

Case Study Profiles

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INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY PROFILES

Groups/Projects Targeting Women as Beneficiaries

1. Carnew Traditional Craft Group

Carnew Traditional Craft Group is an informal group, which came together in 2004 as a result of the group's participation both as individuals and through group work on the County Wicklow VEC Adult Learning Programme. The Group is also supported by staff from the Carnew Enterprise Centre (Old Coolatin Country Ltd) where groups meetings are held. The Learning Programme undertaken by the Group included an optional hour spent on introduction to computers and the hour following spent learning some specific craft skills. As the Learning Programme progressed Group members discovered that not only were their craft skills and in some cases their IT skills improving in many cases their confidence levels also grew. It provided many of the quieter group members with a comfortable and regular social outlet where previously they would not have such outlets. Group members also had the satisfaction of completing a number of pieces of handcraft some of which were donated to the local churches and others of which were displayed at local shows.

The informal nature of the Group meant that it was not in a position to make a funding application in it's own right. The application was instead made by Old Coolatin Country Ltd. Old Coolatin Country Ltd. was established in 1991 as a community based organisation operating as an incorporated company. This Group is involved in delivering services and training for the community in Carnew and in facilitating and supporting the establishment of new groups where they are needed. The Group also run since 1995 the Carnew Enterprise Centre and as such were well placed to make the application, and channel and manage the funding for the more informal draft group.

The Carnew Traditional Craft Group LEADER+ Project

The Group's LEADER+ Project involved the organisation of a new traditional skills course. The course was to be delivered by an experienced trainer and the trainer that the group have previously worked with. The aim of the project was to enable the group run a further training course on a new embroidery technique (Hardanger embroidery¹), and indeed to support the group to continue to meet and build the confidence of group members.

As part of this project the Group wanted to pass on the tradition of Hardanger embroidery to the younger generation and planned to establish links with the secondary school located beside the Enterprise Centre.

The specific objectives of the Project were as follows:

1. To improve the embroidery skills already gained through learning new stitches
2. To broaden the membership of the group through promotional activities
3. To pass the skill to others through forming a dedicated group who will ensure that training in this craft will continue to take place

¹Hardanger, or Hardangersom, is a form of white work using counted thread and drawn thread work. It is worked on either cotton or linen with linen or pearl cotton threads. Though traditionally worked in white thread on white fabric, colour can and has been used for many years now, both in the fabrics and threads.

4. To integrate new members through a 'buddy system'
5. To create some tangible pieces of work for use and display within the wider community.

The Group (through Old Coolatin Country) received €2,020 to enable them hire the room in the Centre and engage the services of a skilled trainer to enable them learn a new embroidery skill. Course participants also made a contribution towards the cost of the course (netting €600 in total) and were responsible for purchasing any additional sewing materials they might require which were in turn provided largely at cost prices by the Trainer. The course was held on a Wednesday evening to enable those that were working to attend. The course was delivered in two phases over two terms, 10 weeks before Christmas (which focused on the basic stitches) and 10 weeks after Christmas (which focused on the more intermediate and advanced stitches required to finish pieces). The course had 14 regular participants, while a further four women attended as they could. Participants were drawn from Carnew (3 participants) and the wider rural area (11 participants). Many of these women lived alone and this was one of their few regular social outlets, while some were from the area and other more newly arrived.

At the beginning of the project the Group tried to encourage new people to join through advertisements in the local papers and church newsletters, notices in public buildings and public places including the post offices. Flyers were also distributed through the schools and local parent and toddler groups. These efforts went unrewarded and no new members came to the group through these means. Efforts were also made to involve local secondary school transitional year students at Cóláiste Bhríde and initial discussions were very positive. However they did not ultimately generate any student participation in the project and the group decided to proceed with the project without the pupils who stated that they were already committed to other activities making it impossible for them to come to the meetings on a Wednesday night.

Membership of the Group grew instead through Group members approaching other women they knew and encouraging them to come. In many cases the new members were collected and accompanied to the meetings by existing members. A number of new members started but found the close work involved too hard on their eyes. So in reality the Group only grew by one-two new members.

A number of members of the Group also attend the Computer Training held in the Enterprise Centre. The classes are held in tandem, with a small number of the Group splitting their time between the two classes, while others in the group attend only the craft class. Those attending the Computer training were in the process of completed two ECDL modules over two years. Four to five of the Group members just attend the craft group. The Craft trainer was reportedly very flexible and was able to deal with people entering and exiting the classes at different stages and indeed deal with people at their various different skills levels, ensuring that no one felt excluded or left behind in the process.

Interestingly there is another Craft Group in Carnew. This Group meet during the day and as such are mainly made up of retired people. There is no overlap of members between the two groups, although the Groups frequently exhibit their work together.

The Impact of the Project

Impact on the Carnew Traditional Craft Group

The availability of LEADER+ funding enabled the Group to continue to meet and learn new skills. It has also meant that the Group and individual group members have produced a number of very beautiful pieces included a church alter cloth and pieces exhibited in local shows. One person in the groups skills have developed to the level where others in the Group believe that she has the necessary skills to be able to teach embroidery.

Impact on the Individual Participants

Group members have reported that 'Individuals' in the group were visibly more confident as a result of their participation in the Group and the embroidery work they produce. Many of the group members would not have known one another outside of the group and participation in the group has enable group members to make new contacts locally. It provided the Group members with '2 hours relaxation outside of the house'.

2. Kilcoole Women's Group

Kilcoole Women's Group was established in 1997, in the village of Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow. The overall aim of the group is to provide a positive and supportive environment for women of all ages to come together and share their everyday experiences, provide mutual support and help break down feelings of isolation. The Group aims to service a range of functions namely:

- To provide support and friendship
- To create a safe and friendly environment for women of all ages to meet
- To provide a social outlet
- To enable women to share experiences
- To enable women to share information
- To increase awareness of the local community
- To enable women to become more involved in the development of their local community and challenge social policy in their own area
- To host talks on a range of different topics
- To promote training and educational opportunities
- To network with other groups.

The Group meets once a fortnight in St. Patrick's Hall in Kilcoole. The Group is managed by a committee of seven members comprising a Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary, PR Officer, Under Chair, Under Treasurer, and Under Secretary. These last three roles are members of the committee who are being mentored by the standing position holders so that they will be able to take over that role in the following year. At that time they will then mentor someone new into their role. Therefore each committee member signs up for a two year period, becoming a full role holder only in the 2nd year.

