

SICAP 2018-2022

Comhar na nOileán CTR Case Study 2018

The Process of Setting up Men’s Sheds on Bere Island and Oileán Chléire.



Background Case Study

At the launch of SICAP in 2015, meetings were established on the offshore Island in West Cork to launch the programme, and to engage with the various voluntary and nonregistered community groups that are often difficult to communicate with, or were unknown to us.

After the launch of the programme, many small specific needs groups with little or no resources identified themselves at the meeting, and sometimes in a private capacity. Two such groups were identified on Bere Island and Oileán Chléire. Over 2015, some small progress was made with two identified potential group leaders who were both men in the 60 -65 age category.

Both were near retirement from work and did not have any land on the island, which many older people tend to farm for the sake of having “something to get up for each morning rather than any monetary value”. Both felt that many elderly men, especially single and living alone, faced isolation, loneliness and depression as they aged, and were looking for interventions to prevent this.

The concept of Men’s Sheds was mentioned, and it was agreed that some research was needed from the national stage, and most of 2015 was spent doing research on this.

In 2016, both potential leaders availed of training provided by Comhar na nOileán under SICAP for Good Governance for Community Groups. This training involved modules such as leading the organisation, transparency and accountability, the importance of knowing one’s role and control, working effectively and allowing integrity and fairness to all.

Many modes of communication were used to encourage, inform and to initiate contact with the identified potential leaders by the development workers during that time. One major obstacle at the time seemed to be the lack of a specific building for rent. Both men felt that it was essential that the group could have a permanent residence to operate from and somewhere that “you could come and go from without having to pack everything away”.

In the beginning progress was slow on most fronts. However, it had been recognised from the outset that patience would be needed, and that the project would progress on a step-by-step basis. The potential group leaders also attended a workshop in 2016 on the New Regulations for the Charity sector, work planning and setting up and developing Working Groups.

In 2017, The Men’s Sheds Group on Oileán Chléire demonstrated their ability to develop at a faster pace than the Bere Island group. They had a clearer vision of the end product, and were working hard to find a suitable premise. Towards the end of the previous SICAP Programme they envisaged setting up a Social Enterprise once they had carried out a skills analysis.

The ad hoc group investigated various different avenues for potential funding. It was envisaged that any potential funding would be put towards training, and a SYOB Course was also mentioned at that time. Towards the end of 2017 they were encouraged, by a female who helped them with paperwork, who was employed by a CE Scheme looking after the elderly. Finding a building had not happened towards the end of 2017 but they were still hopeful.

The group on Bere Island had not progressed towards the end of 2017 and there remained only two potential group members. However, they were confident if they could secure a building that others in the community would get involved. They are still interested in moving forward but are currently at a standstill.

Moving Forward

Oileán Chléire is an off-shore island situated 9 miles off the coast of West Cork with an all year population of 125 people. Its geographical locality marks it out as a place that can be both isolated and challenging for its residents. For example, it can often be difficult for residents to take part in mainland activities, or opportunities which can, in turn, lead to some inhabitants feeling isolated. There are a number of client groups that reside on Oileán Chléire that experience disadvantage with its particular access, and economic issues. The male population are a particular cause for concern particularly in such a rural and isolated area. Local men in particular can be susceptible to mental health problems as quite often they are reluctant to talk about what is going on in their lives. This project is designed to alleviate some of these issues whilst at the same time encouraging Island Men to work shoulder to shoulder and provide support and advice for one another along the way.

Bere Island is situated in Bantry Bay, 1 mile from Castletownbere, the main fishing port of the South West. It is roughly 10 km x 3 km in dimension, with an area of 17.68 km² with a winter population of approximately 150 persons.

It is described as being marginally below average in the Pobal deprivation index (2016) with a male unemployment rate of 9.38 %. Due to its proximity to the mainland town of Castletownbere, many women come and go from the Island to take up work there. Despite this, unemployment still remains high and reached 11% in 2016.

Isolation and mental health issues are areas of concern for the local development company. It was acknowledged that men living on the island were a particular risk group due to high levels of male unemployment and also due to the lack of social investment in the area. Empowering local men by using a bottom up approach through the setting up of structures that they can work with, is a first step in bringing them into a wider social circle.

Target group(s)

- Disadvantaged men on the island of Oileán Chléire and Bere Island,
- Non-native residents,
- Isolated men,
- Unemployed men,
- Elderly men,
- Recently retired.

Engagement Strategies with SICAP Target Groups/Communities

When we first met with the Oileán Chléire Men's Sheds group in early 2018, they suggested that they would be eager to be up and running by September 2018. Comhar na nOileán took that on board and worked with the group and other stakeholders to ensure that this aim was met.

