



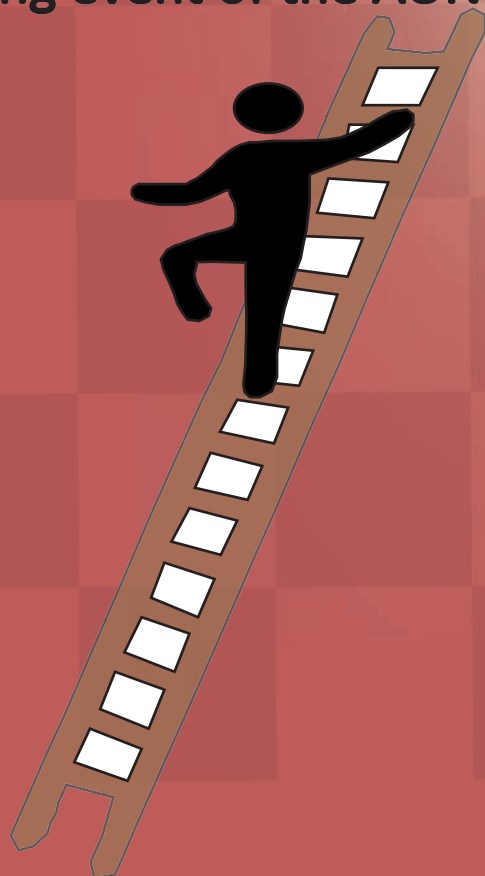
aontas

# COMMUNITY EDUCATION

*A Strategy For Success*

Lobby for Learning Day

Closing event of the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2013





## **AONTAS Mission Statement**

**The mission of AONTAS is to advocate for the right of every adult in Ireland to quality learning.**



## Introduction

Since the national Adult Learners' Festival was established in 2007 AONTAS has organised a Lobby for Learning Day to close the week. 2013's event builds on two previous policy exchanges organised by AONTAS which marked the closing of previous Adult Learners' Festivals. In 2010, a constituency clinic featuring the then Minister for Lifelong Learning, Sean Haughey and Education spokespeople met with adult learners and representatives from adult education providers. This allowed political representatives to engage directly with learners and providers about the impact of specific policy issues.

In 2012, the event 'SOLAS – serving adult learners' further developed this format. Twenty seven learners with diverse experiences of entering, progressing through and moving on from various further education and training initiatives participated in this interactive event. Members of the SOLAS Implementation Group, including FÁS CEO Paul O'Toole, SOLAS Executive Director Designate Fiona Hartley and Minister for Training and Skills Ciaran Cannon spent time at each round table and engaged in dialogue with each group of learners. Both events received extremely positive feedback subsequently from both participants and decision makers.



## Community Education:

### A Strategy for Success

For the closing event of the Adult Learners' Festival 2013 AONTAS adopted this format to focus on the role of community education in serving the needs of people most distanced from education and training, and the labour market, and as a valid form of activation. The event focused on community education delivered in the independently managed community education sector, and drew on the experiences of both providers and learners. The aim of the event was to demonstrate to policy makers how community education works to serve the needs of learners and to prepare them for employment. Community education has been especially successful in enabling people to re-engage with education and training, develop confidence and skills and gain qualifications which equip them for employment. Of particular importance is the range of supports available to learners including childcare, mentoring, assistance in making the right choices, study and learning supports and ongoing monitoring throughout the learning programme. Many community groups also have links with employers thus enabling them to assist learners into employment.

Over half the organisational members of AONTAS are community and voluntary organisations engaged in the provision of adult and community education. In 2007 AONTAS established a network to support these organisations. The Community Education Network comprises over 140 community education organisations which work collectively to gain recognition for community education, raise its profile and lobby to ensure it is adequately resourced. AONTAS worked with the Community Education Network to source providers and learners for the event. Representatives of ten community education providers and twenty one learners participated. Invited policy makers included the Minister for Education and Skills, Ciaran Cannon, John McKeon, Assistant Secretary General, Department of Social Protection, Ken Seery, Head of Contractor Training and Momentum, FÁS, Peter Baldwin, Assistant Secretary, Fiona Hartley, Executive Director (Designate), SOLAS, Ciaran Conlon, Director of Training Standards, FÁS and Michael Mooney, Head of e-learning, FÁS. Participants were seated at three round tables and facilitated by AONTAS staff.

# Participants

## TABLE 1 - LEARNERS

Facilitator : Berni Brady, AONTAS

Note taker: Jacinta Cuthbert, AONTAS

1. Caroline Kelly D8CEC, Dublin 8
2. Sinead Kelly An Cosán, Tallaght, Dublin
3. Nuala O'Dwyer Knockanrawley Resource Centre, Tipperary
4. Cathal O'Reilly Warrenmount, Dublin
5. Learner Loreto Centre, Crumlin, Dublin
6. Gary O' Heaire An Cosán, Tallaght, Dublin
7. Laura Pierce INOU, Dublin
8. Michelle Ryan Longford Women's Link, Longford
9. Alan Weldon Near fm, Dublin
10. Sharon Warrenmount, Dublin 8