One of the first activities the Group was involved in was the organisation of a Parent and Toddler Group which meets for an hour and a half every Wednesday morning in St. Patrick's Hall in Kilcoole. The Group has also participated in a range of courses and training activities, including:

- Art Therapy
- Indian Head Massage
- Reflexology
- Facilitation Skills
- Parenting Course
- Computer Training
- Stress Management
- First Aid Course
- Car Mechanic Course
- Expressive Therapy
- Women's Health
- Aromatherapy

Kilcoole Women's Group LEADER+ Project

By 2005, Kilcoole Women's Group membership had grown with many new women joining the Group. As a result, the Group felt that they needed to have more direction, become more focused and more pro-active in the community. Following a meeting with a similar group in the county (Wicklow Women's Group), who had recently completed (and had highly recommended it) a Committee Skills Training Course, Kilcoole Women's Group, in March 2005, decided to apply for funding under LEADER+ to run their own 'Committee Skills Training Course' for its members. The Group received valuable advice and guidance from Wicklow Rural Partnership in relation to sourcing an appropriate training course and applying for funding.

The total cost of running the course was €1,907 (€1800 for training fees and €107 for the venue). The Group was awarded €1,787 under LEADER+ towards the cost of running the course (94% of the total cost). The remaining 6% of the cost (€120) was raised through contributions from participants. The course, which was delivered by Modern Business Training Services (MBTS), took place over two and a half days, in St. Patrick's Hall, Kilcoole in May 2005, and addressed the following areas:

- Roles, Responsibilities and Training of Officers
- Exercising Financial Control
- Conflict Resolution and Negotiation
- Effective Planning
- Running Effective Meetings.

Nine women attended the course over the two and a half days.

Impact of the LEADER+ Funded Project

Impact for the Group

The most significant impact arising from this LEADER+ funded project for the Group has been the increase in confidence, capacity and effectiveness of the Group as a whole. The training course enabled members to gain a clear understanding of the need for a structured committee, how a committee is organised, and the different roles in a committee and how the committee can work effectively.

Prior to attending the course, the Group felt that they lacked the necessary expertise to run an effective committee. Committee work was generally left to the same few women. Committee members were not sure of their roles, which frequently resulted in a lot of unnecessary overlap and duplication of activities while other actions were being neglected. This lack of organisation often led to unnecessary tensions. However, as a result of the training course, each committee member and indeed each group member now has a greater awareness and understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. Each committee member is now aware of their particular area of responsibility. This has had two knock-on effects. Firstly, as members are now clear about what is involved in each role, they are no longer afraid to take on positions of responsibility within the Group. As such, the Group is finding that more women are willing to take these roles of responsibility than before, thus responsibility within the group is shared more evenly. Secondly, if disputes arise at committee level, it does not affect the atmosphere of the committee as people are aware of the duties and responsibilities attached to each role and are able to distinguish between the person and the role. Members have respect for the role and so disputes do not become personal. Furthermore, following the course, the Group established a new PRO position, which has been particularly instrumental in maintaining group involvement in its various activities. Consequently, since the participants attended the course, Kilcoole Women's Committee has operated more smoothly and effectively, thanks to a more structured and professional committee structure.

Another impact of the committee skills training course is that the course participants are now trained in conflict management and resolution. This has enabled them to complete tasks and projects in a shorter space of time than would have previously occurred as they are now better equipped to resolve the disputes and conflicts that can arise during any project. An example of a project which the Group believed was helped by the skills developed during the training course was the publication of a Community Information Leaflet. The skills developed during the course enabled the Group to quickly resolve the differing perspectives on what should or should not be included in the leaflet.

As a result of the training course, the Group has become much more confident in itself and in its ability to get things done. The Group has become more productive as it is now more willing and more likely to take on bigger and better tasks than they would have done before. The publication of the Community Leaflet is a case in point, which was officially launched with much local publicity in October 2006. The Group has also been involved in a campaign to establish a children's playground in the area. While this campaign is being led by a 'spin-off' group of Kilcoole Women's Group, not by the Women's Group itself, it would be true to say that the campaign was initially instigated by Kilcoole Women's Group who continue to actively support the campaign for a playground.

Another area where the Committee Skills Training Course can be seen to be making a difference is in the separation of committee business and Group activities and events. Prior to the training course, committee matters were generally discussed at the Group meetings every second Tuesday. However, since the course, the committee has met separately to the general meetings. This way the Tuesday meetings are not taken up discussing 'business matters' which may not be of interest to the wider membership who are there to meet other people on a social basis or to attend a specific activity. This has meant that the Tuesday night meetings are more attractive for a wider audience who simply want a night out and do not want to be involved in 'committee business'.

Finally, as the training course was spread across two and a half days, it provided an opportunity for newer members to get to know other women in the Group. As one woman wrote in the feedback form completed at the end of the course, "being a new member, I found it great for getting to know people".

Impact on Participants

At an individual level, the course participants believed it made them more confident in themselves and gave them a greater belief in their own abilities. It has encouraged members to become more active in the Group. Members are more willing to take on a project or task and see it through to completion (which in turn has made the Group as a whole has become more productive).

The course has also helped women in the Group in their daily lives. For example, one participant reported that the conflict management component of the course has helped her resolve conflicts and tensions at work, while another participant reported that she now had a greater understanding of financial management.

Impact for the Community

The wider community in Kilcoole has also benefited from a strong and more effective Kilcoole Women's Group. For example, the Parent and Toddler Group and the proposed playground will benefit the wider community not just the members of the Kilcoole Women's Group, while the Community Information Leaflet produced by the Group will be useful for the whole community.

The course participants have also brought their newly acquired knowledge of how committees should work and how they can be effective to other arenas in the community. For example, some members are also members of their local parents' associations or sporting groups, and as a result of the course, they are now more knowledgeable about what is involved in running such an organisation and of the importance of a strong and structured committee. As a result, the wider community is benefiting from the knowledge and skills developed at Kilcoole Women's committee skills training course.

Overall Impact

It is true to say that while the particular project that was funded by LEADER+ was quite small in duration and size, the direct and indirect effects of that project have been far greater. The overall impact of the training course, funded by LEADER+, is probably best summed up by the Chairperson of the Group, who wrote in a letter to Wicklow Rural Partnership,

"We found it ... extremely helpful and very thought provoking. Since doing it, we have found more and more that it is paying dividends in directing us through our current group development – most particularly in making us realise that a strong, focussed, well-working committee is of prime importance", while another participant described the project as, "money well spent".

3. Tinahely Women's Network

Tinahely Women's Network (TWN) was officially formed in 1999 with the aim of providing a Forum for new residents to meet more established longer-term residents and local women from the community. The Group currently has a membership of 50 women drawn from a wide geographical area and a range of backgrounds. The age of Group member's ranges from women in the 30's to women in the late seventies and into their early 80's. The Group generally meet on the first Monday of each month (except for the summer months).