In order to engage with the specific target group it was decided that a variety of strategies would have to be used. These strategies included group meetings via face to face, email, text and phone calls every couple of weeks or more frequently if required. By implementing these strategies we were able to provide support, encouragement and advice to both potential service providers and users alike. Throughout this initial engagement process our main aim was always to allow the group to take the initiative, and to express what their specific needs were, and what they hoped could be achieved.

The group is set up as an official organised group and is registered with the National Organisation of Men's Sheds as of late August when they had their first official meeting.

The group call themselves 'Bothán Chléire' and they have identified a premise and have worked with Comhar na nOileán to secure the premises as their base.

Bothán Chléire, have applied for the Community Enhancement Grant for windows to make the premises secure, and they have been successful in their application.

Bothán Chléire, are at present drawing up a plan of works to be completed as a part of their ongoing plan of development. They have also drawn up a number of engagement strategies about how best to go about targeting men within the community so that they will have the opportunity of joining or taking part in some of the activities the Men's Shed has to offer. Some of these strategies are based around the skills and experience the men possess and is an effective way of drawing targeted men in without saying 'You need this'.

Benefits to participants

There are many benefits associated with Men's Sheds. One of the main benefits is that by being active in your community, and engaging with others on a regular basis the effects of social exclusion can be reduced. Many participants of Men's Sheds have also stated that their general health and wellbeing have improved as a result of the shoulder to shoulder experiences that the shed provides. The ability to self-determine and take control of one's life and outcomes over a longer period of time as well as having a sense of self and achievement and self-confidence will go beyond the activities and the walls of the shed. In such a rural and isolated small community such as Oileán Chléire, a development such as this adds life and ripples in to all aspects of Island life, and in turn generates activities that benefit the community as a whole.

Critical success factors

One of our major successes to date has been the commitment of the group to achieve their goals. Also, the willingness of the group to participate in the SICAP Programme has enabled Bothán Chléire to navigate through the challenges faced by its participants by offering interventions and supports through the engagement of a community development bottom up approach

Comhar na nOileán has developed a working relationship of honest transparency with all stake holders. This process has offered both encouragement and direct support. We have also been successful in connecting with people, and developing the groups' capacity to deliver on their own goals.

Having a worker situated in the local area has made a difference to the level of work we have achieved. The frequency of contact with the clients on a formal, informal and off the cuff meetings was significant to the development of the project, and in being responsive to the needs of Bothán Chléire.

Challenges/barriers

Access to amenities and resources are an ongoing barrier to the group. Comhar na nOileán, along with Bothán Chléire will have to look at how we can address this barrier, and due to the area's geographical location will do so in as creative and innovative a way as is possible.

Issues with communication and misunderstanding of priority, to unravel perceptions of stakeholder actions or inactions, and address those in a transparent and supportive way.

Due to island circumstances stakeholders' priorities have not always aligned with the priorities of the shed. It is critically important that Comhar na nOileán must continue working with both the stakeholders and Men's Shed in reaffirming their commitment to the shed.

Island rhythms dictate that it is not always possible to do what needs to be done within the allotted timeframe. It can often be quite challenging to bring folk together at certain times of the year, in particular the summer tourist season.

Access to funds has always been, and will likely remain a challenge. Due to geographical factors, supports and activities are more expensive to hold on islands. For example, the provision of training on the islands can often prove to be expensive. In many cases trainers will have to stay overnight and will also have other additional costs such as accommodation and travelling expenses. Also, many trainers do not want to spend nights away from their families by having to go to the Islands. Comhar na nOileán are aware of this and we will continue to work together with Bothán Chléire to ensure that there are adequate resources available.

Collaboration

In March 2018 Comhar na nOileán made further contact with a representative of the Men's Shed on Oileán Chléire, to kick-start a process of going forward again on the project , and:

- To develop a working relationship with Bothán Chléire,
- To gain a better understanding of where the group was at, and what their priorities were,
- To identify the key stakeholders,
- To identify what kind of support the group wanted from the development officer and SICAP,
- To work with the local development group to gain support for the Men's Shed,
- To work on the Men's Shed behalf, in ironing out any difficulties they may have experienced.

This was achieved through numerous meetings and interventions both with the shed and Comharchumann Chléire Teo, the Local Development Cooperative on the Island who are one of the major stakeholders in support of community development on Oileán Chléire

A premise was identified by Bothán Chléire and they were at a loss as to know where to go next as there was a delay with the Local Development Cooperative in addressing the request to lease.

