

AONTAS Community Education Network (CEN)



Meeting Report
19th October 2017

AGENDA

Date: Thursday, 19th October, 2017

Venue: Longford Women's Link, Willow House, Ardnacassa Avenue, Longford

Time: 10.00am – 3.00pm

- 10.00 – 10.30:** **Registration, Tea/Coffee and Networking**
- 10.30 – 10.45:** **Information and Updates**
Suzanne Kyle, AONTAS CEN Coordinator
- 10.45 – 12.00:** **Local Government and Participative Democracy**
Questions and Answers
Catherine Lane, National Women's Council of Ireland
- 12.00 – 1.00:** **Lunch and Networking**
- 1.00 – 2.20:** **Models of Engagement**
- Group Work Exercise
 - Case Study: Longford Women's Link
 - Sharing CEN Member experiences
Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link
- 2.20 – 2.50:** **Ten Things You Can Do!**
Call to action
Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link
- 2.50 – 3.00:** **Wrap Up**
Suzanne Kyle, AONTAS CEN Coordinator



Theme: Engaging with Local Government Structures

The role of community education in reinforcing democracy is strongly promoted by the CEN. Despite the many challenges faced by providers it is important that the voice of community education is maintained within policy making structures. In order to keep community education on the agenda and as a strong force in shaping policies which impact on local communities, it must maintain a significant presence at local government level.

The purpose of this meeting was to examine the role of local government in relation to education and social inclusion and to highlight the opportunities for representation of the community education voice at local and regional levels. Examples of good practice were shared and the meeting ended with a call to action for all members.

The idea for this meeting came about following discussions at CEN meetings about the need for strong representation of the community education voice at local and regional, as well as national level. The diversity in terms of how community education organisations engage with local government structures, and also their experiences of this process, both positive and negative, had long been acknowledged. It was recognised by CEN members that greater engagement at local and regional government level was needed if the collective voice was to be reinforced. The meeting allowed for the sharing of information and expertise, as well as dialogue about the next steps for the CEN.

The meeting began with an introduction by Suzanne Kyle, CEN Coordinator, providing updates on the work of AONTAS and highlighting the upcoming CEN Ten Year Anniversary celebration to take place in Croke Park.



Catherine Lane from the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) then introduced the subject of engaging with local government by providing a background to the NWC and the approach they take in aiming to influence government policy. She provided the context for their work i.e. the picture of life for women in Ireland today, a subject of significance for community education providers. Catherine provided a comprehensive account of the areas of responsibility for local government and how it currently operates within a context of local government reform, reductions and cutbacks. The decision making processes of local government and the structures through which policies are made were also covered

extensively. Some case studies were presented and attention was drawn in particular to the possibilities of representation on Public Participation Networks (PPN) and Local Community Development Committees (LCDC). The presentation also provided the space for discussion on the challenges facing community education organisations in terms of engaging with such structures, but also the opportunities and the potential impact of greater engagement. A list of useful resources was also shared. A copy of Catherine's presentation is available on request or through the online EPALE platform CEN closed group.

Tara Farrell, Deputy CEO of Longford Women's Link (LWL) followed Catherine's input by sharing with the CEN their own experience of engaging with local and regional government. Tara provided an overview of LWL which is situated within a rural setting with a lack of third level and employment opportunities, and where many community education participants in the area experience isolation and domestic violence. The LWL priorities of leadership, support and opportunities were highlighted along with their integrated model of service delivery through which the learner is supported, community capacity is increased and social change is achieved.



Tara highlighted the representation of LWL on local regional and national structures and invited those present to examine the engagement of their own organisations in relevant structures and how such engagement could take place to the advantage of their organisations and local communities.

The new Pobal SICAP (Social Inclusion Community Activation) Programme, 2018 – 2022 was also discussed. Its goals of supporting individuals and communities are relevant to community education providers as is its promotion of participation in lifelong learning.

Tara's presentation allowed for the sharing of a case study of the LWL Women's Manifesto Programme, an effective model of participation aimed increasing the engagement of women in local democracy and decision making. The Programme was developed to tackle a feeling of powerlessness by women in the area, to ensure local women's perspectives are heard and to promote collective action in order to bring about social change. Under the Programme a Manifesto Network has been established, workshops for local election candidates are provided, seminars and learning events are organised and relevant research is undertaken. The manifesto group has monthly meetings, attends council meetings, is represented on local committees, develops relationships with relevant policy makers and engages in decision making processes through notices of motion and submissions.

The learning from the Women's Manifesto Group has been very valuable and has led to greater recognition at local government level for the women of Longford. A copy of Tara's presentation is available on request or through the online EPALE platform CEN closed group.



The presentation ended with suggestions for strengthening the community education voice at a local level and a call to action following which, members committed to one action at organisational level in order to strengthen their understanding of and engagement with relevant structures. Participants were asked to write down on post-it notes one thing their organisation could do to engage in local government structures and raise the profile of community education at that level. These commitments are illustrated below and will be revisited at a future CEN meeting:



- Find out where education/lifelong learning is at in my area

- Find out about lifelong learning in LECP (Local Economic and Community Plan) (x2)

- Find out what I need to know more about

- Feedback to PPN plenary meeting re housing rep

- Learn more about SICAP (x 5)

- Read the local Economic and Community Plan

- Be a chatter champion!

- Bring a political representative to our manifesto group

- Look in to joining PPN

- Contact my local PPN worker

- Attend a local council meeting

- Share information

- Find out who my community representative is

- See one decision followed through to conclusion at SPC level

- Be a better champion in my circle

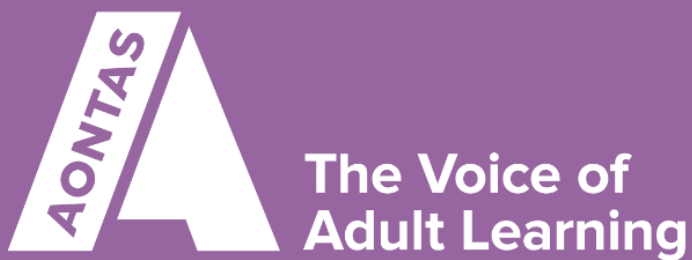
- Try and get one person [from the organisation] to attend a county council meeting



The meeting closed with AONTAS staff offering a huge thanks to both Catherine Lane for travelling to Longford to present the CEN with such valuable and informative material, and to Tara Farrell for her relevant and engaging presentation and for inspiring such motivation to action in the CEN!

Our gratitude was extended also to Longford Women's Link for providing the venue and for their hospitality and willingness to provide CEN members with a tour of their facilities.





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