## TABLE 2- LEARNERS

Facilitator: Katie O'Rourke, AONTAS

Note taker: Dympna Larkin, AONTAS

1. Pamela Delaney St Catherine's, Carlow
2. Patrick Duffy All Hallows, Drumcondra, Dublin
3. Beatrice Hughes Loreto Centre, Crumlin, Dublin
4. Grace Johnston An Cosán, Tallaght, Dublin
5. Marie Keating Longford Women's Link, Longford
6. Liz Mills D8CEC, Dublin 8
7. Geraldine Minogue Limerick Community Education Network
8. Joanne McCabe FOCUS Ireland
9. Emma Finglas FOCUS Ireland
10. Mark Ward An Cosán, Tallaght, Dublin
11. James McCarthy Limerick Community Education Network



## TABLE 3 - PROVIDERS

Facilitator: Sara Bourke, AONTAS

Note taker: Máiread Tynan, AONTAS

1. Catherine Aylmer, Limerick Community Education
2. Andrea Dalton, St Catherine's, Carlow
3. Tara Farrell, Longford Women's Link, Longford
4. Stephen Flitton, Warrenmount Centre, Dublin 8
5. Marie Gill, D8CEC, Dublin 8
6. Colm Kilgallon, All Hallows, Drumcondra, Dublin
7. Ciarán Murray, Near fm, Dublin
8. Loretta Needham, Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre, Galway
9. Brede Quirke, Loreto Centre, Crumlin, Dublin
10. Liz Waters, An Cosán, Tallaght, Dublin
11. Avril Bailey, An Cosán, Tallaght, Dublin



# Format of the Event

Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS formally opened the event at 10.30am, set the context and explained how the event would run. She introduced the Minister and other guests. Each learner and provider then introduced themselves. Each group discussion was focused on a different theme highlighting different aspects of community education and acknowledging the interest of the visiting guests:

## **THEME 1:**

**“Community education is a successful pathway of Further Education and Training, complimentary to other pathways provided by Vocational Education Committees (VECs), FÁS and private bodies.”**

Learners were asked to explain how community education has been a successful pathway for them to move through Further Education and Training (FET) and into employment and about why they chose it. They explained what vital supports community education provides such as childcare, mentoring and practical supports. Learners also discussed the importance of FÁS Community Employment Schemes and how beneficial they have been for some of them.

## **THEME 2:**

**“Community education is an essential labour activation measure.**

Learners were asked to reflect on why they chose community education and whether they entered it with the goal of employment in mind. Learners talked about how community education has assisted them in reaching their goals of achieving qualifications and which can lead to good quality employment both within and outside the sector.

## **THEME 3:**

**“The value of community education not just as a labour market measure but also in terms of achieving wider outcomes such as better health, stronger civic engagement and breaking the intergenerational cycle of educational disadvantage.**

Learners reflected on why they thought it was important to include community education in the FET strategy and what makes community education different to other FET models. Learners talked about the difference that community education made to their quality of life and as well as qualifications, what other benefits they have experienced through community education.

The discussion at each table was facilitated by an AONTAS member of staff, who helped structure the dialogue using a number of questions which were designed to assist learners to articulate their experiences of community education. Learners drew from their own experiences and the experiences of their respective organisations. The guests participated in a listening capacity spending thirty five minutes at each table and also had an opportunity to ask questions of the learners.

# LEARNERS

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION OFFERS LEARNERS A SECOND CHANCE AT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Community education offers a learning experience which is very different to the previous learning experiences of many adults. Many learners had poor experiences in the formal system and left school early with no or very few qualifications. Because of this, learning is often seen as a fearful experience for them. Community education offers learners an alternative model that allows for flexibility and personal growth. Learners discussed why they chose community education as opposed to other FET routes.

- **I felt very isolated and it was a second chance at education for me in my community**
- **Through my experience of community education I felt that my personal journey was relevant**
- **I was a single parent with little or no skills and was looking towards a life on social welfare unless some thing radical changed; community education offered me a new opportunity**
- **I commenced my journey of education when I was in prison with a Pathways course**
- **I had a very negative and traumatising experience at school and community education offered me something different**
- **My confidence was diminished to the stage where it was almost impossible to apply for positions as I would get another rejection. My mentor has supported me to keep going and not get discouraged**
- **I needed the time to try out courses and test my own abilities before I could take on some thing more serious**
- **After feeling isolated with low self-esteem community education offered me a new lease of life**
- **Women's studies offered a second opportunity for me and was diferent experience, there was no hierarchy, respect from tutors, and my own experience was valued and acknowledged**
- **For the first time in my life I was not made to feel stupid and there was someone who believed that I had potential**



# COMMUNITY EDUCATION OFFERS TAILORED SUPPORTS FOR LEARNERS

Learners spoke about their positive experiences of community education and how, without it, many of them would not be where they are now. Learners spoke at length about how important supports were in order to help them succeed. Community education recognises that there are different levels of readiness among learners depending on their distance from the labour market and the amount of time they have spent out of education. Adult learners have busy lives so the flexibility and support offered through community education means they can progress and achieve their goals at a pace and time that suits them. Supports mentioned included childcare, mentoring and personal development.

