KICKBOXING, KINDNESS & GOING THE EXTRA MILE
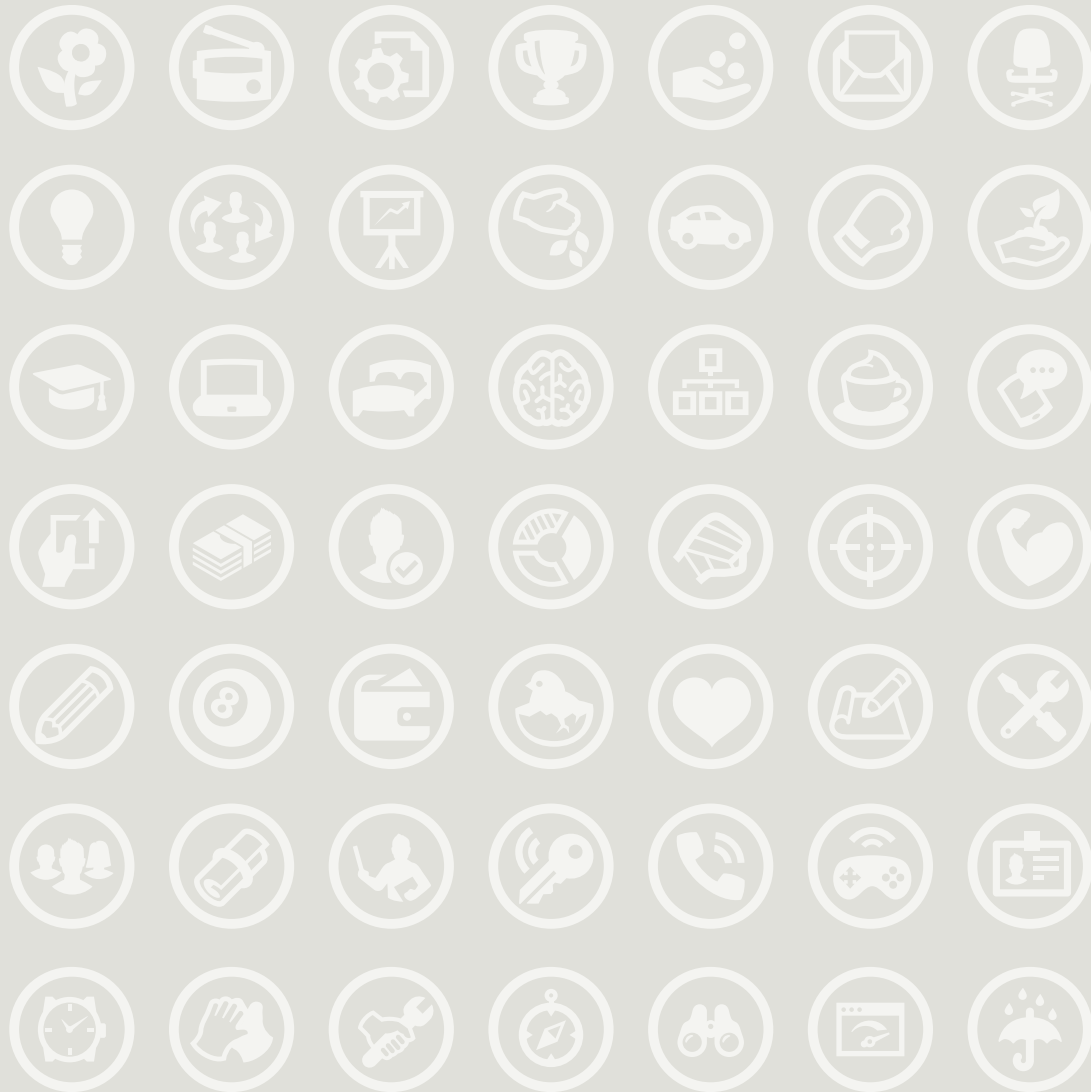
GOOD PRACTICE FOR WORKING WITH NEETS UNDER SICAP

**SUMMARY REPORT
OCTOBER 2017**

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

This research aimed to uncover current good practice in Ireland in relation to the engagement of and service delivery to young people aged 15-24, who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The need for this research was identified by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal. Service providers wanted more information on what interventions and approaches were most effective in creating positive change for young people, however, there is not a large amount of research available on this topic.

Eurofound[1] has highlighted a lack of research into good practice in relation to working with NEETs and has called for more research, particularly of a qualitative nature, to deepen an understanding of what works in practice. This study, co-funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the European Social Fund (ESF) under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL 2014-2020), aims to provide both Irish and EU audiences with well evidenced and synthesised data on 'what works'.

