



The Centre
for Effective
Services

Mayfield Integrated Community Development Project

Case Study

September 2023



Case Study – Mayfield Integrated CDP

This case study showcases the work of Mayfield Integrated Community Development Project (CDP) & its sub project Mayfield Community Adult Learning Project (CALP) providing community education and support to lone parents, and the wider community, in the Mayfield area of Cork City.

The research was funded by the Beachaire Fund, a charitable fund operating under the umbrella of Community Foundation Ireland (CFI). One of the Fund's objectives is to support education initiatives with a view to affording access to and the benefits of education to children.

In Ireland, households headed by a lone parent with low levels of completed education are amongst those at greatest risk of poverty, facing economic and social disadvantage that have potential lifelong adverse consequences for children. Community education programmes potentially offer 'second chance' return to education opportunities to lone parents and a progression for lone parents to improved mental health and wellbeing, further education, and employment. The Beachaire Fund appointed the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to conduct qualitative research, through case studies, to explore the impact on lone parents and their children from participating in community education programmes across Ireland.

The research was conducted during the spring of 2023. Twelve people contributed to this case study including management/coordinators (2), community education staff (2), and past community education participants, who are lone parents (8).

All participants received a one4all voucher as a token of appreciation for their contribution to the research. Participants shared the stories of their life journeys and the ways in which their participation in community education has transformed their lives. A vignette further illustrates the varied and distinctive stories of participants as they move through their lives with the support of community education.

The stories contain recurring themes of enjoyment of shared learning and support, educational progression, paid employment, more positive feelings around parenting and capacity to parent, enhanced mental health and wellbeing and a deeper sense of self, personal mastery, connection, and for some, motivation, and greater motivation capacity to be involved in their local community. This includes working in community development and many different forms of volunteering. The stories capture the courage and resilience of the women, many of whom have lived through difficult life situations, and trauma. These include early childhood experiences of growing up in poverty, experiencing addiction firsthand or through a family member, domestic violence, losing a business or home, and fear of becoming homeless. Caring and dedication to children, including those with additional needs, family members who are seriously ill, and aging parents, feature prominently in the lives of many of those who participated in the research.

1. The Story of Mayfield Integrated CDP

Mayfield Integrated CDP is a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG). The organisation is governed by a voluntary Board, some of whom have experienced their own journey through community education.

Mayfield CDP began in the late 1980s, as a pilot. At that time, it rented space in the local family centre and then in the 2000's it moved to a bungalow with office & training space and a crèche with 8 places. It started as a small group of local women striving to improve opportunities and encourage social inclusion within the community. The organisation has continued to develop and grow throughout the years in response to the ever-evolving needs of the community. Mayfield CDP owns the entire building, as the 200k mortgage was paid off with grant aid back in the 2000s. Mayfield was the first CDP in Ireland to get a mortgage. It also has a long history of being a chosen setting for pilot initiatives including the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and Citizens Information Service (CIS).

There was, at that time, and continues to be, a large population of early school leavers and lone parents in the community of Mayfield. Historically, Mayfield CDP had links with University College Cork (UCC) which provided a Diploma in Social and Women's Studies on an outreach basis to the community. This course attracted several very strong women who progressed on to work in the community, many in leadership roles.

The Board of Management decided to close down the crèche in 2021. The decision was made on the grounds of non-sustainability as it was no longer financially viable. This decision was not taken lightly as the crèche, even though it only had capacity for 8 children. It provided a service and a great development opportunity to children.

The crèche part of the building has been converted into a meeting/training room, for private rental and multipurpose use by the community.

Community education is provided through Mayfield Community Adult Learning Project (CALP) and is not specifically targeted at lone parents. There is a timetable of programmes and courses including first aid, computers, personal development, horticulture, arts and crafts and a range of psychoeducation programmes, on health and mental health themes such as mindfulness, depression, and grief and loss.

It is not possible to discern the specific status of community education participants, e.g., whether they are parenting alone, as these details are not sought. The current profile of participants is an older aged cohort, perhaps reflective of the population in the community. Mayfield CDP is keen to widen participation out to a broader representation including attracting more lone parents to benefit from the services and supports on offer.

Services and supports

Mayfield Integrated CDP believes that community education is a catalyst for positive change and transformation in the lives of women. The organisation offers a range of programmes and supports to women, within a community setting, which is a converted bungalow and community garden in Mayfield. In 2022 over 40 courses were delivered to over 400 participants. These courses included personal development, Information Technology, from beginners level to QQI & ECDL, mindfulness, health & nutrition, and First Aid (Basic to First Aid Response).