- **Community education provided emotional and physical support in a time of great need for me and my family**
- **My children are looked after on the premises which puts my mind at ease**
- **As I am a young mother, childcare made it possible for me to continue my education**
- **I gained great support and encouragement from my tutors and this enabled me to continue with the programme**
- **There is a lot of flexibility for me, if I miss a day or session due to family commitments the tutors ensure that I don't fall behind**
- **Through personal development, community education helped me with my low self-esteem, I have grown as a person and I know that my peers have been through the same thing as me**
- **The supports provided such as mentoring have helped me with my negative school experience, I now want to learn again**
- **Guidance was offered to me as I went along which encouraged progression, this is severely lacking in many other FET routes**
- **Community education helped me with assignments and I felt that the tutors really cared and were there whenever I needed a pep talk**
- **It was only when I was engaged in it that I realised the supports and methods of delivery were very different to what I had been expecting**



**“One size does not fit all. The supports that are available in community education like childcare and mentoring allow people, who otherwise would not avail of mainstream education, to participate and flourish.”**



# COMMUNITY EDUCATION OFFERS LEARNERS A CHOICE

Learners access community education for a number of reasons, often they are unsure of what path to take or where their interests lie. A fear about current labour activation measures is that learners will not get to choose what course they do. Learners discussed how community education provides an environment/space that allows them to choose the right option for them

- **Work experience was essential and it helped me choose the right path**
- **Through community education I was allowed to discover where my abilities lie**
- **For me the outreach programme was essential. I couldn't have gone straight back to third level education and the support from the centre continued even when I moved on**
- **I did a self-advocacy course, I was told to give it a try and if I didn't like it I could leave**
- **I got a say in what courses were offered and that made a big difference**
- **It teaches you to believe in yourself and I now want to get a job as a drug addiction counsellor, I wouldn't have had the confidence to do it before**
- **If you are unsure of what to do when you start, you can build it up over time and you have a say in what you do**
- **Community education offered me flexibility and one to one sessions were available if I needed**
- **Community education gave me more choices about what I wanted to do. I completed a few taster courses to help me decide which course to take on, I am now doing a course that I love and I plan to apply for my Master's next year**



# COMMUNITY EDUCATION LEADS TO EMPLOYMENT

Community education is sometimes seen as only offering non-formal or non-accredited programmes. However it also has the capacity and potential to equip learners with the skills and experience to go on to gain full time employment as the learners who participated in the discussion demonstrated.

- **Without community education supports such as personal development and mentoring I wouldn't have gained the confidence to secure employment**
- **Community education is the reason why I am now working in my dream job**
- **Mentoring and informal supports were very important, I was told I was great at the job I was doing and given encouragement to aim higher**
- **It gave me a goal and a vision and I realised I was worthy of a good job**
- **Work experience meant that I could try out different sectors and see what my passion was**
- **It gave me a second opportunity to do what I was good at and what I was drawn to**
- **I was brought back into the work environment through community education, I now have a full time job and my life couldn't be better**
- **The people I work with can identify with me because I was once them. On the same road to destruction of yourself, your family and your life, but they can see that there is a way out**
- **I am now working with people who were like I was, and I know the difference it has made to my life and my family, I know I can help to make a difference**



# FÁS COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT (CE) SCHEMES OFFER A SUCCESSFUL PATH FOR LEARNERS TO RETURN TO EMPLOYMENT

Learners explained how CE schemes were very successful for them and how many of them have progressed onto employment following a period on community employment. Recently there has been some criticism of Community Employment schemes as a successful method of getting people back to employment but many of the learners have progressed to employment from these schemes and described why they worked for them. In 2011 an ESRI report questioned the value of Community Employment schemes in supporting people in employment. Some of the learners participating in this event outlined how Community Employment had benefited them, demonstrating that it can act as an effective intervention for some learners.

- The CE scheme helped me find an area that I was interested in and I gained valuable insight into that area
- Through my CE scheme I was encouraged to work in an area where my personal traits were valued
- My CE scheme gave me the confidence to believe in myself, I was told I could do it
- It helped me to develop intellectually while getting on the job experience
- Without the help of my CE scheme I would not have got my dream job
- My CE scheme allowed me to learn skills and develop my confidence in an unthreatening environment
- There was an issue of there being no employment available in my area so rather than draw the dole I am happier to continue on a CE scheme while developing my confidence and skills until the employment situation has improved
- CE gave me a whole new life to look forward to and future prospects
- In small rural town CE was my lifeline, as there are no jobs available and it meant that I could gain valuable experience while on the scheme



# COMMUNITY EDUCATION HAS A SOCIAL PURPOSE & OFFERS WIDER BENEFITS TO LEARNERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Community Education reaches out to the most marginalised in society. As well as educating learners and equipping them with life and vocational skills, it has many other outcomes which enhance the lives of learners and their families. Learners outlined some of the changes that they have experienced.

