- Engaging men as partners and participants in research project

The wider benefits of the Larkin Centre programmes from the perspective of learners was also discussed and included: improved confidence and new friendships; increased motivation; and a consideration of options never previously considered such as attending college.

The stigma suffered by people on social welfare was discussed and highlighted the importance of challenging myths surrounding social welfare claimants.

Ann also discussed the changing policy landscape in community education in which the ethos and practice of community education is not recognised by the statutory funders; employment activation agenda is the primary driver of adult education policy; and the assessment of disadvantage fails to grasp its multi layered dimensions.

The importance of practitioners’ engagement with local and national policy development was highlighted and an appeal was made to work collectively to build on the ‘strong and proud tradition’ of community education in Ireland.

A copy of Anne's presentation is available via the EPAL CEN group or on request.



Ann Flannery highlights the work of the Larkin Unemployed Centre and explores the challenges in maintaining the ethos and values of the project within a climate of cuts, resource shortages and labour market activation policies.

-----

**The Power of Non Formal Learning**  
**Erasmus+ Mobility – Lisbon Portugal: Killucan Area Services**  
**A presentation by Caroline McEntee**

Caroline McEntee of Killucan Area Services shared with the CEN her experience of participating in an AONTAS Erasmus+ mobility to Lisbon in April this year. A mobility is an opportunity to travel to another European country to learn about other adult education projects through visits, job shadowing, or participating in a training course. This particular mobility involved participating on a week-long training course about the value of non-formal learning.

The course involved cultural visits including a study visit to Lisbon Story Centre, storytelling, improvisation theatre, introduction to a living library, group work, photo voice (a process that combines photography with grassroots social action and education), and a walking tour of Lisbon city.

Examples of good practice were shared and Caroline spoke about her learning in relation to the Leerpunt Centre for Basic Education in Belgium with aims to increase literacy and support language development among foreign language speakers.

Caroline spoke very highly of the mobility and its benefits to her on personal and professional levels.

**A copy of Caroline’s presentation is available via the EPALE CEN group or on request.**



Caroline McEntee shares her experience of an Erasmus+ mobility in Lisbon



## **Building on the Strengths of the CEN Discussion facilitated by Noel Fitzgerald**

The purpose of this session was to offer the members of the CEN an opportunity to discuss the principles and values of community education, explore the current experience of facilitating community education and examine the purpose and function of the CEN.



### **Considering the Principles / Values of Community Education**

The participants were asked to name the types of values and principles they thought about as they did Community Education work. The values and principles (named in the table below) all came from the AONTAS definition of Community Education which is as follows:

Community education is a process of personal and community transformation, empowerment, challenge, social change and collective responsiveness. It is community-led reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their community. Through its ethos and holistic approach community education builds the capacity of groups to engage in developing a social teaching and learning process that is creative, participative and needs-based. Community education is grounded on principles of justice, equality and inclusiveness. It differs from general adult education provision due to its political and radical methodologies.

The exercise showed that while Community Educators did not always consciously think of the values and principles of Community Education, they did think about these when delivering Community Education processes. The areas that those presented identified most strongly with were community ed as reflecting and valuing the lived experiences of individuals and their community, that it was community led, and that it espoused the principles of inclusiveness, equality and justice.

Many present noted that they enjoyed talking about the values and principles of education considering the amount of time people spend in a normal work day attending to bureaucratic and technical matters.



## Exploring the experiences of facilitating Community Education

The participants were asked to think about their experience in planning, organising and delivering Community Education initiatives, programmes, sessions and groups by considering the following questions:

- What is it like?
- What helps?
- What hinders?



The following are some of the comments noted when participants explored what it is like to work in community education:



The groups were asked what helps and hinders the work and the following are some of the points to arise:

