

Consultation Workshop

‘The Needs of Early School Leavers in the Present Climate – How can we respond?’

Prepared For:

- **Ellen O’Donnell** – Clonmel Youth Training Centre
- **South Tipperary Disconnected Youth Group** which is a sub group of the Social Inclusion Measures Group (SIM) of the South Tipperary County Development Board

New Links Training Solutions

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1. Objective of the Workshop

New Links Training Solutions was invited to facilitate an information gathering workshop – a collaboration between the Clonmel Youth Training Enterprise (CYTE) (Ellen O'Donnell) and South Tipperary Disconnected Youth Group which is a sub group of the Social Inclusion Measures Group (SIM) of the South Tipperary County Development Board. The objective of the workshop was to bring professionals working with disconnected young people together to discuss the needs of early school leavers (ESLs) in the present climate and to see how services could respond to these needs. A proposal was sent to Ellen O'Donnell and a plan for the workshop was agreed (see appendix 1). The workshop provided an opportunity for those working with disconnected young people to network, share issues and come up with possible solutions taking in to consideration the limited resources available to services in the present climate. The disconnected youth group plans to use the discussion/recommendations from the workshop to develop an action plan which will be reflective of the resources available. This action plan will feed into the SIM action plan and the County Development Strategy. Ellen O'Donnell (CYTE) stated that this information would be also be used to assist the staff and management of CYTE to critically evaluate and improve the service that they provide.

2. Workshop Attendee Profile

18 people attended the workshop – representative of a broad range of professionals involved in the education and support of early school leavers in the South Tipperary area. (See Appendix 2)

3. Workshop Overview

The following information was requested as per agreed brief:

- Current Challenges being experienced by service providers
- Changing profile of service users?
- Identified needs of service users?
- Gaps in Service Provision
- Responding to Challenges- what are the needs and how can these be addressed in the service that we provide?

Based on the brief, the following information was gathered directly from participants during the course of the workshop.

4. Current Challenges

Working in Isolation: it was noted that some service providers felt that they were working in isolation, and these providers believed that they would benefit from having contact with other groups and professionals who work with and support ESLs.

Difficulty in making contact with ESLs: this was highlighted as being a problem (especially with 15 year olds). Pathfinders had previously ensured that youth were contacted within 4 weeks of leaving school.

- Challenges of contacting and tracking ESLs were noted.
- Only two existing services actively accessing ESLs
- Intervention is often too late.

Behavioural issues increasing: this point was discussed as it is becoming increasingly difficult to encourage ESLs to engage in a productive manner.

Social Welfare Dependency: It was noted that social welfare dependency can be counterproductive in a number of ways:

- Pay is not a positive motive for learning.
- Expectation of learner to prop up the family income therefore encouraging/accelerating early school leaving.
- Pay (seemingly large sum of money) appears attractive to the ESLs.
- Conflict is often the result when a learner is 'docked' money for non attendance.
- Culture of social welfare dependency within the community and families 'multi generational'- difficult to break the cycle.

Absence of home supports: this was reported as a growing problem since many of the supports have been taken away from many disadvantaged groups e.g. Travellers.

Reduced supports: in general less supports available to encourage young people to stay in school e.g. SNA's

No National agency taking full responsibility for ESLs.

Substance misuse: delegates noted that addiction creates problems for the staff who work directly with service users. It was noted that adult parents, guardians and relatives of the service user may also be abusing substances and or alcohol thus compounding the problems for service providers.

Balancing Staff/Learner Support: The point was raised that the challenge of nurturing staff dignity (in the face of adversity), whilst at the same time dealing fairly with learners is very difficult at times.

- There is no standardised staff behaviour management training readily available.

Staff morale: it was noted that staff find it difficult to maintain morale when in some instances they too are facing difficulties associated with the recession e.g. financial.

No formal qualifications on entry: it was reported that a new trend is appearing in that ESLs are presenting younger with junior cert or less and many of those presenting are very weak in the area of maths and English.

Absence of a stepping stone to entry level or at progression level: It was noted that if there was a 'pre-development' programme available to prepare the learners for the programme that they are entering; more success might be achieved. Equally a link programme to enable learners to progress to the next level was suggested.

Limited employment opportunities: due to economic circumstances low/semi skilled employment opportunities are almost nonexistent.

5. Changing Profile of Early School Leavers

The following is a summary of the feedback from the group:

Rights and Entitlements: Learners are more assertive about their rights and entitlements without considering their own responsibilities. Learners resist even the most minor responsibilities.

Learner profile: Learners are presenting with a much more complex range of problems.

- Drug and alcohol dependency (multi generational as above)
- Single parenthood – more young single fathers presenting to the services
- Teenage pregnancy
- Mental health issues
- Lack of consistent and stable relationships in the home causing heartache for the young people (bad example from Parents).