The Tinahely Women's Network LEADER+ Project/s

Tinahely Women's Network received funding for two distinct but linked projects. The first project was a Creative Writing Training Course. This project involved the delivery of two training courses; both courses had a mix of participants, with some participants having experience of writing and some new to the process. At the time of applying for funding the Group had planned that these Courses would provide the materials for what turned out to be the second project - the compilation and publication of a book and CD of women's short stories.

The Network received €5,000 (83% of the total cost) under LEADER + toward the cost of the creative writing training courses, the remainder of the costs was met by charging the participants a small fee. The Group also received €4,313 from LEADER + towards the cost of compiling and publishing the book and CD. The remainder of the costs of compiling the book and CD was met with funding from Wicklow County Council and from sales of the final book. The training project was funded under the LEADER + training measure while the publication of the book and CD was funded under the LEADER + enhancement of the Social, Cultural and Natural Environment Measure. The training courses were run in June 2004 and August 2004 over a period of 10 weeks each. The Book and CD were compiled using twenty two stories produced by course participants and by others including two from KARE Centre and one from the local Traveller group. Both the Book and the CD were completed and launched on International Women's Day on March 5th 2005.

The Network made a particular effort to celebrate International Women's Day annually. In 2004 they decided to ask local women to write some stories for the occasion. They were surprised to receive 13 short stories written by local women. These were read out under the title 'A Women's Heart' to mark the day. The public reading of these stories on International Women's Day generated a very positive and enthusiastic response. It was clear that there were other women out there who believed that they too had a story to tell but for one reason or another did not feel confident to do so. The Network went on to organise the creative writing course in order to equip these and other local women with the skills and confidence to be able to tell their stories.

The aim of the Creative Writing Training Course was to encourage local women to write. The Network believed that there was 'an abundance of untapped creativity, knowledge and talent in the locality' which needed to be explored. The aim of publishing the anthology and the CD was to ensure that this creativity would be 'preserved for future generations to enjoy'.

The two creative writing training courses run were broadly similar and covered the following topics: analysing different writing styles, exploring writing for a listening audience, observation exercises, introduction to editing group work and networking. A total of 24 women participated in the courses. The first courses participants were mainly from Tinahely, while the participants for the second course came from a wider geographical area. Participants came from both within the group and from the wider community. Both courses were delivered by Sylvia Cullen a playwright with skills and experience of delivering this type of training in a community group setting. Sylvia was also involved in editing the book and the CD. Many of the contributions for the book and the CD came from the course participants. Contributions were also sought more widely and were indeed received from women from the local community who work in KARE² Centre for women involved in the parents and toddler group. The Book was dedicated to the Memory of Ger Horan a founder member of the group and the initial instigator of the project.

²KARE is a voluntary organisation, which provides a comprehensive range of services to individuals with learning disabilities.

Impact of the LEADER+ Funded Project

The feedback from the women participating in the project was very positive on a number of levels, as some quotes³ picked at random from participants will demonstrate:

'It was really scary, I felt very inadequate but decided not to let that stop, I got so much out of it, it was great'

'I found the course most enjoyable and uplifting. It gave me the opportunity to get to know new people and to enhance relationships with people I already know and most surprising of all, I wrote a story!!'

'An excellent course, very interesting- tutor was excellent'

'I hope the group can keep together and continue to support each other'

'met a really interesting group of people from different backgrounds and different age groups'

'I really enjoyed the course although initially it was daunting but I feel it was wonderful self development for me'

'It is more about touching people than Training'

Most of the women participated in the course for their own development and pleasure, while one or two had a plan and used the course as way of focusing their efforts and getting an audience. Clearly many of the women got to know others better and indeed got to meet new people. Individual's confidence levels were enhanced by writing their own story. This in many cases was compounded by the publication of these stories and their reading in a wider public arena. It is also the case that some of the women who were involved in the training continued to meet following the completion of the course and launch of the book and have subsequently established a writers group open to men and women. This group meets monthly.

Impact on Tinahely Women's Network

The creative writing course and the subsequent publication of the book led to the establishment of a locally based writers group who meet monthly. Membership of TWN grew as those doing the training (who were not members of the Network) decided to join. The Book sales also generated a small profit, which the Network used as match funding with Wicklow County Council funding to establish a visual arts programme and specifically an Artists Book Programme. This programme involved a number of workshops on the theme of 'Hands' and resulted in each of the individuals participating coming up with an original interpretation for a unique book. This Project has both an artistic and a social dimension which involved a meeting with a group of Nigerian asylum seekers living in Dublin. This project resulted the collection of 39 books for International Women's Day 2006. The Artists Book Programme attracted new people to the group who didn't want to write but who were interested in more visual art work. The Group are currently investigated the idea of establishing a Choir for the purposes of performing for International Women's Day 2007.

³Some quotes are taken from the evaluation sheets completed and returned by the course participants at the conclusion of the project others from a meeting with a number of course participants held as part of the WRP review.

The Group did not find the process of applying and managing the funds difficult, what was difficult however for them was the requirement for 50% match funding. The Group did not have anything near that amount of money in the bank, and could not get a loan. Individual members of the Group indeed considered taking out a personal loan, but the Group did not believe that this was a good idea. In the end the Group located the necessary funding by selling advance copies of the book sight unseen within Tinahely and the wider area. The Group consider themselves very fortunate that the local community were prepared to back them in this way.

It was also the case that the Group found that notification of deadline dates for applications and for funding drawdown come too close to the deadline dates with little or no sign of any leeway around the dead lines.

Impact on Participants

The Participants in the writing group bonded thus creating a safe space where people could share their ideas and stories; participants also had an opportunity to meet people who they would never have met outside of the course. Many of the participants have continued to write. The courses provided a vehicle through which established local and new comers to the area could meet around a shared interest. For some the discipline of having to write encouraged them to write. A lot of individuals also got a lot out of being published. The launch of the book and CD was very poignant for many of the participants, given that the group had dedicated the book to their deceased Chairperson. There were no dignitaries officiating at the launch it was instead led and indeed launched by local women.

Groups/Projects Targeting Young People as Beneficiaries

4. The Laura Greaves Bursary

'Music under the Mountains' is a traditional music festival that has been taking place every September since 1991 in Hollywood, Co. Wicklow. It is the only such festival held in County Wicklow each year. Since 1996, any profits raised during the music festival have gone into the Laura Greaves Bursary. The Laura Greaves Bursary was set up in 1996 in memory of Laura Greaves, one of the founding members of the 'Music under the Mountains' festival. The Bursary was established in response to an identified gap in traditional music education for young people in the area. The Bursary is used to enable children from Hollywood National School and surrounding areas to receive traditional music education and is managed on a voluntary basis by a Chairperson, Secretary and a Treasurer.