Mayfield Integrated CDP (Mayfield CDP) publishes and disseminates a community newsletter 'Mayfield Matters' bimonthly featuring news and events that are happening in the area, including opportunities for people to participate in courses and workshops. In the past Mayfield CDP was an QQI accredited centre and in recent years it has changed to work in collaboration with and come under Cork ETB for accreditation of courses. This arrangement is working well as it frees Mayfield CDP from the heavy administrative workload of processing accreditation to focus more fully on the people and community education provision.

Mayfield CDP offers information and support to people from the local community. Capacity building is central to the work. Specific attention is invested in combating poverty, addressing isolation, supporting parenting alone families, young mothers, women from new communities and older people.

There is a strong ethos of lifelong learning and Mayfield Learning Neighbourhood, of which Mayfield CALP is an active member, hosts a Lifelong Learning Expo regularly. An initiative called the Mayfield Learning Neighbourhood University College brings a university college programme into the community with lecturers from Munster Technological University, University College Cork, as well as contributions from additional further education colleges. This brings topics such as social science, human rights, science, taxation, psychology, and genealogy to the community, delivered by university lecturers in an applied format.

Interagency collaboration is central to the work of Mayfield CDP including close working relationships with organisations locally, regionally and city-wide. Mayfield CDP is a member of the Cork Equal and Sustainable Communities Alliance (CESCA) which shares goals and coordinates grant proposals that benefit the entire community.

Sources of funding

Mayfield CDP owns the bungalow and garden on the Old Youghal Road in Mayfield. The organisation relies on a range of grants and funding sources to support the work in service to and support for the community of Mayfield and surrounding area.

Mayfield CALP is a member of the Mayfield Learning Neighbourhood. It is funded by Cork ETB from the Department of Education & Science and is part of the Mayfield Integrated Community Development Project Ltd.

Main funding sources are outlined below:

- Pobal – Community Services Programme. This five-year funding stream pays the wages of two full-time staff and two part-time staff. Mayfield CDP was also a recipient of the Building Enhancement Fund to upgrade the building in 2023.
- HSE Section 39 funds the part time Project Coordinator position and running costs of the CDP.
- Cork ETB funds the pay and non-pay costs of Mayfield CALP including the CALP Coordinators positions and all of non-accredited and some accredited courses. It also facilitates the Reach Fund which enabled the CDP to purchase laptops.
- Cork City Partnership funds part time tutor hours for accredited courses. It also facilitates small grants for community development.
- Cork City Council provides small grants annually. For example in 2022 successful grants included the community garden and the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) project which is a mental health and wellness programme for workers in the area.
- HSE Mental Health grants fund mental health courses and mental health awareness days.

2. Methodology

The Project Coordinator at Mayfield CDP prepared a flier and shared information about the research and its purpose with colleagues internally and across the range of organisations that Mayfield Integrated CDP is connected with in Cork City. This network includes Family Resource Centres and Community Employment Schemes locally. Together they identified community education participants, both past and present, who were parenting alone, and invited them to participate in the research through a series of focus groups and interviews. This was a distinctive feature of the methodology as there were some challenges in accessing lone parents to participate in the research.

The CES researcher visited Mayfield in March 2023 and met with management and a sample of *past* participants of community education. The methodology included a mix of focus groups and one-to-one interviews. The focus group was in person, semi-structured, and participatory, and approximately ninety minutes long. The research process was designed to encourage participants to share their journey through and experiences with, community education. This included an exploration of the benefits of community education, enablers and supports, and the difference that participation has had on their lives and on their children and families. The one-to-one interviews followed the same themes, inviting participants to share their stories of their community education journeys.

All research participants were briefed about the research and assured that their personal details would be held safe and confidential. All gave their consent to participate.

Mary Kelly, Joint CALP Coordinator (2000 to 2023) our colleague and friend - this case study is dedicated in memory of Mary, an advocate and true believer in the impact community education can have on people's lives.

3. Past Participants

People who had participated in community education in the past were invited to attend a focus group, at Mayfield Integrated CDP, on 14th March 2023. This section sets out the results of the thematic analysis of the stories shared by the women during the focus group. A selection of anonymised quotes portrays the voices of the women.

Profile of participants

Seven past participants of community education attended the focus group. Another, who could not attend the focus group, participated in a one-to-one interview in the week after the focus group.

All were women from the local community, and all were parenting alone, including one lone grandparent who was the guardian of her grandchild as her daughter was in recovery from addiction. The age range of participants was between twenty and sixty plus years. The community education courses completed by the participants included a range of self-development courses, exploring hobbies, health and creativity, including art, crafts and mindfulness, as well as accredited programmes in ECDL (QQI Level 3), childcare (QQI Level 5), special needs assisting, and social care.