- It instils a desire to give back to the community and I took up voluntary work
- Following on from community education I encouraged my own children to break the cycle and continue with their education
- It gave me a sense of community that I never previously had
- It saved me from the lowest point in my life and gave me a reason to get up in the morning
- I have so much more confidence now and can take on any challenge that is thrown at me
- My quality of life has improved dramatically, for the first time in a long time I have a sense of routine in my life
- It gave me the encouragement to go on when I questioned my own ability, I now apply this to other areas of my life
- I'm now a happier person, a better parent and role model and a better wife
- After such a negative experience of learning from school I now feel like I am fulfilling my true potential and anything is possible
- After a great experience of community education I then wanted to give back to the community and I now volunteer and help others who are less fortunate

“Taking part in community education is starting a journey which will, in most instances, take a lot longer than a person with higher self-esteem and confidence. While it may take longer, it has the same ability to move people into work, look at the people here today, more than half are working.”



# PROVIDERS

## MAKING A CASE FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION AS PART OF THE NEW FET STRATEGY : REFLECTIONS OF PROVIDERS

The community education providers who participated in the event work with a wide variety of adults in both urban and rural settings. Some specific target groups include rural women and lone parents, unemployed people, those who left school early, people with a history of mental and physical ill health, migrant workers and refugees, isolated older people etc. Their observations tallied with the experiences of learners and bear out the importance of paying attention to the diversity of the needs expressed by them.

Initially they described how community education works with people who are distant from education, training and the labour market, and how through a holistic process of supports, confidence building and skilled tuition community education empowers them to achieve positive outcomes both socially and economically. They went on to discuss the outcomes of community education and the key role it can play in the development and implementation of the new FET strategy.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTS

People returning to education, often after a poor prior experience, require specific supports to enable them to achieve and to balance learning with other aspects of their lives. These supports depend on each person's situation and include childcare, travel, counselling, guidance, mentoring etc. Community education centres often offer these services as a one stop shop. Key to success is also a participative, supportive and facilitative tutoring methodology which builds on and values learners experiences.

Introductory non-accredited courses give learners an opportunity to gain in confidence and develop core skills prior to progressing on to accredited courses. Based in local communities, community education invests in outreach to encourage people to return to education and to identify supports which will enable them to remain there.



## PROVIDING A RANGE OF CHOICES

The diversity of Community Education provision was evident from the providers and learners present. The methodologies of Community Education are used to offer everything from introductory courses to Level 8 degrees on an outreach basis. Many courses offer formal accreditation, while others involve learning for learning's sake. Providers highlighted programmes developed to specifically meet the needs of particular communities. They noted that Community Education is "like a small boat as opposed to a big ship; it can adapt and turn fast in an effective and innovative manner."

### EXAMPLES

Some examples of programmes were highlighted. For example D8CEC developed a skills based course for former construction workers which has led to over 50% gaining employment. St Catherine's Centre in Carlow provides a programme for young mothers to enhance both their employment opportunities and their parenting skills. Croí na Gaillimhe offers an intergenerational and intercultural place of learning including provision for people at risk of homelessness.

An Cosán has developed childcare training programmes to meet the need for qualified people within the area. This programme has excellent progression to well paid secure employment. Longford Women's Link have a 75% progression rate from their CE scheme. It was strongly recommended that CE should be continued as a core training and work experience scheme, which is complementary to



## SUPPORT FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Providers discussed the changes in the FET sector, specifically the development of the ETBs, SOLAS and INTREO. While there is real potential to develop an integrated service which will support learners, community education providers are concerned about certain aspects of the draft legislation and how the new structures will operate. AONTAS has been lobbying government for the broadening of the definition of Further education to include non-formal as well as formal learning and to specifically include community education. Community education providers reinforced this point.

In addition to including it as part of the overall Further Education and Training strategy, it is essential that independently-managed Community Education is supported and funded adequately and appropriately.

This requires multiannual funding so that both learners and providers have clarity about which programmes will run each year and can plan accordingly. It involves resourcing all aspects of service delivery as shown in the diagram above. The providers requested that this commitment, including a ring fencing of finance for Community Education, be included in the Service Level Agreements to be drawn up between SOLAS and the ETBs.



## Challenges for Independently-managed Community Education

Providers raised issues relating to different protocols for applying for funding, managing funding, amount and duration of funding operated in different parts of the country. They called for clarity and consistency throughout Ireland to ensure that all ETBs work with Community Education Groups in a similar manner, respecting their unique contribution to FET. Some of the points are highlighted below

- We have ten different funding streams for community education coming into the centre with different timelines and reporting requirements. This is not the best use of resources. Hopefully the development of the ETBs will streamline this process, without losing the diversity of programmes.
- Proper structures of funding are required e.g. multi annual, it is not acceptable to keep learners “on hold” waiting to see if funding will be granted for the next phase of their programme.
- There needs to be co-ordination of locally based provision to ensure that state agencies, for profit private providers and community education providers do not duplicate programmes and compete for learners.
- Where pilot programmes are developed successfully they should be main-streamed in the organisations which developed them. At present there is a situation where “pilot” programmes will not be refunded, no matter how successful, as all programmes need to be seen to be “innovative.”
- There needs to be clarity and consistency throughout Ireland, we do not need the same situation as BTEI, where different VECs have different rules
- Community Education needs to be more than “Recognised”, it needs to be “Resourced”; it’s not just giving out money it’s changing people lives

## How Independently-managed Community Education can contribute to the reform agenda

Community Education providers see great scope in working with the Department of Social Protection to support people to move from welfare to work. Through their outreach and guidance capabilities as well as their expertise in enabling people to return to education, they are ideally placed to collaborate with INTREO. Providers called on the Department of Social Protection to include community education providers as local partners to complement INTREO’s objectives. Community Education places equal emphasis on the social and economic outcomes of education. There is a need to develop robust tools and procedures to be able to accurately document the social return on investment in community.