Since its establishment, the Bursary has paid for and provided music classes and instruments and held music workshops for up to 400 children aged between 6 and 16. The Bursary has also helped to establish Fuinneamh, a traditional music band involving second level students. Fuinneamh have performed with bands such as the Chieftains, and have also performed in the National Concert Hall. The philosophy of the Bursary is to make traditional music fun for young people. Although the Bursary will facilitate young people who wish to sit for music examinations, it is not the primary aim of the Bursary. Rather, the Bursary aims to enable young people, who may not otherwise be exposed to traditional music or who cannot afford music lessons or instruments, to learn a musical instrument.

The Laura Greaves Bursary has previously organised musical exchanges with a youth music group in Dalarna, Sweden. On three occasions, the Swedish group visited Hollywood, while students of the Laura Greaves Bursary have visited Dalarna, Sweden on two occasions. In each case, the trip to Sweden was funded by the children's parents, subsidised by the Bursary, with hostel accommodation provided by the Swedish hosts.

The Laura Greaves Bursary LEADER+ Project

As part of the 2005 'Music under the Mountains' festival, the Laura Greaves Bursary organised a series of workshops exploring the styles of Cajun fiddle, accordion, dance and percussions and their differences and similarities to Irish music styles. The workshops were entitled 'Louisiana Music – the Irish Connection' and were conducted by music tutors from Louisiana in the United States. It was hoped that the workshops would not only enhance young people's musical education but would lead to a musical exchange between young people in the USA and Ireland in the future. The workshop took place over the weekend of 23rd – 25th September 2005 during the 'Music under the Mountain's' festival, and involved four tutors each giving two-hour workshops on the Saturday and the Sunday. The workshop was open firstly to participants in the Laura Greaves Bursary Schemes (i.e., young people from Hollywood and surrounding areas) and then to other people attending the Music Festival.

The Laura Greaves Bursary applied to Wicklow Rural Partnership for funding under LEADER+ to cover the tutor costs for the workshop and the cost of venue hire for the weekend. The total cost of the project was €1,450 (€1,200 for tutor fees and €250 for venue hire). The Bursary was awarded 100% of this cost by Wicklow Rural Partnership under LEADER+ funding.

The workshops were well attended, as shown:

Dance Workshop 1	12 Participants
Dance Workshop 2	22 Participants
Fiddle Styles of West Louisiana	12 Participants
Fiddle Workshop 1	21 Participants.

The US musicians put on a concert at the end of the weekend, which was open to the whole community. Money raised during this concert was put towards the cost of the US musician's flights and accommodation (neither of which were covered within the LEADER+ funding).

Impact of the LEADER+ Funded Project

Impact for the Laura Greaves Bursary

The main impact of the workshops was an increased level of interest in the Bursary. The international flavour of the workshops meant that they received considerable local media coverage at the time, which in turn had the effect of raising the profile of the Bursary in general. The presence of international musicians also raised people's interest in the festival and in particular in the Bursary. The workshops became a showcase for the Bursary leading to a subsequent increase in the number of people applying to participate in it. This increase in interest in the Bursary has led to the formation of two bands involving young people aged 15-18. The Bursary is also now in the process of developing a 'demo' CD involving up to 20 musicians, including young people, tutors and adults.

The music workshops, which took place due to funding received under LEADER+ and awarded by Wicklow Rural Partnership, were a success and a positive experience for the whole community. The Bursary group is now an established organisation with proven experience and knowledge in relation to musical education. They would now like to channel this experience and knowledge into other projects. For example, the Bursary would like to explore new opportunities and projects such as a return trip to Louisiana or Dalerma, Sweden or to develop musical links with non-national communities living in Ireland.

Since the workshop weekend, the group has maintained regular communication with the US-based musicians who travelled to Ireland to conduct the workshops. Plans to organise a return trip for Irish students to visit Louisiana were unfortunately put on hold when Hurricane Katrina devastated Louisiana just prior to the visit by the Cajun traditional musicians in September. The plan now is to reschedule the trip for sometime in 2007.

Impact on Participants

The main impact of the Project for young people was that it exposed them to international styles of music while making connections with Irish music. It enabled the young people to see how music has travelled across the Atlantic and developed over the years. The young people learned US songs and musical pieces which they have continued to play since. The workshops highlighted the international aspect of Irish music, making it more attractive to young people and increasing their interest in music so much so that they are more likely to maintain an involvement with music in the future.

Overall, the project raised the profile of the Bursary among young people in the local area. More young people are now applying for music lessons. The Bursary currently has 7 children playing in one band, and 17 in another. In fact, the activities provided by the Bursary are one of the few non-sporting activities available to young people in the area.

Impact for the Community

The workshops received considerable local media coverage, and so interest in the workshops, the festival and the Bursary increased considerably among the local community. The workshops were enjoyed by the whole community as the dancing workshops and the final concert were open to the whole community and were well attended by both adults and children. Overall, it contributed to raising the profile of Hollywood and bringing a positive boost to the area.

5. St. Joseph's Hall Management Committee

St. Joseph's Hall Management Committee has been in existence in Blessington since 1950. The Committee is responsible for St. Joseph's Hall, which is located on the main street in Blessington. St. Joseph's Hall is operated as a parish-based, community facility under the terms of a lease agreed with its owner – the St. Laurence O'Toole Trust. The Committee is comprised of a Chairperson, a Secretary and a Treasurer as well as six other Committee members including representatives of youth groups who use the facility.

The Hall was being used on a regular basis by approximately 450 users a year, representing all age groups. Groups using the Hall included local youth clubs such as Blessóg and Foróige, Brownie groups, speech and drama groups, Irish dancing groups, aerobics and kickboxing groups etc. The Hall comprised a large main area with a stage, a small rear kitchen, toilet facilities, a room to the rear of the stage (accessible via a second public side entrance), and two adjoining offices, which were being rented by FÁS.

In 2003, the Committee engaged in a consultation process with the local community to ensure that the Hall was being used in a way that best met the needs of the community. It was as a result of this consultation process with individuals, local schools and groups in Blessington and surrounding areas that a need for services and facilities for young people in Blessington was identified. This in turn resulted in the Committee subsequently applying for LEADER+ funding in order to redevelop a section of the Hall as a Youth Café/Drop-in Centre.