Starting point and activation

Participants found out about Mayfield CDP and community education in several ways, including the noticeboard outside Mayfield CDP, through social media (e.g., Facebook) or through word of mouth within the community, usually a friend or neighbour. The good and trusted reputation, community location, and local awareness of Mayfield CDP and its history were important features that attracted people to community education.

Other factors included participants' own inner drive and motivation to engage and be part of something.

'I wanted to feel better about myself, to gain new skills, and I knew that I needed connection with adults.'

'I am an early school leaver and was in a sheltered housing situation as a teenager and part of this meant that you had to participate in community education – started on level 3, moved onto level 4, ECDL, peer support'.

There are also examples of Community Employment (CE) being an entry point and encourager for lone parents to engage in community education.

One participant described how her community education journey started on a Community Employment scheme over fourteen years ago. At that time there was an extra payment on top of the lone parent's allowance and this financial incentive attracted her to participate. The CE scheme paid for her to do a qualification in nutrition, achieve a certificate in community development in University College Cork and complete a Healthcare Assistant Course in the College of Commerce in Cork.

Enablers

The women shared a range of factors that enabled their participation and completion of community education. The dominant themes were their experience of encouragement, the safe and nurturing atmosphere, psychosocial and peer support, encouraging each other along. All noted that childcare was an important enabler and some shared experiences of free and accessible childcare that they had availed of in the past, as well as financial incentives and top up payments that they recall were once available through social welfare.

One woman drew attention to the atmosphere of acceptance and absence of any judgement, within community education and the feeling of psychological safety to develop and change.

'When change happened for me, it was always when someone accepted me as I was'.



The women shared how much they valued the support of tutors and the personal development that they experienced as part of community education. One woman shared how important the understanding and support of the tutor was to her, as a lone parent. It was like having 'one good adult' in her life to encourage and support her.

'Education is a different experience when you are a lone parent, you do not hang around, you need to get home to your child.'

The careful attention of the tutors was singled out and another woman shared how a tutor discreetly put her in touch with the St Vincent de Paul (SVP) for financial support at a time of particularly acute distress. She described how difficult life is as a lone parent and the cost of living and how helpful the SVP have been supporting her once she had been signposted there by her tutor. Others expressed appreciation for the access to low-cost counselling that they had benefitted from and in some cases their children had also benefitted from.

Impact on social inclusion and progression to further education and employment

Participants were asked to reflect on the difference that participating in community education has made to their and their children's lives.

All recounted positive differences including acquiring new skills (technical and interpersonal), restored confidence and wellbeing. The women shared experiences of loneliness and isolation parenting alone and how wonderful the feelings of belonging are, now that they are more connected to people within their community. One woman shared how she learned how to ask for support and to tend to her own needs.

'I learned how to ask for support, it was a massive struggle for me to stay to education and it was just a case of just asking and we will find a way to support you through – I have got to ask for the support – that was a positive experience for me.'

One woman shared how much she appreciated having a solid CV and a set of skills to increase her chance of employment and another shared how community education had helped her to get paid employment.

'Community education changed my life completely and helped me to get work and to earn enough to pay my mortgage.'

'I have a solid CV now with real skills and experience in it.'



'It has inspired and sparked a love of education that I did not know was in me.'

'I was transformed by my community education experience'.

All seven participants recounted progression and improvement in their lives as a result of their participation in community education. This includes feeling more socially connected and self-confident, appreciating education, achieving qualifications, progressing to further and higher education, volunteering and finding paid employment in work they enjoy. Three are currently working in childcare, two are working in community development and social care, and one is currently completing her Honours degree in Social Work through a scholarship.

All described a love of education and desire to continue their learning throughout life. One woman who is a lone grandparent described how much her community education experience supported her to feel connected to others, open to new learning experiences and the joy of learning:

'Community education was a new learning experience for me – I would love someday to do a course in VCC – just learning something – just to enjoy it all'.

Ripple effect

Participants were invited to share the difference they believe their participation in community education has made to the lives of their children. They described how they now feel that they can trust education and believe that it is good and are encouraging their children to participate and complete their education and do their best in life. They discussed how they are feeling better about themselves, and this has a positive impact on their children.

'It is great for my children to see that I love my job, to see that work is enjoyable and not hardship'.

'It is not just setting a positive example; my teenager has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and it is a huge barrier for education and her watching me – she can see me getting up every day and going back – at the start of the year there was huge school refusal, and this is changing – she sees I can do it'.

The women shared how they notice themselves having higher hopes for their children and their education. Some reported feeling more secure and better off financially, bringing a sense of independence which ripples through the family.