Cultural Expectation: since the academic route is the only progression route fostered by the education system the leaving school and getting a job type of progression is often discouraged and frowned upon.

Age profile of ESLs: it was noted by the group that ESLs are presenting at a younger age (14). It was reported that the pattern of bad behaviour is starting earlier, and with reduced support hours for students issues/solutions are unaddressed.

Challenge to succeed: lack of support and encouragement due to a culture of 'fear of change' makes it very difficult for young people to want to change the mould and choose a different route than that of their parents or peers.

Poor social skills and general functioning: manifesting itself in a learner who expresses him or herself in an aggressive manner.

Increased incidences of bullying: especially in the area of social media e.g. face book and texting.

Territorial ownership (by learners) of a centre: this acts as a barrier to ESLs from other areas to sign up for participation.

Low impulse control: learners seeking short term solutions and lacking the ability to focus on long term goals.

Use of avoidance mechanisms: learners disinterested in tackling their problems or accepting help from people charged with the task of helping them.

Ghettoisation of children: expectations of children from certain disadvantaged areas or backgrounds are lower than those of children from more affluent areas. The cycle of disadvantage means that children in this category are earmarked for failure, experiencing:

- Low expectations from teachers
- Issues of low self esteem

Labelling: An increased demand for additional welfare income causes some families to label a child with a disability or disorder e.g. ADHD.

Parental bad example: leading to smoking, illegal drug usage and in some instances abuse of prescription medication.

Lack of parental involvement: for reasons cited in section 4.

Motivation to learn/progress: this is almost nonexistent in the current profile of learners presenting.

6. Current Needs of ESLs

One of the major difficulties reported at the consultation workshop was the **difficulty of identifying ESLs** due to the changing landscape of service provision. Another key point that was raised by contributors was that ESLs perhaps need the reassurance that they have '**someone who believes in them**' in their sometimes chaotic lives. In addition the following needs were identified by the group:

- Safe and supportive environment
- Pre-entry preparation courses
- Part-time options (taster programmes) to help ESLs to find their direction.
- Home – centre liaison person
- Family support worker
- Post centre progression support phase (short programme to prepare the young person for the world of work)
- Increased numbers of learners = increased demands for places so more places needed
- Behaviour management support training for staff
- Behaviour/boundary management training for learners
- Literacy and numeracy training for staff
- Tracking system
- Life skills training
- Mental health support (counselling)

- Specific support for Traveller youth
 - Emphasis (acknowledgement) of soft skills attainment
- **3 level programme (flexible option customised approach)**
 - Pre- development work with the young person (hand holding phase similar to the service previously offered by Pathways)
 - Centre based work (Youthreach/CYTE)
 - Introduction to the world of work – establishing the work readiness of each learner. Opportunity to look at future options.
- **Strong positive influences/relationships** – some suggestions from the group included:
 - Mentor programme between the young person and an older person whom they might look up to e.g. local sports person
 - Staff being aware of and proactive in engaging and building relationships with learners.
- **Different approach to personal effectiveness module:** learners are resistant to this module in its current format – it may be useful to approach this module in a different way perhaps combining it with activities in another module as a frame of reference for the SLO's in the PE module. Some new creativity and linking of modules may be useful in future planning.
- **Possible need to review approach to delivery of programmes in general:** with a view to developing alternative methods of delivering modules to make them more appealing to learners.

7. Current Services Available

A range of suggestions relating to local services and other services were presented by the group as follows:

1. **Big Brother Big Sister** – Foroige, Carrick on Suir – Michelle Power (coordinator)
2. **Clonmel Youth Training Centre – Contact Ellen O'Donnell**
3. **Disconnected Youth – Contact Ann Ryan**
4. **Cappawhite training centre**
5. **F.I.T Fast Track Information Technology** – interview techniques, preparation for work, interview techniques. Dublin/Cork offices – contact Lorraine or Ruth <http://www.fit.ie/index.php?page=contact-us>
6. **MEBS – multi element behaviour support programme** – piloted in CYTE – contact Ellen O'Donnell or Shirley Fahey for more details.

7. **Conflict Resolution** – bespoke programmes developed specifically for each presenting target group or organisation see www.newlinkstraining.com for more details.
8. Tipperary Regional Youth Service (TRYSS)
9. VEC back to Education Initiative (BTEI) – Kate Mullaney
10. Barnardos Family Support Project- available to youth residing in RAPID areas.