St. Joseph's Hall Management Committee LEADER+ Project

In 2005, members of St. Joseph's Hall Management Committee visited an existing Youth Centre in Dublin. They also held a number of meetings with the two youth groups in Blessington, and with potential funding agencies to identify good practice with respect to developing a Youth Drop-in Centre. The Committee and potential users of the Hall also participated in two externally facilitated workshops to explore the potential operation and management of a Youth Drop-in Centre. In September 2005, St. Joseph's Hall Management Committee applied to Wicklow Rural Partnership for funding under LEADER+ to renovate the rear section of St. Joseph's Hall as a Youth Café/Drop-in Centre. The Committee argued that the Youth Café would provide a much needed, safe and welcoming environment for young people (aged 13-18), from Blessington and surrounding disadvantaged rural areas, to socialise and meet.

The Committee proposed to convert the existing room, kitchen, offices and toilet facilities at the rear of the Hall into a facility that would be used as a Youth Café/Drop-in Centre. This Centre was to comprise of an activity room for young people, which would include entertainment equipment such as PCs and DVD players, a kitchen with a small café area attached (which could also be used by those using the main Hall), a small storeroom for equipment, and upgraded toilet facilities available to users of both parts of the Hall. FÁS staff would relocate into one office, thereby freeing up space at the rear of the Hall but still enabling rental income from FÁS to continue.

The total cost of the Project was €60,363, of which 85% was for building work, 12% for equipment (PCs, DVD, CD players etc) and 3% for furniture and kitchen equipment. The Committee were awarded 50% (€30,182) of the total cost of the Project from Wicklow Rural Partnership under the LEADER+ Programme. The remaining costs of the Project was funded by Wicklow County Council (16%), the Committee's own resources raised from rental income (25%), and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (8%).

The Centre officially opened in April 2006 and is the first such facility in County Wicklow. While St. Joseph's Hall Management Committee maintain overall responsibility for the Hall and the Youth Café/Drop-in Centre, the day-to-day running of the Centre is undertaken by volunteers from the two local Youth Groups – Blessóg and Foróige.

From its opening in April 2006 to mid-August 2006, the Café/Drop-in Centre has opened six evenings a week from 7.30-10pm (including one evening – Friday – when it is used exclusively by the two local Youth Clubs, Blessóg and Foróige). Teenagers pay €2 to use the facility and while there they can use the entertainment and PC equipment, play pool, have a coffee in the café area etc, all under the supervision of a local Youth Group volunteer. The Café/Drop-in Centre also has its own entrance at the rear of the Hall. Youth leaders from the two Youth Clubs staff the Café/Centre on a voluntary basis. In August, the Café/Centre closed for a break of three weeks before opening again in September 2006. Since September 2006 the opening hours of the Centre have had to be reduced as one of the Youth Club volunteers was no longer available Centre in the evenings. The Centre currently opens four evenings a week (Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, Saturday). Friday attendance is limited to Youth Clubs members.

Impact of the LEADER+ Funded Project

Impact for the Group

Committee members believed that their involvement in this Project had a hugely beneficial impact on the group as a whole. The Committee “gelled very well together” throughout the process of getting the Project completed, and although the Committee membership has not grown in size, the experience has made the group stronger. The Project also brought them into contact with a wider sector of the population, including members of Blessington Forum, the local business community and local politicians, all of which has helped raise awareness of the work of the Committee, the facilities available in the Hall and the existence of the Youth Café/Drop-in Centre. This in turn has increased demand for the use of the Hall by community groups and consequently has increased the Committee’s rental income.

This Project however demanded a huge commitment on the part of individual Committee members. For the Secretary for example, it represented the biggest project she had ever been involved in and one that required her to undertake a considerable amount of work from fund-raising to networking with funders to form-filling etc. Despite at times feeling overwhelmed by the workload, the Project was however an extremely fulfilling and rewarding experience for her. As she stated,

“Its great to think I have achieved more than I ever thought I could”.

She also felt that the whole experience has been a great learning tool and one that has significantly boosted her confidence in her own abilities. She now knows that after having successfully completing this particular Project, she could complete similar projects again in the future.

Impact on Participants

The Youth Café/Drop-in Centre is being used on a regular basis by approximately 20-25 local teenagers with about 10-15 teenagers using it most evenings. According to the Committee members, these young people have identified with the Café/Centre in a very strong way. The Café/Centre has become very important to them. They feel at home here, and are even keen to help with cooking and cleaning that may have to be done. For the first time, they have a place they can call their own.

However, by far the most important difference the Youth Café/Centre has made for the young people of Blessington and surrounding areas is that it has provided a safe place for young people to meet and socialise with each other that takes them away from “street corners”. Committee members are in doubt that if it weren’t for the existence of the Youth Café/Centre, many of the teenagers using the facility would instead be “hanging around street corners”.

The Committee eventually hope to employ a Manager and a Support Youth Worker who will identify needs of the young people in the area and who will use the facility to plan, develop and implement a range of social and educational activities and supports for the young people in Blessington and surrounding areas.

Impact for Community

While the Café/Centre is first and foremost a facility for young people, it has potential to be used by other groups during the day when young people are at school/not using it. The local Blessington Hospital has in fact recently requested permission to hire the facility as a social venue for the elderly on two days a week. Users of the main Hall can also use the kitchen/Café facilities. As a consequence, the wider community has become more aware of the existence of St. Joseph's Hall and everything that takes place there. A lot more activity is now taking place in the Hall, with an increased number of groups using it. During the building and renovation phase of the Project, the front of the Hall was also cleaned up, making the building more attractive to potential users and to the wider community.

6. ACORN Community Development

ACORN is a Community Development Group based in Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow. It was established in April 2002, became a limited company in 2004, and has applied for Charitable Status (for which it is currently awaiting approval). It was set up by a group of local people after two public health nurses conducted a needs analysis of the Rathdrum area in 2001 and discovered that there was a distinct lack of services and activities both for young mothers and for young people in the area. ACORN was therefore set up with the aim of providing and improving services and activities for children, young people, and families in Rathdrum and surrounding areas (including Greane, Ballinaclesh, Glesnagert Bridge and the Meeting of the Waters).

ACORN is managed by a Committee comprising of eleven members and includes a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. As part of the Group's development it received training in 2003 on how to set up a Limited Company. The training was provided by Pobal, and funded by a National Lottery grant.

Among one of the first activities undertaken by ACORN was the establishment of a Parent and Toddler Group in April 2002. This group meets for an hour and a half twice a week in a local hall in Rathdrum, and has a regular meeting attendance of about 5-10 children and 6-8 parents. Guest speakers are frequently invited to talk to the parents attending on issues such as health, social welfare etc. Day trips to places such as the Glenroe Farm are also organised during the summer months.