Community Education providers are keen to work with the new structures on this issue. The provider group sends the following messages to the policy makers and funders.

- Independently-managed community education is an essential part of Ireland’s Further Education and Training Strategy.
- It offers a distinct and effective form of education and training which is effective in engaging learners who are hard to reach and supporting them on a pathway to further education, employment and personal growth.
- It can provide vast knowledge and experience to support the Department of Social Protection, SOLAS and the ETBs in achieving their objectives.
- Independently managed community education should be named within the SOLAS Bill currently going through the Oireachtas.
- Independently managed Community Education must be specifically named and resources ringfenced for it within the Service Level Agreements between SOLAS and the ETBs.

## Some responses from our guests

At the end of the discussions our guests were invited to respond to what they had heard and after the event they were also invited to give us their feedback.

The FÁS team found the event to be most helpful. It provided an effective forum for Community Education providers and learners to engage with senior policy makers. From a FÁS perspective, it provided a long overdue opportunity for senior FÁS managers to meet, listen and respond both to adult learners and to Community Education providers in a structured, reflective and open forum. It was an effective way to learn about the impact Community Education can have on learners' lives and the nature of the journey it entails. The seminar highlighted the essential role of the range of supports which characterise Community Education – childcare, counselling, guidance and learning support. The opportunities for progression into Further Education and Training, Higher Education and employment afforded by Community Education were illustrated by the individual stories.

The dignified manner of the learners in recounting their personal stories and the transformative effect it has had on their lives was particularly moving, not least the impact it had on their children, families and wider communities. The professionalism of the providers and the thoughtful comments on various aspects of policy – based on experience - was also striking. One of the FÁS team added that he was not very familiar with community education; however, after listening to the individual stories, he quickly built a picture of what made it unique. The 'More than just a Course' headline made complete sense after this event. These views were reiterated by our guests from the Departments of Education and Skills and Social Protection. In addition the experiences of people who had used CE schemes as a route to employment were noted, especially in the light of a recent review of Employment Supports carried out by the Department of Social Protection.

Minister Ciaran Cannon closed the event and reassured us that he is committed to ensuring that people, who have already been failed by the system have access to an education that suits them at their pace and time of life. The Minister commended the participants for their honesty and the constructive way they put forward their points of view. He thanked AONTAS for organising the event which he found once more to be extremely useful and informative. He assured us that he is determined that the new SOLAS will be flexible and totally learner centred and that community education will have a place within the new FET strategy.

AONTAS wishes to thank most sincerely all those who participated especially the learners and we look forward to continuing to engage actively with the SOLAS process, and to feed in to the new FET strategy. The event was covered by the RTE programme, Drive Time with a number of learners and the AONTAS Director being interviewed by Philip Boucher Hayes.



## APPENDIX 1: Profile of Learners

### 1. Caroline Kelly, D8CEC

Caroline left school at 17 with the Leaving Certificate and raised her two children. After a long break from education she began a CE Scheme and enrolled in a few courses with D8CEC, doing computers at FETAC Levels 3, 4, 5. She then trained as a tutor with D8CEC and is now working as a tutor teaching basic computers in the centre and is currently studying Women and Gender Studies with UCD (NFQ Level 7).

### 2. Liz Mills, D8CEC

Liz left school with the Leaving Certificate and after many years of employment in retail she lost her job. She then started a CE Scheme in Francis Street and did computer and personal development courses with D8CEC. She took part in a heritage programme which involved an exhibition to mark the 250th anniversary of Guinness, this involved many visits to the Guinness store house to carry out research. Her tutor told her about a job in Guinness and with her support and encouragement she applied for it. After a tough interview process she got offered the job. She first started on 6 month contracts and was made permanent last March.

### 3. Mark Ward, An Cosán

Mark left school with the Junior Certificate and a couple of years later he returned to do the Leaving Certificate. He began a CE Scheme and worked in Clondalkin Addiction Support Programme as a key worker and developed a passion for the sector. He did a number of non-accredited courses and moved on to do a number of FETAC Level 5 courses including Community Addiction Studies and Occupational First Aid. He completed a range of other continuous professional development programmes including Applied Suicide Intervention Skills and has also volunteered for various organisations and then achieved a Diploma in Drug and Addiction studies in Merchants Quay. He also has a Level 7 Addiction Studies Cert from Maynooth and is currently in his 3rd year of the BA Programme in Applied Addiction Studies & Community Development. Mark has recently got a full time paid position as a Community Drug Worker with Inchicore Bluebell Community Addiction team and is committed to achieving his third level degree qualification.

### 4. Gary O' Heaire, An Cosán

Gary left school with the Leaving Certificate; he has completed a number of FETAC Level 5 courses including Occupational First Aid. He then achieved a Diploma in Drug and Alcohol Studies through the University of Limerick. He has since done a range of other continuous professional development programmes and has worked in Bawnogue Youth and Family Support Group Clondalkin as a street based outreach worker. He is currently in his 3rd year of the BA Programme in Applied Addiction Studies & Community Development and works in the area of addiction.