One woman described how she noticed how her own personal development, communication skills and enhanced self-esteem, and self-confidence was supporting her parenting.

'Self-esteem, self-worth and communication – I am using these skills more in my parenting, I am much more self-aware'.

The women described their growing awareness about experiences and issues in society and understanding of social justice. This has helped them to parent more purposefully whilst also looking after themselves. They discussed how they instil values into their children and appreciation of education and good employment, breaking generational cycles of trauma and poor education. One woman described how the diversity of her connections, through community education has instilled respect and appreciation of diversity in her children.

Participant feedback on the research process

Participants were invited to give their feedback on their experience contributing to the research. Overall, it was considered a positive experience. Participants welcomed the opportunity to participate and were eager in their expectations of how their feedback will be used to inform policy. Some offered suggestions around better financing for community education, an increase in the allowance for CE participants and more onsite childcare and after school care to support lone parents to engage in community education.

One woman was strong in her gratitude for how community education and positive role models had influenced her and impacted her life and was delighted to participate in the research as a gesture of appreciation and encouragement to other lone parents.

'The impact that community education has had on my life, and I am happy to be involved and instrumental in more lone parents getting community education and to have the steppingstone, with encouragement to show the pathways – my CE supervisor was that person for me'.

4. Staff Perspective

The CES researcher facilitated a consultation with community education staff over zoom on 5th April 2023.

The staff have been involved in community education or related community development for over twenty years and are highly committed designers, deliverers, and advocates of community education.



The discussion centred around understanding of community education; the approach, ethos, and values; the benefits and barriers that participants encounter; and their vision for the future of community education. This section sets out the views of Community Education Coordinators.

Terminology and unique features of community education

The staff highlighted the distinctive features of community education including its accessibility and flexibility to be participant-led and offering a space for participants to become comfortable and feel safe and supported as they learn. Community education is underpinned by community development principles including being inclusive, open and person centred.

One staff member described the incremental nature of community education pointing out that the small steps can lead to other things recounting examples of participants progression from non-accredited courses through accredited programmes and on to degree and master's degree courses in university. Community education is purposeful in preparing people for the next step which is unique to each individual.

'It is all about the first step and participating in first step courses to restore confidence and bring participants back to a community and classroom setting.'

'It is about courage coming up the entrance to do stuff. We know this sort of education is as valid as any other sort of education on the continuum of education.'

The incremental journey of community education is an important feature as it supports participants to feel part of the learning process. In many cases it involves overlaying previous poor experiences of school with more positive and supportive ones and this can have a particular resonance for lone parents.

'We work to make sure that participants understand that community education is not school, they have choice and if they feel it is not for them, we will find something for them. For some people it is a big step.'

'It is the process of community education and not just the result. Ultimately, we are based in the community, and we are trying to meet the needs of people in a non-threatening environment, and we open the doors in lots of different ways.'



Benefits to lone parents

The staff believe, based on their experience, that the main benefit to lone parents participating in community education is that it is life changing and transformative. The shared experience and coming together through community education affects each person individually with ripples of positivity through the community. The fact that community education is community based and easily accessible helps to draw lone parents in. It is a gentle entry into the world of learning and personal development.

The staff shared how they see community education as a powerful vehicle for personal growth, progression, and transformation. The movement through community education varies and can be a slow and meandering process facilitating incremental personal development, growth, and progression to further training, education, and paid employment. Participants become role models and champions of education within their communities.

Challenges

Childcare was noted as a significant challenge and the closure of the crèche was with regret. Childcare is considered one of the big draws to encourage lone parents to engage with and participate in community education. It has the added value of giving access to early start, developmental opportunities to children through the early years programme, and an excellent intervention to break the cycle of educational disadvantage.

5. Vignette

The following vignette gives insight into the transformational power of community education and how it impacts the lives of participants. A return to education can be challenging, particularly for those who have experienced difficulties during primary and/or secondary education. The vignette highlights the importance of encouragement and support that is within the ethos of community education, the quality of facilitators, the wraparound support offered and the incremental impact of being engaged in community education. The vital enabler of childcare and after school care is noted.



Vignette 1: 'Martha' (Pseudonym)

This vignette showcases how activation, through a Community Employment Scheme (CE) coupled with community education and encouragement can support a younger mother to overcome barriers and return to education. It shows how the power of a trusted community setting, encouraging staff, coupled with a sprinkling of self-motivation, can activate personal agency and progression. Martha's story highlights the challenge of returning to education and how onsite accessible childcare can support an easier and earlier return for lone parents.