ACORN held beginners and advance level computer courses in 2002 to 2004 in the local hall (the Rathdrum Development Area (RDA) Annex) using computers donated to ACORN by Dell Computers in Bray, Co. Wicklow. Since 2003, ACORN has also been involved in organising FETAC Childcare, LEVEL 2 courses for members of the local community in the RDA Annex. In 2004, ACORN held a three-day summer camp for local children aged 6-12. In 2006, ACORN was nominated for a Price of Place Award by Wicklow County Council for their work with the community and providing services for the community.

Since 2002, ACORN has implemented a series of projects with the help of funding received from Wicklow Rural Partnership under LEADER+. These include:

- The Incredible Years Parenting Programme, 2005 and 2007
- The Youth Summer Camp, 2005 and 2006
- The Youth IT Training Project, 2005 and 2006
- The Production of a Community Directory in 2006.
- Development of a Strategic Plan in 2007.

The projects are now described in more detail.

ACORN's LEADER+ Funded Projects

1. The Incredible Years Parenting Programme, 2005 and 2007

In February 2005, ACORN applied to Wicklow Rural Partnership for funding under the LEADER+ Programme to run a parenting course entitled 'The Incredible Years Parenting Programme'. ACORN was successful in their application and received €900 (100% of the requested funding) under LEADER+ to cover the cost of the venue, course materials and childcare costs. Tutor costs were paid for by the East Wicklow Parenting Programme. The course, which was provided by Dr. Peter Reid of the Lucena Clinic, Wicklow Town, as part of the East Wicklow Parenting Programme⁴, was aimed at the parents of local children aged between 3 and 7 who were displaying challenging behaviour, who needed extra support at home and at school, and who lived in areas of social disadvantage. The need for such a course was identified by Rathdrum Education Committee (which is made up of representatives of ACORN, teachers and parents from local secondary and primary schools, students and other community representatives). The Incredible Years Parenting Programme provided advice and support on the following topics: Play; Praise and Rewards; Effective Limit Setting; and Handling Misbehaviour. It aimed to develop parents' overall parenting skills, confidence, self-esteem and ability to deal with conflict.

The first course took place over twelve weeks between March and June 2005. Fifteen parents (all young mothers except for one father) attended the course with thirteen completing it. In November 2005, ACORN applied to Wicklow Rural Partnership for further funding under LEADER+ to run a second 'Incredible Years Parenting Programme' in February 2006. It was intended that the course would be similar to the first one but would be expanded to allow for a greater emphasis on personal development. Instead of twelve weeks, the expanded course would run over a period of twenty weeks. Topics to be covered in the expanded course were:

- Active Listening and Speaking Up
- Communicating More Positively to Oneself and Others
- Giving and Getting Support

⁴The East Wicklow Parenting Programme is a project run by the Lucena Clinic and the Health Service Executive East Coast Area.

- Adult Problem Solving
- Family Problem Solving Meetings
- Teaching Children to Problem-Solve Through Stories and Games
- Teaching Children to Problem-Solve in the Midst of Conflict.

ACORN was awarded €2,026 under the LEADER+ Programme to cover the costs of venue hire, childcare and training materials. Tutor costs were once again to be covered by the East Wicklow Parenting Programme. However, in February 2006, with permission from Wicklow Rural Partnership, it was decided to postpone the running of the second parenting course until early 2007 when more people would be available to participate in the course and when a suitable venue would become available.

2. Youth Summer Camp, 2005 and 2006

In June 2005, ACORN applied to Wicklow Rural Partnership for funding under the LEADER+ Programme to hold a summer camp for young people in the Rathdrum area. The aim of the summer camp was to train young people in sports (football and basketball), craft activities (fabric painting) and cultural dance and music from Africa. By participating in such activities, it was anticipated that the children's social and personal skills would be enhanced.

ACORN received €857 (52% of total cost of the project) under the LEADER+ Programme. The funding was used to cover the cost of venue hire, sports and craft materials, and tutor fees for the Crafts and African Drumming and Dance classes (sports training was provided by suitably qualified local people on a voluntary basis). The remaining costs involved in running the summer camp (bus hire, insurance and refreshments) were covered by charging participants a €20 fee.

Through consultation with the local public health nurse, schools and St. Vincent de Paul, children experiencing disadvantage were specifically targeted for inclusion in the camp. These children were given first preference for places on the course, with the remainder of places being left open to all other children who applied to take part.

The summer camp took place over four days between the 8th and 11th August 2005 in the local GAA sports complex and grounds, and was attended by approximately thirty children between the ages of 7 and 12, many of whom were identified by ACORN as young people experiencing disadvantage.

In 2006, ACORN once again applied for LEADER+ funding to run the summer camp for a second time, in August 2006. This time, funding for a camp that could cater for 60 young people was applied for. ACORN was awarded €934 to cover the venue cost, sports materials and tutor fees for the percussion/drama workshops. The 2006 summer camp took place over four days between August 14th and 17th in the local GAA sports complex and grounds, and was attended by approximately 60 children between the ages of 7 and 12. Similar to the previous year, many of the participants were identified by ACORN as young people suffering relative social disadvantage. Although participants were charged a €20 participation fee, the fee was waived for those 'target' children for whom participation in the Camp would have a significant impact, and where families could not afford to pay the fee. In this way, ACORN ensured that the Camp remained accessible to the most disadvantaged children.

3. Youth IT Training Project, 2005 and 2005

In May 2005, ACORN applied for funding under the LEADER+ programme to run a computer skills training project for eighteen young people, between the ages of 10 and 13, in the Rathdrum area. The project targeted young people who did not have access to computers elsewhere and whose families could not afford to pay for summer camps. These children were identified in consultation with the local schools.

The aim of the project was to enable young people to:

- Develop basic IT skills
- Learn how to present and layout documents
- Improve research, evaluation and problem-solving skills
- Practise public speaking
- Build self-esteem and self-confidence
- Stimulate their imagination
- Develop an interest in learning computer skills

The training programme covered topics such as:

- Introduction to Computers
- Keyboard Skills
- Microsoft Word, including Clip Art
- Microsoft Excel
- Microsoft Publisher
- Microsoft PowerPoint
- Nero CD Burner
- Epson Data Projector.

ACORN was awarded €850 (100% of project cost) under the LEADER+ Programme. The funding was used to cover the costs of the tutor fees and training materials. The camp took place over four days between the 18th and 21st July 2005 in the RDA Annex in Rathdrum, where ACORN had six computers. Fourteen young people took part in the IT camp. The children were split into three groups and each group took part in one and a half hours of IT training per day. Classes were delivered by a qualified IT tutor with experience of working with young people and who used age-appropriate teaching methodologies and content. While the funding only covered the cost of one tutor, that tutor brought an assistant with her, thereby facilitating a lower pupil: teacher ratio of three-to-one.