### 5. Sinead Kelly, An Cosán

Sinead left school with the Leaving Certificate and had her daughter at a young age and worked at various jobs. In 2008 she completed the Young Lone Parents Programme (FETAC Level 4). She then completed her degree in Community Development with An Cosán and volunteered doing various pieces of facilitation. She now works as coordinator/tutor of the lone parents programme, FETAC Level 5 Community Development and she coordinates the Development Education programme in An Cosán.

### 6. Grace Johnston, An Cosán

Grace has lived in the Jobstown community all her life. In 2001 she decided she would like to focus on a career in Childcare and she made enquiries in An Cosán. They directed her towards FETAC Level 4 award which An Cosán facilitated under the B.T.E.I. This was especially great for her as it was community based and not far from her home so it was easily accessible to her with no travelling expenses. She really enjoyed the experience which also raised her awareness of community spirit and values. An Cosán were also doing the Level 5 in childcare. During this time she became ill but was strongly encouraged by course participants and her Coordinator to keep going. It took her a couple of years to get there but she finally achieved her Level 5 in 2010. She gained employment in a local childcare centre in 2006 and has worked there for the past 7 years. After completing her Level 5 she wanted to go further with her training and education so when the opportunity came up in An Cosán for her to do a B.A (Hons) degree in Early Childhood and Education she decided she would give it a go. She is now nearly through her first year and is looking forward to continuing her studies to completion.

### **7. James McCarthy, Men's Shed Group in Southill**

James left school with his Leaving Certificate. He worked as a cleaner and then a porter in the Mid-Western Regional Hospital. He was unemployed for a number of years. He returned to education to do an ECDL course and has done a number of FETAC accredited courses in Southill. He has worked on a CE scheme and is currently looking for employment.

### **8. Geraldine Minogue, LCEN**

Geraldine left school at age 11 due to the death of her father, she went to work in a hairdressers and did factory work. She then gave up work due to an accident. Her husband then lost his job and she looked for a CE Scheme for 2 years. She went for over 100 interviews and was rejected from all of them due to lack of education so she started basic computers in Lady of Lourdes, did FETAC Level 2, 3, 4. She achieved a Diploma in Women's studies in UL and also did a Cert in Drugs and Alcohol Addiction. She has since gone on to complete Diploma's in Women's Studies and Youth and Community and is currently volunteering as a facilitator with the elderly in Southill. She also provides alternative health (aural acupuncture) in the centre and is on the board of the Family Resource Centre.

### **9. Nuala O' Dwyer, Knockanrawley Centre, Tipperary**

Nuala completed the Senior Cert and then went on to the Leaving Cert but never managed to complete this. She got married and worked in various jobs in retail and as a dental nurse assistant. She had 3 children and her 3rd child was very unwell with heart problems. Through her children's school she heard about Knockanrawley Resource Centre and began parent support groups. She then did practical parenting classes as well as a cookery course. She is now a parent mentor and credits the centre for supporting her through a very difficult time. The support of the centre has allowed her to set up her own businesses. She runs a farmers market at the weekends and a bus escort service during the week.

### **10. Alan Weldon, Nearfm**

Alan left school with the Leaving Certificate and went on to college to study broadcasting and Design. He now works as a volunteer with Near fm.

### **11. Laura Pierce, INOU**

Laura left school with her Junior Certificate and worked in various customer service roles for a number of years. She did a Fast Track to IT course during this time. She was then made redundant in 2007 and became a carer to her husband. She completed the Building Futures programme with the INOU in 2011 and now works as the LTI Co-ordinator for the INOU.

### **12. Patrick Duffy, All Hallows College**

Patrick left school with the Leaving Certificate. He started an apprenticeship with Aer Lingus and worked in the aviation sector for 40 years. During this time he achieved various City and Guilds qualifications. In 2009 he was made redundant from SR Technics. Returning to learning saved Patrick at the lowest point in his life. He is now doing a BA in Personal & Professional Development (NFQ Level 8) and hopes is to teach IT skills to adults in the future.

### **13. Sharon, Warrenmount**

Sharon left school with her Leaving Certificate. She worked as a school secretary and heard about courses in Warrenmount. She went to Warrenmount Centre in January 2009. She has completed Caring for Children (FETAC 5), Communications (FETAC 5), Work Experience (FETAC 5), Story Sacks, Interior Design and Photography. She found the flexibility in Warrenmount essential and she was allowed to have a taster of different courses before she committed to one specific area. As well as the courses in Warrenmount, Sharon has completed 4 modules in psychology in DBS (Dublin Business School). She completed her Childcare Level 5 and finished her Level 6 in June 2011. Sharon is currently doing a BA Honours Degree in Early Childhood Education in Dublin Institute of Education (DIT) and hopes to go on to do a Master's Programme next year. She credits Warrenmount for continuing to support her through 3rd level education and she regularly visits for advice and support.