Helps	Hinders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacting on people’s lives (positive)</li> <li>• Support of colleagues / networking</li> <li>• Commitment of tutors and volunteers</li> <li>• Relationship with the ETB</li> <li>• Collective network</li> <li>• Experienced tutors</li> <li>• Vibrant Communities</li> <li>• Childcare</li> <li>• Doing more outreach</li> <li>• Having a structure and a plan</li> <li>• Tutor one-to-one with students</li> <li>• Being creative in courses</li> <li>• Listening and needs-led</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Home School Liaison Officer</li> <li>• Collective Responsiveness</li> <li>• Local network</li> <li>• ETB</li> <li>• Other Centres</li> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Agency connections</li> <li>• Efficient staff</li> <li>• Local knowledge</li> <li>• Community champions</li> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistical reporting which doesn’t reflect full-reality of learner outcomes</li> <li>• For-profit employment agencies</li> <li>• Conditionality attached to funding streams</li> <li>• Excessive bureaucracy and administration</li> <li>• Conflicting goals (between programmes)</li> <li>• Lack of resources, (people), time, and funding streams</li> <li>• Location – Transport</li> <li>• Conflict around the purpose of Community Education</li> <li>• Not implementing education plans</li> <li>• Funders</li> <li>• Losing the informality of community education</li> <li>• Service Provision</li> <li>• Bureaucracy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Blocks people</li> <li>○ Loses people</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Conditions attached to social welfare preventing engagement in education</li> <li>• Tutor availability</li> <li>• Less opportunity for offering ‘tasters’</li> <li>• No joined up thinking between agencies</li> <li>• Barriers (childcare, transport, accessibility of courses etc.)</li> </ul>

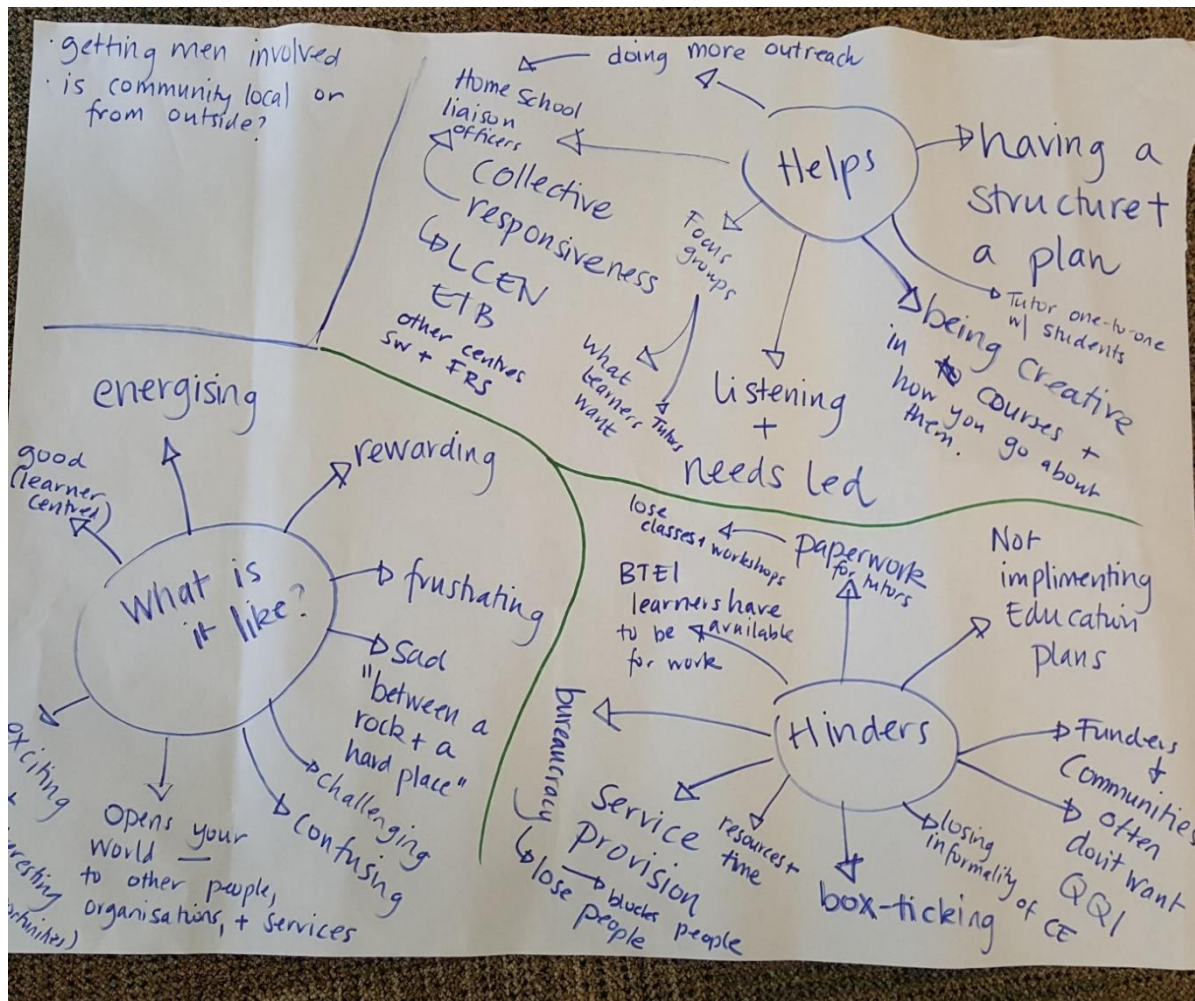
**Some of the following discussion points arose:**