A number of interventions were held with representatives of the Local Development Cooperative, CCTeo, Bothán Chléire and Comhar na nOileán, to discuss the property and its possible lease. It was agreed that CCTeo would lease the building. However, issues were raised around health and safety and a requirement was placed on the men's group by CCTeo to undertake health and safety training as a priority.

Interventions were held around the training needs of the group and the development of the Men's Sheds as an organised group. Bothán Chléire was in discussions with the National Organisation regarding affiliation and support was given around this time through SICAP. Also around this time, Comhar na nOileán undertook research to find out more about both the National Organisation and Men's Sheds in general. As part of this research, Comhar na nOileán became aware of the National Networking event. This information was passed on to Bothán Chléire and it was agreed that we would support one or two members to attend this event. This could be an invaluable support and also an opportunity for the group to get access to the wider network of sheds, and to develop some links going forward. This was taken on enthusiastically by the group.

During early May, development began to slow down and Bothán Chléire were getting a bit worried about the shed. Their concerns were centred on the slowness of the work being done in regards to the lease, and a perceived lack of movement with their desired outcomes. The group felt that if they had a lease from CCTeo then it would be a ratification of the Men's Shed, and would be seen as a supportive gesture. In addition, Bothán Chléire further suggested that they felt that there was resistance to the Sheds existence or at the very least a lack of interest. In such a small community, support for initiatives, such as this, is essential to their success and sustainability.

It was the opinion of Comhar na nOileán that there had been a bit of a misunderstanding about how long the process would take. As a result, meetings were conducted via phone and face to face with the stakeholders, who assured Comhar na nOileán that CCTeo were indeed supportive. However, as it was the beginning of the summer tourist season, the enormity of the CCTeo's workload at the time meant that the Men's Shed was bottom of their list of priorities.

To put this in context, island life has a particular rhythm from May to the middle of September, especially for folk who may be involved in the tourist trade. This time has a life of its own, and it is a challenge to get anything done that has not got a summer session theme. Therefore, the Men's Shed was low on the CCTeo's priorities. In support of the Men's Shed and in order to move the Shed up the priority list, further interventions were held between Bothán Chléire, CCTeo and the development officer of Comhar na nOileán to discuss how best to move forward. Comhar na nOileán, CCTeo and Bothán Chléire held a meeting at the shed so as to assess the work that needed to be done in regards to getting the shed up and running.

However despite some of the initial problems Bothán Chléire, with the help of SICAP have managed to:

- Obtain a commitment from CCTeo to lease the property and support the development of the Men's Shed.
- Bothán Chléire are now affiliated to the National Organisation.
- Bothán Chléire opened up a bank account with the local Credit Union, this in its self is a major piece of work for the group.
- Bothán Chléire are now established as an organised group and had their first meeting in early September.
- One member of the shed attended the International Networking Event of Men's Sheds Ireland in the Rochestown Park Hotel in early September.
- At Comhar na nOileán's midyear review an opportunity arose with the ETB to acquire some solar panel and wood working equipment. We notified Bothán Chléire of this development and they felt that this could be a major training, employment and development opportunity for the group and the island as a whole. With employment opportunities on off-shore islands

very few and far between this could be the impetus for further skill acquisition, and employment openings for the group's membership and beyond.

- Bothán Chléire made an application for funding, under the Men's Sheds Fund - Community Enhancement Programme for capital expenditure on the premise. They have been successful in this application.
- Comhar na nOileán held meetings with the ETB in regards to training and supports that may be put in place to support the ongoing capacity building of the group. We have also arranged for Safe Pass training for this group and will also provide the opportunity for further employment opportunities on the island. In addition, there may be boat building and other activities supported through the ETB in the future.
- Development of a work plan is being drawn up at the moment which will incorporate strategic ways to encourage and support targeted men within the community.

Indeed the setting up of the credit union account provides us with an example of the commitment of the Men's Sheds members, and some of the barriers that islanders face on a daily basis. In order to set up the account four men set out on a 50-minute ferry ride to land in Baltimore. After a 20-minute car journey to Skibbereen, all four men met up outside the credit union at 10.30 armed with passports and proof of address. It took 2 hours to open an account after two of the men realised that they did not have all of the information they required for the process. As a result they had to go to the local social welfare office in order to obtain proof of their PPS numbers and then travel back to the credit union, where the account was finally processed. On return the men travelled back to Baltimore for a return ferry at 2 o'clock which saw them land safely at the harbour for 3pm. In total the men had to spend six hours of their day just to open a credit union account.

There is still more work to do in supporting Bothán Chléire. But their commitment to themselves and their community will stand them in good stead for the road ahead. Also we expect that the Cape Clear Group can be used as a case study of an example of good practice in order to encourage the group on Bere Island in their efforts to move forward.