#### **14. Cathal O'Reilly, Warrenmount**

Left school aged 16 with the Inter Cert and had a very bad experience in school. He got into a band and played as a semi-professional drummer for a number of years. When the band folded he worked at various jobs. He set up a painting and decorating company and ran it for 15 years. During the recession his business folded and he was left with very little options due to his lack of education. He attended Warrenmount Community Centre and completed FETAC Levels 3, 4 in the Next Step programme. He has completed FETAC Level 5 in various courses and is looking to apply to the Trinity Access Programme this year. He is currently working in a tennis club as part of a TUS Programme.

#### **15. Joanne McCabe, Focus Ireland**

Joanne left school with the Junior Certificate and had a very bad experience with teachers in school. She started a cleaning job at 17 and worked for 2 years. She then went on to work in a pub. She got pregnant at 20 and lost the child aged 11 months. She was unemployed for many years and faced many personal challenges. Her key worker recommended a course in addiction. However she found the environment very hostile and not very welcoming and dropped out. She then began courses in FOCUS Ireland with the PETE programme in self advocacy, computers and fitness. She feels that she now has a reason to get out of bed in the morning. She wants to be a good role model to her 3 children and give them a better life.

#### **16. Emma Finglas, FOCUS Ireland**

Emma left school at 15 years of age. She went to Youth Reach and completed FETAC awards 3, 4. She completed FETAC Level 5 in Community and Health Services and was offered a FETAC Level 6 course. Due to a number of challenges in her life including becoming homeless she was not in a position to take up this course. She came to FOCUS Ireland last year and completed four courses with the PETE programme including self-advocacy and inter-personal skills. She is currently doing her fifth course. With the support of FOCUS Ireland she hopes to return to college in September.

#### **17. Pamela Delaney, St Catherine's Carlow**

Pamela left school with no formal education. She had her daughter at 16. She returned to education a year later and did a FETAC Level 3 course in St Catherine's Carlow. She then continued on the Moving on Programme. On completion she was offered a FÁS CE scheme working on reception in St Catherine's. She worked on 6 month contracts and then was offered a permanent part time position. She developed a great interest in the work of the centre and decided to do a degree in Applied Social Studies (NFQ Level 7). On completion of this she was then offered a position as project worker and now works on the Moving on Programme. She credits St Catherine's for her achievements and says she wouldn't be where she is without them

#### **18. Learner, Loreto Centre**

The learner left school with the Inter Cert at 15. She did various FÁS courses but didn't always complete them and they never led to anything. She worked at various jobs in restaurants until her children were born and raised two children as a single parent. She returned to do basic computers and this led to the completion of the ECDL. She took a year out and then contacted the adult guidance service in her area. The guidance counsellor told her about the Diploma in Women's Studies. She went to the Loreto Centre and completed the Diploma through UCD outreach. They provided a childcare service which meant she could complete the course. Due to the encouragement and support from the centre she has since gone on and completed her Master's Degree in Women's Studies.



### **Beatrice Hughes, Loreto Centre**

Beatrice left school with a disappointing Leaving Certificate. She went straight to work in admin and secretarial jobs. She had her 1st child and then returned to work in a bank. She had two more children and always had a desire to return to learning but didn't know where to begin. She heard about the Women's Studies programme and began the Diploma through the Loreto Centre outreach programme (NFQ Level 6). She developed a strong desire to give back to her community and she is now in her final semester of the Masters in Women's studies. She works part time in the Diaspora Women's Initiative and the Traveller Counselling Service

### **Michelle Ryan, Longford Women's Link (LWL)**

Michelle left school with the Leaving Certificate. She came to LWL with experience of working in the care sector (nursing home). Since coming to the centre she has completed her FETAC Level 5 in childcare, various childcare related courses, for example child protection and she has also completed her Food Safety course. She will be commencing Level 6 Childcare soon. She is employed as a Childcare Assistant under a Community Employment Scheme

### **Marie Keating, Longford Women's Link (LWL)**

Marie left school with the Leaving Certificate. She came to LWL with experience in factory work and is also a mother. She has worked very closely with LWL's CE Supervisor Kathleen Dowd to identify the transferable skills from her experience in a factory setting to working in the childcare environment. Marie has completed both FETAC Levels 5 and 6 in Childcare as well as ECDL and Food Safety. She has just secured employment in a local crèche, commencing in March.

## **APPENDIX 2: Profile of Providers**

### **Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN) represented by Catherine Alymer**

Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN) is a network of on-the-ground providers of community education and statutory agencies in Limerick City. Its aim is to ensure the continuation and further development of quality learning opportunities for adults. It provides a mechanism for community education providers to identify learners' needs and to work together to provide appropriate learning opportunities in a co-ordinated manner.

### **St Catherine's Community Services Centre Carlow represented by Andrea Dalton**

Services provided at St Catherine's include, community education and development programmes, childcare services, youth work, work with non-Irish nationals, services to older people and young mothers programmes. There are 43 people employed in St Catherine's. St Catherine's Community Services has worked with people and communities of Carlow and its environs over the last 35 years.

"Our mission is to provide quality services responsive to local needs, based on equality, diversity, justice and inclusion with a view to empowering and enriching individuals, families and communities in Carlow and its environs." All work is undertaken within the framework of St Catherine's policies and procedures and overall strategic plan.