Most SICAP programme implementers are implementing these good practice recommendations in their work. The process of exploring and collating good practice enables service providers to identify the areas where they can improve their approach based on learning from peer organisations. The findings can also help to confirm that approaches used by service providers are indeed in line with good practice, as it is currently understood in Ireland.

How good practice was identified

In order to develop a list of good practice examples, the independent research team spoke to 95 stakeholders, including young people who have participated in SICAP, programme implementers' staff and their partner organisations. They were all asked questions to identify what works best when supporting young people to move into education or employment.

Interviews lasted around 45 mins and the views of those interviewed were documented. The findings from these interviews were combined with additional information gathered during six on-site visits to programme implementers where the research team spoke to staff and managers. The researchers then analysed the findings in a systematic way, identifying 19 good practice recommendations, which participants collectively agreed on and saw as important.

[1] Eurofound. (2016). Exploring the diversity of NEETs. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Introduction to youth unemployment and the SICAP programme

Youth unemployment is a significant issue within the EU. During the recent global economic recession, Ireland, with a drop in youth employment participation of 11%, was amongst the countries with the highest rise in NEET rates alongside Greece and Spain[2]. While Ireland's NEET rate has declined at a faster rate than in other EU countries, it was still high in 2015[3]. The OECD noted in 2016[4] that Ireland has still not recovered from the great recession and this is continuing to have a particular impact on young people.

A number of European Union funds tackle youth unemployment, notably including the European Social Fund. In Ireland, the European Social Fund is matched by the Irish Government and provides €1.15bn in investment to more than 20 national measures set out in the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (ESF PEIL 2014-2020). One of the four priorities in ESF PEIL (2014-2020) is dedicated to measures which support young people, who are not in employment, education or training[5]. This priority draws also on a dedicated EU funding stream - the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). SICAP is one of these measures and has received an allocation under the Youth Employment Initiative, which is combined with ESF and national match funding.

All NEETs supported by SICAP are between the ages of 15 and 24 years, with males accounting for almost six out of ten participants. The geographic spread of NEETs supported under SICAP is in line with the distribution of the general population of 15 – 24 year olds in Ireland. Four in five NEETs are educated to a Leaving Cert standard or lower when they register with SICAP. A small proportion of SICAP NEETs report being from a minority group (8%), being a lone parent (6%), being disabled (7%) or being homeless or at risk of homelessness (4%).

This research found that SICAP services are appreciated and useful for the young people they target. Four in five young people interviewed, reported that their progress into education or employment was due, in some part, to supports received under SICAP. In the small number of cases where young people did not see these interventions as reasons for their progression, they still valued the skills they had developed as a result of their engagement. Just over two thirds of service users interviewed felt that the staff member who worked with them had gone 'above and beyond' in their efforts to help them. Three quarters of young people stated that they felt staff cared about their future plans.

[2] Carcillo, S. e. (2015). NEET Youth in the Aftermath of the Crisis: Challenges and Policies. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 164. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5js6363503f6-en

[3] Farrell, C. (2016, September 1). Youth Unemployment. Retrieved from PublicPolicy.ie: http://www.publicpolicy.ie/youth-unemployment/

[4] OECD. (2016). Society at a Glance 2016: OECD Social Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/social/society-at-a-glance-19991290.htm

[5] In line with a detailed national definition of NEET

Good practice:
working with NEETs

OVERVIEW

The research identified **19 good practice recommendations**. These are described under four categories:

1. **Engaging young people**

2. **Working with young people**

3. **Partnership working**

4. **Organisational development**

Spotlights or small examples of good practice have also been included throughout the report to illustrate innovations occurring in the SICAP programme.

Engaging young people

GOOD PRACTICE 1:

Get in the dole queue

To successfully engage young people, service providers go to places where young people gather or spend time. This can involve calling to their homes or youth clubs, playing football, going to the post office on welfare payment days, or anywhere else where NEET young people might spend time. Maintaining positive relationships with the community and actively engaging families in the service also helps to get the word out to young people. Directly asking existing clients and community members to encourage young NEETs they know to come in is also effective.

Spreading the word through existing relationships increases engagement, as does directly meeting young people where they are hanging out. Young people confirmed this point. Nine participants of 42, had heard of the support service through word of mouth, including from their family members. Approximately the same number were referred through another service and around 20 were referred from the DSP. If you want people to know about the service, good practice says nothing is better than going out into the community and forming relationships.

Spotlight: Getting out in the community gets young people in

The team in Wexford Local Development were emphatic about the importance of understanding the local community, being part of it and being out in the community, as a means to engaging young people, especially those with the most needs. They felt that only by going into community spaces and going to places where young people meet, were they able to locate hard to reach young people and tell them about the supports available. 'Our community development team plays football in local greens. They go to the local markets, to post offices on 'dole day', to online local Facebook groups, and to local ETB and LTI programmes to try find out who's having trouble and who needs a bit of extra help'. This approach meant that young people not associated with youth groups or other support services also had a chance to engage with the SICAP programme and get its benefits.