Starting point

Martha grew up in Mayfield. Martha experienced an unplanned pregnancy at age 17. Martha had to stop going to school and stayed home to care for her daughter full time for the first few years. Martha's entry point into community education was through a Community Employment Scheme in a local Community Childcare setting.

Martha recalled that it was the reputation of the centre and the atmosphere of encouragement that attracted her to take up the place on the community employment scheme and begin her community education journey. Martha said she felt encouraged by friends and the coordinator was approachable and known and trusted in the community.

The staff encouraged Martha to participate in community education. Martha considers herself to be a practical hands-on person and the academic aspects of school did not suit her. Martha held a fear of education and a belief that it was not for her.

'Looking back, I did not think I would ever work or have a job, I had no confidence, somewhere, deep down I knew I would like a qualification, but I never thought it would happen, it was just not something that I had been brought up to know about or believe was possible.'

'I knew that I wanted to do something with my life'.

'I was carried on a wave of encouragement, I took a chance and hoped for the best'.

'At that point I felt that I had nothing going for me, I loved my child and wanted to do my best by her, I grew up thinking that the dole was special and important to have and hold on to and I never really thought about education, or that education was important'.

Martha described how she did twenty hours a week on a CE scheme working in a crèche and did a module of childcare QQI Level 5 one night a week. Studying at night suited Martha as there was no childcare and she relied on family for childcare support until her son went into the early years' childcare scheme.

Martha singles out the encouragement she received from community education tutors as the main support for her. She also valued the flexibility around assignments and the information and guidance that she received from tutors and staff. There was also some **flexibility** around caring for her child in that she could bring her child to the crèche where she worked for a little while after she had collected her from school.

'It was the one-to-one encouragement from tutors and people who know what life is like, people I trust'.

'I became homeless for a while and the information, advice and support was valuable'.

Difference made in her life:

Martha reflected on the difference that her participation in community education has made to her life and that of her child. She believes that it gave her a taste for education as a positive experience and inspired her to continue.

'I got a taste for education, I got a taste for work, and I enjoyed it, I would never have afforded to study, to go to college to get an education'.

'Community education showed me how important education is.'

Martha reflected that her own experience of people being kind, caring and supportive of her brought out her own propensity for kindness and opened opportunities for volunteering and paid employment in social care. Martha recalled her community education journey over four years from being at home caring for her child to gaining qualifications and working in her community.

'I saw a lot of kind and helpful people, it showed me how to be kind and made me want to be kind to others and to be helpful, I work now with people who are affected by addiction, I learnt how to be kind – if you do not know it you cannot show it'.

'I could guide people who are struggling, I now work in an area where I support and guide people who are struggling with addiction'.

Ripple effect

Martha looked back on her life and also forward to the ripple effect of her participation in community education on herself and her child. She noticed how it shifted her mindset and the lens through which she views the world. Martha shared her new understanding of and appreciation for education and realisation of her own potential and that of her child.

'It changed my view of education, and I am now a role model for my child.'

'I was very young when I had my child, at the beginning my main priority was caring for my child and keeping him safe, now I am more mature and I know it is important to show him the way'.

'For me I want my child to have the best education that they can have to move their life forward, if someone had guided me when I was young I could have gone on to college'.

Stage of the journey

Martha is now working as a Special Needs Assistant in a local school and loves her work and feels a sense of satisfaction in what she is and does. She also volunteers in a service that supports people recovering from addiction. She feels a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with how her life is unfolding. She feels she is contributing, and her life has meaning and purpose.

'I am now financially independent and no longer reliant on social welfare; I am working in a job that I love, and I am thinking of going back to college'.

6. Conclusion

The overall message arising from this case study is the transformative power of community education and the impact that it has on the lives of those who engage in and advance on the journey.

The effects of participation in community education can be seen across a range of policy domains including social inclusion, health and wellbeing, mental health, education, the labour market activation, housing, addiction and family support.

The power of a warm welcome, wraparound supports including counselling, tutor qualities and dedication, and the community development ethos, is evident. The culture and practice of psychosocial support is a recurring theme with encouragement being one of the main drivers of engagement, participation, and completion of community education. Childcare is a significant enabler and the closure of the crèche at Mayfield CDP is noted as a significant loss.

The case study highlights the incremental nature of community education as a first and preparatory step in the continuum of lifelong learning and an integral part of a greater system of education. The importance of the community setting is illuminated, in particular the reputation of Mayfield CDP and the way it works in collaboration with other community organisations in Cork City responding to the needs of lone parents and others who are experiencing challenging life situations. Attention is drawn to the power of lifelong learning and learning neighbourhoods initiatives to inspire a return to community education.



Produced by Centre for Effective Services, 2023.

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