The tutor's approach to realising the course objectives involved supporting the children to create an autobiographical, multi-media presentation, entitled "All About Me". In order to complete this task, the children had to think about their lives, their families and friends, their likes and dislikes and what was important to them. Once the children had decided what they wanted to include in their presentation, they were taught how to put it into a PowerPoint presentation, how to plan and design the presentation and how to copy it onto a CD. Each presentation included text, images and sounds. Each child delivered their presentation, first in front of their classmates, and on the last day, in front of their families and classmates. The children were awarded with course completion certificates by the course tutor at the end of the week.

Following the success of the IT Training Camp in 2005, ACORN received a lot of queries from parents on whether it would run again, and so, in February 2006, ACORN applied for further LEADER+ funding in order to run the IT training camp for a second time, in the summer of 2006. Due to the high demand for the course, ACORN decided to run the Camp twice, over two one-week periods, and so applied for a higher level of funding than the previous year. €1,448 was awarded, representing 100% of total project costs; this money was used to cover the cost of materials and tutor's fees.

The aims and objectives of the 2006 IT Training Camp mirrored those of the year before. However, this time, the Camp focused on developing the children's skills in using Microsoft Excel. It did this by supporting the children to use Microsoft Excel and Maths to explore whether vampires exist. The 2006 Camp provided training for 36 children, all between the ages of ten and thirteen, who would not otherwise have access to a summer camp or to a computer. The children were divided into six groups with each group receiving six hours of IT training over four days. The Camp took place between the 3rd and 6th July and the 24th and 27th July 2006 in St. Xavier's National School in Rathdrum where not only did the children have access to computers but now for the first time, to the internet as well.

4. Publication of a Directory of Activities and Services in Rathdrum and Surrounding Areas

In 2005, ACORN applied for funding to produce a directory of activities and services in Rathdrum and surrounding areas. The need for such a directory was identified by the Rathdrum Education Committee who felt that there was a perception among the community, and particularly among young people, that "there is nothing to do in Roundwood/Rathdrum". As a result, ACORN decided to find out what was available in the area and present it to the community in the form of a booklet. In so doing, ACORN aimed to promote greater awareness of, and participation in, local services and activities among existing residents as well as providing a useful welcome guide to new residents.

ACORN successfully applied for €1,155 (67% of total project cost) under the LEADER+ Programme to help cover the costs of labour and the printing of 1,000 Community Directories. The remainder of the cost of publication was covered by donations, advertisements, and sales of the Directory. Three Transition Year students, from the local secondary school, Avondale Community College, under the supervision of a teacher, undertook an extensive survey of service providers and activity organisers in Rathdrum and surrounding areas. This task was completed as part of their work for a Gaisce⁵ Award. The students, in conjunction with their teacher and

⁵Gaisce is the National Challenge Award from The President of Ireland to young people between fifteen and twenty five years of age.

the local education committee, then collated all the information collected into a publishable format. ACORN in the meantime sourced a number of sponsors for the Directory. The published Directory cost €2 to purchase. It is pocket-sized and 32 pages long. It contains information on a wide range of services and activities under a variety of headings, including:

- Adult Education
- Animal Welfare
- Art and Craft Classes
- Breast-feeding Support
- Pre-school Activities
- Community Groups
- IT Centres
- Groups for Older People
- Health
- Library Services
- Religious Groups
- Schools
- Scout Groups
- Sporting Organisations
- Youth Groups

Approximately 1,000 copies of the Directory were published. They are now available to purchase in shops, post offices etc in Rathdrum and surrounding villages. While the initial reason for the booklet was based on increasing young people's involvement in local activities, the booklet in the end contained valuable information about activities and services for people of all ages.

5. Development of a Strategic Plan

In November 2006, ACORN were approved a grant of €5,760 to develop a strategic plan. The project originated in the discussions between WRP and ACORN with respect to their participation in the Community Services Programme (CSP), a programme which is indirectly administered by WRP. Although unsuccessful in their application, it was agreed that the need to develop a more long-term approach to planning, had been substantially demonstrated and could also be met under LEADER Plus. On this basis, ACORN made an application under LEADER Plus, which was approved in November 2006. Since LEADER could fund up to 80% of the costs for development of a strategic plan, Wicklow County Council was approached to fund the balance. A facilitator for the planning process was found through a recommendation from Comhairle, this project will commence in January 2007 and will involve a series of supported workshops with ACORN Committee members.

Since February 2005, ACORN has received nearly €14,000 in funding under the LEADER+ Programme to develop and implement eight separate projects. Table 1 below provides an overview of the eight projects, highlighting when they were implemented, and how many young people and women were either directly involved with the Project or benefited from it.

Table 1 Overview of ACORN's LEADER+ Funded Projects

	Project	Funding Received	Date of Implementation	No. of Participants
1	Incredible Years Parenting Programme	€900	March - June 2005	13 parents 27 children aged 3-7
2	Youth IT Training Project	€850	18-21 July 2005	14 children aged 10-13
3	Youth Summer Camp	€857	8-11 August 2005	30 children aged 7-12
4	Youth IT Training Project	€1,448	3-7 July, & 24-27 July 2006	36 children aged 10-13
5	Youth Summer Camp	€934	14-17 August 2006	60 children aged 7-12
6	Community Directory	€1,155	2005-2006	3 Transition Year students: Directory available to whole community
7	Incredible Years Parenting Programme	€2,026	November 2006 - March/April 2007	TBC
8	Development of a Strategic Plan	€5,760	January - March 2007	11 Committee members
Total		€13,930		

Impact of the LEADER+ Funded Projects

Impact for ACORN

Probably the most significant impact for ACORN arising from their involvement with the LEADER+ Programme is that it enabled ACORN to provide a more wide-ranging and appealing programme of activities for young people in the area than would have been possible otherwise. For example, the Group did not have “to cut corners” in order to reduce the costs involved with running the summer and IT camps. They no longer had to rely on the goodwill and voluntary efforts of parents. The funding enabled ACORN to purchase equipment and materials as well as to hire qualified facilitators for the workshops. This was particularly true in relation to the Youth Summer Camps as the funding enabled ACORN to hire expert tutors in the areas of crafts, music and dance, while in the case of the IT training camp, ACORN were able to hire a qualified IT tutor.

LEADER+ funding also enabled ACORN to charge a reduced participation fee for the various projects, thereby ensuring that a greater number of families and young people could afford to participate in the various projects (although the fee was waived for target families who could not afford it). LEADER+ funding therefore enabled ACORN to provide a valuable educational service to young people who were most in need of it but who were also least likely to have access to such training elsewhere.

To ensure participation in the various projects by families and young people most in need of support, ACORN engaged in a consultation process with local schools, the public health nurse and St. Vincent de Paul. As a result of this consultation, ACORN came to learn more clearly who it was within the community that was experiencing disadvantage and how to reach them. This bank of knowledge has enabled Acorn to tailor and target their projects more effectively.