### **Longford Women's Link represented by Tara Farrell**

Longford Women's Link is a women's centre based in Longford Town and has been in existence since 1995. They operate a wide range of services and programmes, including Women's Community Education and Training, Female Entrepreneurship, Domestic Violence, Counselling, Childcare, using their Integrated Service Model. In September 2011 they opened a dedicated Women's Community Education Facility at LWL and are an Outreach Centre for the UCD Women's Studies Programme as well providing outreach through NUI Maynooth and the Irish Academy of Public Relations. LWL's purpose is to link women with the resources to change their lives and transform their communities. They have a long history of promoting the transformative nature of women's community education. LWL is a social enterprise employing 48 staff.

## APPENDIX 2: Profile of Providers

### Warrenmount Community Education Centre represented by Stephen Flitton

Warrenmount Centre aims to meet the needs of the local community by creating opportunities, building confidence and developing skills. This is done through a learning style that is person-centred, participative and informal. Through this, people are given a voice enabling them to create a better society. Warrenmount Centre opened its doors for the first time in 1995 in order to provide an innovative approach to community-based adult education. This approach is based on a social justice perspective and is driven by the real needs of the local people. The Centre started with 16 learners in 1995. Since then it has responded to the changing needs of the community and we now have nearly 300 learners.

### D8CEC represented by Marie Gill

D8CEC is a community education centre committed to serving the educational needs of the Dublin 8 community. It has evolved from a crafts-based organisation designed to help local parents become involved in their children's education at primary level, to a centre where the local community can access accredited courses, provided at a time and in a place which suits them; where tuition is the best it can be and is delivered in a welcoming and caring environment. D8CEC also has a policy of encouraging and providing training for members of the local community to become adult educators. Over the years, D8CEC has formed strong links with other agencies, with employers and with government bodies. They work closely with SWIC LEC, the local employment service and together, they have been able to devise and deliver programmes to give community members the skills to access employment or further education. As a local, independent body, D8CEC has been in a position to respond quickly to the needs of the community and of the employment market and to exploit opportunities as they arise, where these will benefit their learners and the wider community.

### All Hallows College represented Colm Kilgallon

All Hallows College is a college of DCU, specialising at undergraduate level in the teaching of theology, philosophy, psychology, and English literature as well as programmes in personal and professional development. All Hallows also runs Masters and PhD programmes. The college combines a commitment to both the achievement of academic excellence and to the individual support and development of its students. All Hallows College has a clear focus on the three priorities of leadership, social justice and human services as the focus or prism through which it educates its students. The Adult Learning BA (ALBA) at All Hallows College represents a unique and distinctive approach to higher education for adults (+23 years) in Ireland, by linking experience with study and focusing on achievable outcomes of learning. Graduates from All Hallows College have developed careers in a wide range of areas: secondary school teaching, social work, the caring professions etc.



## APPENDIX 2: Profile of Providers

### **Croí na Gaillimhe represented by Loretta Needham**

Located at 1 Mill Street in Galway and operating since 2009, Croí na Gaillimhe provides an intergenerational and intercultural place of welcome in the heart of Galway offering a broad range of social and learning supports. The Centre provides supports and co-ordinate activities for a range of groups, including:

- Older people, by providing a lunch and social club with a wide variety of activities, clubs and courses on offer.
- Parents by providing groups, courses and information sessions of relevance to parents.
- A men's club and aspire to run Job Ready Courses directed at younger men who are currently engaged in home minding.
- Fáilte isteach (conversational English) and life skills coaching
- Money/Advice/ and Budgeting and Home Management Courses for those experiencing unemployment
- Intergenerational Programme of learning with transition year students and retired older adults.

### **Loreto Centre Crumlin represented by Brede Quirke**

The Loreto Centre was established in 1998 to meet the needs of people in the local community by providing opportunities for human growth and community development. The Centre aims to help people realise their own self-worth and potential and to develop resources for more creative and effective living. The approach aims to be holistic, educational and empowering. It seeks to provide a friendly, safe, supportive and challenging environment for all who come to the Centre. There are two distinct aspects to the work of the Centre, namely Adult Community Education and Psychotherapy Services. Within the community Education setting, the programmes include Personal Development, Creative skills, Stress Management, Holistic Health, Life Skills, UCD Outreach Programme in Women Gender and Social Justice Studies. The centre places a huge importance on offering learners the opportunity to participate in higher education as a way to counteract their disadvantage. They work closely with local agencies, both statutory and voluntary.

### **An Cosán represented by Liz Waters**

Liz has been involved in An Cosán for the past 15 years, first as a part time tutor, then Manager of the Community Education Centre at An Cosán in 1999 and CEO since 2001. An Cosán is an amazing organisation totally committed to the eradication of poverty through education. She has always worked in the community and voluntary sector, in residential childcare, community education, psychotherapy and then the Shanty. When she discovered the Shanty in 1995 she felt she had come home, all the values she most aspired to in her work were held there. She is passionate about her work and feels really privileged to work in the community of Tallaght West. Despite the daily struggle with the injustice of poverty it is a vibrant active and socially committed community. An Cosán is engaged in working with this community to identify community educational needs and to develop innovative courses to respond to these needs.