8. Addressing the gaps in Service Provision – responding to the needs. (Recommendations based on feedback from the consultation group)

There were many suggestions as to how the gaps in service provision might be addressed. Many of these gaps have occurred as a result of the economic downturn and dissolution of some services such as Pathways, SNA's and Traveller support workers. The group agreed that it would be useful to look at a practical solution focused approach to the current needs of services for ESLs. The following suggestions were presented:

1. **Mentoring:** Foroige (Big brother big sister) – Lisa Kavanagh agreed to distribute this information.
2. **Educational Mentoring Report** – Martin Hayes (WSTCYS) agreed to prepare an overview of this paper and it will be distributed by Ann Ryan (Disconnected Youth) to all attendees.
3. **Increase progression route opportunities for learners:** VEC BTEI coordinator suggested that this might be useful for some learners as a stepping stone. Contact Kaye Mullaney - **Tel:** (052) 617 6755 / 617 6867
4. **Raise Awareness around soft skills training and accomplishment:** Hilary Dilworth (STDC) and Catherine Corbett (FAS) will open a discussion document on this topic.
5. **Work Experience and Placement:** consider how the informal network (workshop attendees) and disconnected youth members could identify effective methods of sourcing employers.
6. **Work Experience:** look at the modules on offer and consider alternative methods of providing work experience to learners e.g. enterprise, volunteering, Community Employment (CE) schemes (as volunteer learners).
7. **Encourage Community Involvement:** Look at what is already out there and seek to connect the youth with an activity that is of genuine interest with the goal of active participation for reasons of enjoyment. Some suggestions: Sport, theatre, art, music etc. Consider how this could be incorporated in the already existing service – look at module selection.

8. **Filling the gap left by the demise of Pathways:** It was suggested that it may be possible to employ a TUS worker to carry out some of the duties formerly provided by the Pathways coordinator. Hilary (STDC), Lisa and Ann (STDC) have agreed to look into this possible option).
9. **XLC Project Waterford** is a successful alternative method of engaging ESLs: Martin Hayes agreed to connect with Nuala Jackson and report on his findings. It was also suggested that the volunteer service look at this project for ideas.
10. **Programme Development:** it was suggested that some informal networking between staff from different services might be useful in the process of developing new and innovative programmes to encourage participation and retention of learners.
11. **Counselling & coaching services:** the following options were suggested.
 - a. Tipperary Institute – Kathleen Fanning who possibly has a bank of trainee coaches looking to gain experience by offering pro bono or reduced rate hours.
 - b. Sr. Kate – Counsellor who may be available for pro bono or reduced rate fee for practice counselling hours. (no contact details were available so this lead will need to be followed up in more detail).
12. **Staff development training:** is it possible to extend some places on staff training events to members of disconnected youth?
13. **Unfinished Modules:** if a learner has not completed the course could it be made possible for him or her to complete the modules in another centre where applicable?
14. **Creativity in Developing Modules:** it was suggested that in order to make the programmes more attractive to learners and to reduce the workload overall; it might be useful to organise workshops where staff could participate and exchange ideas in relation to linking the modules and SLO's in a more holistic way. This will serve as a method of reducing the workload for staff and learners as many SLO's are repeated in more than one module.
15. **Increasing Youthreach places** It was suggested that extra spaces should be made available on the Youthreach programme. Some concerns were raised in relation to transport for trainees. The possibility of creating some part time places as opposed to all fulltime places was raised as a possible method of addressing the problem of financing this option.

Appendix 1 – Workshop Proposal

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| Consultation & Development of Programme Evaluation for Referral Agents of CYTE | <p>Consultation with CYTE Coordinator in order to establish specific evaluation needs and required outcomes.</p> <p>Areas of Specific interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of Attending Referral Agents • Key areas of Focus Questioning • Specific requirements of coordinator/board of management • Future planning that will be influenced by the report |
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| Venue | CYTC centre or external location (recommended) |
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| ½ Day (AM) Evaluation Workshop with invited stakeholders | <p>Brief Overview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input from Referral Agent/Stakeholders • Current Challenges being experienced by service providers • Changing profile of service users? • Identified needs of service users? • Gaps in Service Provision • Responding to Challenges |
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| Evaluation Summary Report | <p>Summary feedback and recommendations from ½ day workshop.</p> <p>Approx 6 pages short report format.</p> |
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| Training Materials | Handouts, Folders, Pads, and Pens. |
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Appendix 2

List of Attendees:

- Aine Donnelly, (JLO)
- Trish Keogh, Barnardos
- Kathleen Prendergast, RAPID
- Anne Marie O'Donnell, TRIP
- Catherine Corbett, FAS
- Hilary Dilworth, STDC
- Shirley Fahey, CYTE
- Aisling Reade, TRYS
- Donal Kelly, TRYS
- John Kelly, TRYS
- Joanne Barry, Youthreach
- Lisa Kavanagh, VEC
- Fionuala McGeever, VEC
- Ann Ryan C&E, (Disconnected Youth)
- Ellen O'Donnell, CYTE
- Ruairi O'Caisleain, HSE
- Martin Hayes, WSTCYS
- Kaye Mullaney, VEC