- The issues are similar across the country especially in relation to hindrances
- Organisations are on the same page
- Bureaucracy is a huge challenge for community education providers
- The importance of the relationship with the local ETB was noted
- Private for-profit employment and education services are presenting community education providers with challenges.

**Changes in the wider environment / context**

When asked about the most significant changes to happen over the past five years, the following were among the responses:

- Establishment of the ETBs
- Dissolution of FETAC and establishment of QQI
- Nature of relationship with ETBs different to that with VECs
- Nature of relationship with QQI different to that with FETAC
- Massive uncertainty
- New on-line reporting platforms
- Social media
- Reduction in funding and resources
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- Privatisation of Social Services
- SOLAS and the focus on Employment Activation
- Loss of value for the informal and holistic approach
- Time/administration pressures - taking staff away from working directly with people
- Local government reform
- Regulation nationally - national dictating the local
- Labour-market focus
  - Top-down rather than bottom-up
  - Less autonomy for community groups nationally
- Little social analysis regarding poverty
- Lack of advocacy
- Target focus rather than people focussed



**Points noted during the discussion:**

- The work on addressing these issues is a huge
- The importance of a collective approach and dialogue with QQI
- The expansion of the CEN to include other social change focused organisations may be valuable
- There is a need for organisational support for practitioners engaging with the CEN

The meeting considered the purpose of the CEN by participants reflecting on their own experiences in attending and being involved in the work of the CEN. This was done by participants being divided into groups to respond to two questions:

- Why are you or your organisation involved in the CEN?
- What outcomes are you looking for in being on the CEN?

The responses included the following:

Why?	What outcomes?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Connections</li> <li>• Information</li> <li>• Strategic focus</li> <li>• Bigger umbrella</li> <li>• Legitimacy to our work</li> <li>• Networking               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support</li> <li>○ Relationship Building</li> <li>○ Information sharing</li> <li>○ Practice sharing</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Maintain good communications between Community Education Organisations and ETBs</li> <li>• Relevant information sharing</li> <li>• Common interest – alternative would be isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to input into policy</li> <li>• Power behind campaigns</li> <li>• Vital platform to e-education sector</li> <li>• Community focused adult holistic education</li> <li>• A voice/link to Government</li> <li>• Publicity</li> <li>• EU objectives/links</li> <li>• Sub-groups/working Groups</li> <li>• Policy framework</li> <li>• Ring-fenced funding</li> <li>• Support in leveraging change</li> <li>• Accessibility nationally</li> <li>• Supporting the professional development of the sector</li> <li>• Advocacy for community education nationally</li> <li>• Issues clearly identified</li> <li>• Collective voice and strategy developed</li> <li>• Nationwide representation on CEN</li> <li>• Impacting policy and practice</li> <li>• Empowering organisations to further our goals</li> <li>• Effective representation nationally of local needs</li> </ul>