GOOD PRACTICE 2:

Social media is better at keeping people on board rather than getting them on board

Social media, such as WhatsApp, is useful for keeping young people in touch and supporting each other after they have attended a group together. However, social media was generally regarded as not very useful as a tool to make young people aware of the programme or to get them in the door in the first place. Posters and adverts in local papers were also considered poor, as tools for increasing local people's knowledge about the supports offered. When asked, no young people said that they had heard about the service through either posters or social media.
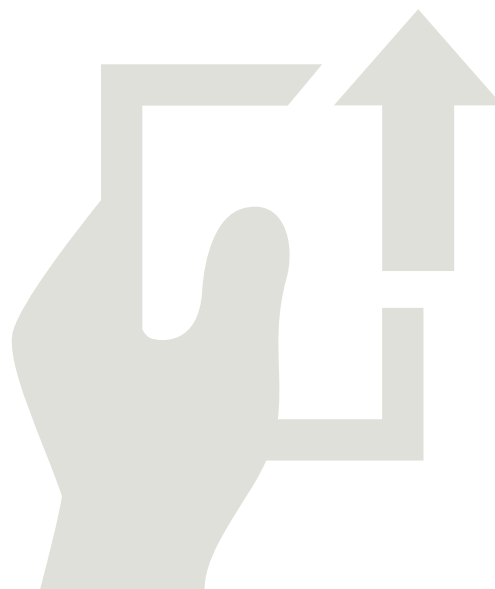
GOOD PRACTICE 3:

Start with kickboxing and co-create with young people

To engage the hardest to reach young people, it is important that their contact with the programme is as attractive and accessible as possible. This takes creative and out-of-the-box thinking. Providing programmes that are interesting to young people is key. It is also important to be aware that due to different experiences, young people who are not in education or employment may not be clear on what they want to do. They may also not wish to make a commitment to a longer programme.

The best way to determine what interests young people and whether a service provider should offer computer game groups or climbing groups is to ask young people themselves, through either group or one-to-one engagement. Good practice in creating accessible entry points for the hardest to reach people includes:

> **Understanding the interests of the young people targeted by the service.**

> **Providing short or taster courses based on young people's interests. These can be provided in partnership with other youth and community organisations. Courses that have worked for providers include kickboxing, beauty and health, music, skateboarding, video gaming and mindfulness.**

> **Ensuring that short taster courses provide meaningful opportunities and clear pathways into other SICAP supports.**

Spotlight: Boxing as a gateway to employment

In West Cork, offering training in boxing technique was effective in engaging hard to access young people. Staff described how they do this: "I go out walking and stick up posters for 'boxing classes' or directly approach young people who look over 18. I bring them into the local boxing clubs. The boxing clubs agreed to provide me the space to do this. We told them we'd do more fitness, technique and we can look at some job stuff.' This partnership approach was effective in creating an accessible space where the staff member could introduce the SICAP supports in a manner that was engaging and did not intimidate young people. The staff member explained that it is not just about providing an interest based course, it is about using this opportunity to open a discussion about their future plans: 'I spoke to the young people in a different way from just a boxing coach. I offered four training sessions and I brought in a career element at the end of the one-to-one techniques, for the cool down. We'd have a bit of a chat about jobs and education after the first lesson, and then I'd bring in information on courses and career stuff in the next few sessions'. The staff member explained that incremental introduction of information works well with young people who are particularly disengaged "If you start hitting them with that employment stuff in the first instance, they feel like you're from the government and don't want to talk to you". Once young people were interested in some additional support the worker would meet them in a café or neutral space, before bringing them into the more formal space of the centre.

GOOD PRACTICE 4:

Bring young people to you or go to them

Most young people using SICAP cannot afford a car or the costs of running one. A lack of suitable public transport, a particular issue in rural areas, can stop young people from engaging with SICAP supports. Good practice is to firstly identify barriers, that can prevent young people from engaging or progressing, such as transport and childcare, and then to find a personalised solution to the identified issue. Examples of creative approaches to these challenges include:

> **Changing the start times of programmes to allow for people to access public transport.**

> **Asking other training or education providers to change course times to facilitate public transport, particularly from rural areas.**

> **Bringing services to the location of clients by creating satellite clinics or utilising available spaces in the community, such as cafes.**

> **Having a fund for public transport and/or child care costs and a clear and simple application process and then ensuring young people know about this.**

Spotlight: Working with third level providers to provide satellite education and change start times

South Kerry Development, an organisation serving a largely rural and semi-rural area, managed the transport challenge through a number of means. One of these was through focused negotiation with education providers. This negotiation resulted in the local university (University College Cork) agreeing to deliver a community development certificate programme in a satellite venue, accessible by young people living in rural areas. This meant students did not have to travel two hours to attend a course where the university is located. This innovation made a positive difference to the number of young people progressing in education. South Kerry Development is currently looking at other ways to make education more accessible for their clients in rural communities. This includes working with educational providers to develop programmes that start later in the day or by delivering more outreach courses.