All the projects run by Acorn demanded a lot of time and effort on behalf of ACORN members. This was particularly true in the run up to the summer camps and IT training camps. However, ACORN members took great pride in what they had achieved and in knowing that they were capable of developing and implementing such worthwhile and valuable projects. Members of ACORN felt that the hard work was all worthwhile in the end as it was extremely rewarding to see what the young children had achieved in such a short space of time. As one ACORN member said in relation to the summer camps,

“We’re shattered but very fulfilled. It’s great to see the kids enjoy it so much”.

Indeed, the summer and IT camps were such successes in 2005 that demand for places on each camp the following year was so high that ACORN had to increase the number of places available on the summer camp in 2006, and had to run the IT camp twice.

With each successful LEADER+ funded project, ACORN’s profile in the community rose as more people aware of the existence of the Group and of what it was trying to achieve in the local area. In the long run, it is hoped that this will benefit ACORN as they gain greater local support for, and involvement in, their various projects.

Overall, ACORN has grown from strength to strength and is currently in negotiation to locate permanent accommodation from where it can provide a range of services and supports on a long-term basis. ACORN have developed from being a group of concerned local residents to a limited company that will, hopefully in the not so distant future, be responsible for the management of a community facility that will provide vital community services such as a mother and toddlers group, a youth drop-in centre, a homework club, a children's playgroup and play space, and a community training centre.

Impact on Project Participants

The principal impact of LEADER+ funding for project participants was that it enabled those most in need of support to participate. If ACORN had not received LEADER+ funding for the various projects, they would have had to ask participants to pay for the course. This would have meant that those most in need of the course would not have been able to afford to participate. The LEADER+ funding however enabled ACORN to target those participants who most needed the support.

Each project had a significant impact on the lives of each set of participants. The Incredible Years Parenting Programme for example helped parents to manage their children better and 'gave them back power'. According to feedback from the course providers, the completion rate of 86% (13 out of 15 parents) was extremely high. In all, twenty-seven young children were directly affected by this particular programme. The course providers used a 'Child Behaviour Checklist' to monitor the participants' progress, and found that after the twelve weeks; all of the adult participants could see significant improvements in the children's behaviour in relation to their score on the Checklist.

The most significant impact of Summer Camps was that it enabled children, who would not otherwise have had the opportunity, to attend a summer camp where they could learn new sporting, crafts, dance and music skills, and where they could meet new friends from a variety of different backgrounds and residential areas. The camps brought children together from different areas and schools and so provided the children with the opportunity to build friendships with children from outside their own neighbourhood and school. Before ACORN held the summer camps, there were no other organised activities or camp of this nature for young people in the area. As such, it was no surprise that the camps were a great hit with the young people who kept asking if they could attend again the following year.

Similarly, the LEADER+ funding enabled ACORN to provide an IT Training Camps to children who would not otherwise had had the opportunity to participate in such a training programme. It provided the children with access to computers that they would not normally have received. Not only did the IT Training Camps enable the children to develop vital computer skills and gain an understanding of 'multi-media' communication (both of which will have a positive impact on their formal educational experience and reduce the risk of educational disadvantage), but it also promoted the children's self-esteem and confidence, as they were encouraged to discuss and explore what was good in their lives in their presentations entitled "All about Me". The course enabled them to develop computer skills while having fun and being creative. They were provided

with the freedom to choose their own topics. They were supported to be creative, to explore ideas and topics and to make decisions on what to present and how. The presentations provided the children with valuable experience in relation to public speaking, all of which helped greatly to boost their self-esteem and confidence, and in the long run, should enhance their formal educational experience and reduce the risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving. Indeed, ACORN members reported that they were aware of children who participated in the course and who were now teaching themselves or their siblings new IT skills, building on and sharing what they had learned at the camp/s.

Finally, the Community Directory project had a direct impact on three local transition year students who undertook the field research for the Directory as part of their Gaisce Awards. They, along with their teacher, developed the content for the Directory. According to ACORN representatives, the project was a huge learning experience for the students as they disseminated, collected and collated survey data in the area. It helped to build their confidence and the students exhibited a strong sense of pride and achievement on the day the Directory was officially launched.

Impact for the Community

ACORN believes that the various LEADER+ funded projects were instrumental in promoting community spirit in the area. Great goodwill has developed towards ACORN as parents become more and more involved each year with the different camps, providing training sessions, supervising and transporting children, or from those who can afford it – paying a participation fee. Indeed, some parents have been known to pay extra so as to help towards the overall costs of the project, such is the level of goodwill and support among parents towards the work that ACORN has been doing. The summer camps provided parents with an opportunity to get involved in the community and to get to know other parents and families in so doing. Similarly, Transition year students from the local secondary school, Avondale Community College, were also invited to help out with the running of the camps, providing them with valuable work experience as well as an opportunity to give something to their community.

The summer and IT camps also provided a safe place for local young people to be for a short period over the summer holidays thus keeping them “off the streets” and out of trouble. The IT training project in particular provided valuable ‘out-of-school’ social and educational support for children who might be described of being ‘at risk’. This type of support reduces the likelihood of educational disadvantage and early school leaving, all of which will benefit the socio-economic profile of the community in the long-run.

Meanwhile, the Directory is a very valuable resource for the local area, providing for the first time, vital information on community services and activities in one publication. This information has been useful, not just for existing residents, but more particularly for new members of the rapidly expanding community. In fact, it is a particularly valuable resource to new families to the area, providing them with information on what is available and happening in the area, and thus helping them to integrate into their new community. Indeed, the Directory has been very well received among the local community. People in the community have reported that they have been surprised to learn about what is available on their doorstep and now that they know what is available in the community, are more likely to get actively involved in the various social and educational activities in the area.

APPENDIX 1

The Consultees

Wicklow Rural Partnership LEADER staff

1. Carnew Traditional Craft Group

Suzanne O’Sullivan: Craft Group Member
Tricia Byrne: Craft Group Member
Anne Kavanagh: Carnew Enterprise Centre Manager

2. Kilcoole Women’s Group

Liz Layton
Ann Walsh
Angie Martin

3. Tinahely Women’s Network

Susan Byrne
Maggie Walker
Emeldia Byrne

4. The Laura Greaves Bursary

Eric Greaves

5. St. Joseph’s Hall Management Committee

Nuala Cashin (Secretary)
Guy Carlton (Committee Member Blessóg Youth Club Leader Volunteer Staff Member of Youth Café/Drop-in Centre)

6. ACORN Community Development

Marie Mullen
Helen Binion



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