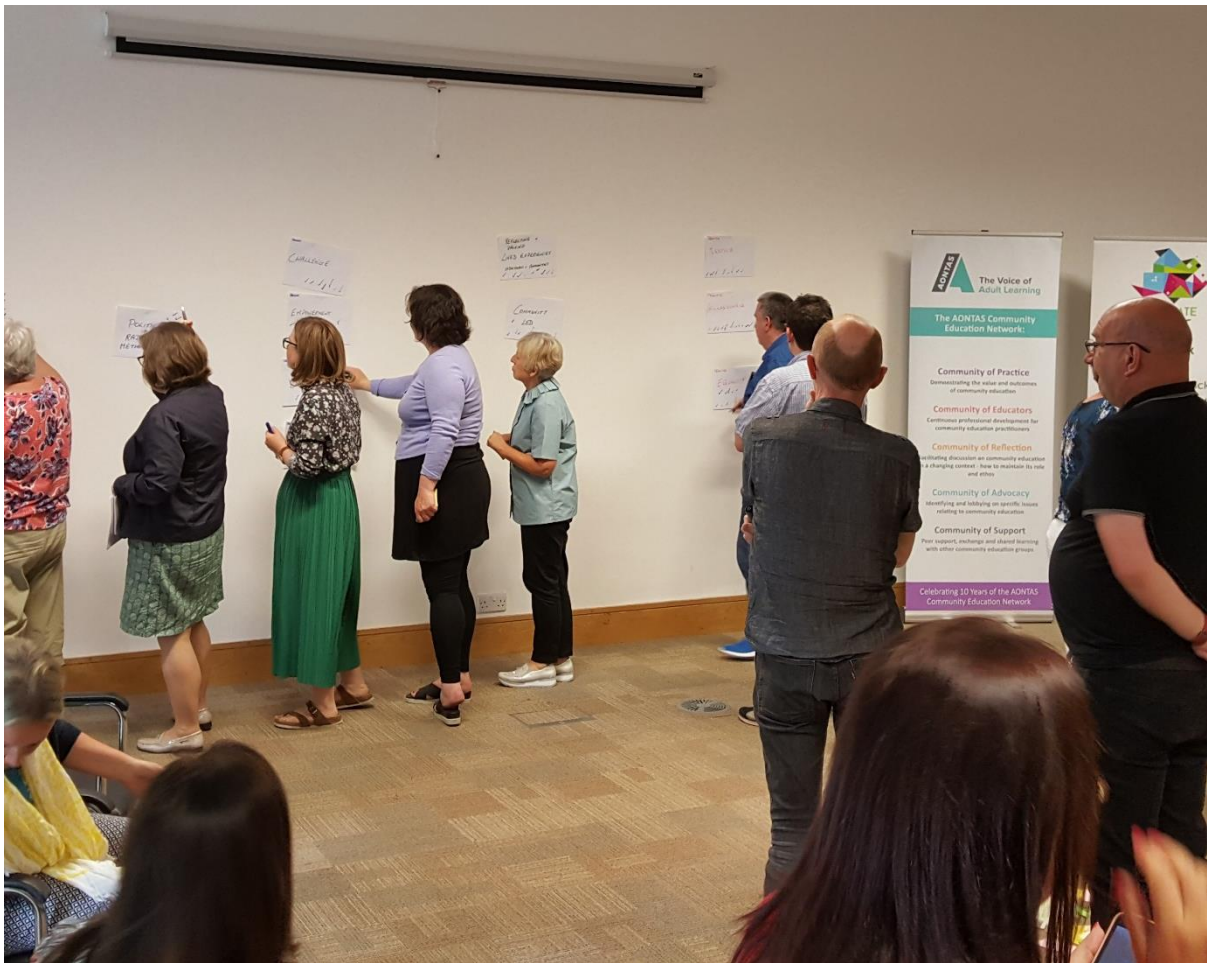
The following were suggested:

- Regional community education networks
- A CEN induction process for new members and new staff in member groups

In order to put the above discussion into a context, two pieces of information were named: the purpose/operation of the CEN as named by AONTAS

**Purpose and operation of the CEN**

The Community Education Network (CEN) was established in 2007 by AONTAS. It is a network of over 100 independently managed community education providers who work collaboratively, sharing information and resources, engaging in professional development and working to ensure that community education is valued and resourced.



The discussion raised many areas for consideration for the CEN, such as possible avenues for expansion of the CEN, alliance building among other social change focused organisations, and the importance of maintaining the space for networking within the CEN. The session will be followed by more discussion with the CEN over the coming months which will inform the CEN role within the next AONTAS strategic plan.

The notes from this session have been circulated among CEN members and are available on request.

-----

*AONTAS would like to express its gratitude to the staff of Engine Limerick for their support in organising the meeting; to Our Lady Queen of Peace Community Development Group for providing the lunch; and to LCEN for displaying the art work from their 'Journeys' project.*