Working with young people

GOOD PRACTICE 5:

Coaching is a good approach for young people with low motivation

Everyone agrees that the needs of NEET young people vary widely and that different people will require different supports. One simple way to describe the variety of needs is to use an adapted version of the high/low motivation and skill matrix. This shows that young people will require different supports based on, amongst other factors, their skill and motivation levels. These interventions also require different levels of resourcing.
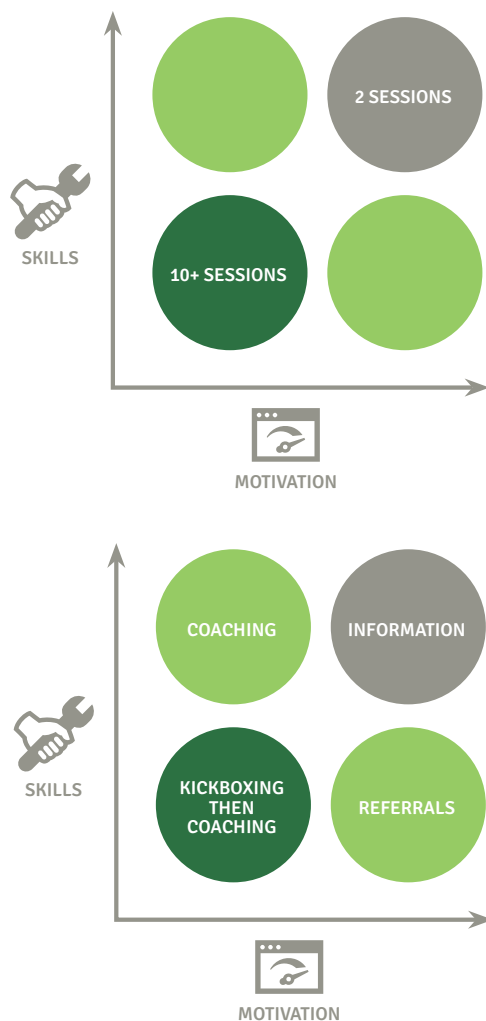
For many interviewees in the research, the terms mentoring and coaching were used interchangeably to describe the process where staff assist young people with lower motivation in the following ways:

> **Clarifying their feelings, ideas and goals;**

> **Setting goals and plan the steps to achieve these;**

> **Follow-up with clients to review progress;**

> **Providing ongoing support to address barriers; and**

> **Challenging ineffective thinking or incorrect assumptions throughout this process.**

An important aspect of coaching is encouraging realism and managing expectations. Staff need well-honed skills to appropriately challenge unhelpful thinking and unrealistic assumptions or expectations held by youth. New workers may require supports to develop this skill set.

Young people stated that being non-judgemental and supporting them to identify their own path was key to a good service. When option A was considered out of reach, rather than forcing a change of plan, young people said that the role of staff is to help them to identify a plan B. When young people felt that the service was not tailored to their individual needs, this was generally associated with staff directing them into an area of work or study in which they had no interest.

A number of service providers stated that coaching is a vital first step when working with young people with lower levels of motivation. Coaching is primarily used to ensure young people develop ownership of a realistic and individualised plan for progression. It was noted that without ownership, referrals to courses are ineffective and participation on courses unsustainable. Training in coaching for staff was utilised by a small number of service providers and is on the training wish-list of many others. The use of coaching/mentoring approach requires more of staff time than simply referral or signposting, with many providers saying that a young person with complex needs requires 10 or more support hours. In this context, output targets were commonly noted as a barrier to a mentoring approach.

Figure 1: Version of the high/low matrix (made popular in "The Tao of coaching" by Max Landsberg).

GOOD PRACTICE 6:

Focus on young people's needs and put away the forms

A significant proportion of the young people using SICAP services have a range of additional needs related to housing, health, mental health, substance use and family difficulties. These issues, if unaddressed, may prevent them from accessing or from continuing to engage in education and employment supports. Supporting a young person to access assistance in relation to these needs requires additional time and a well-developed skill set to ensure workers can identify challenges and respond appropriately to them. This means that staff need to be resourced, trained and empowered to provide holistic supports to NEETs, as well as afforded time to build relationships with young people. Other good practice examples of putting young people's needs first include:

> **Doing paperwork and assessments in a non-invasive way, over a period of time.**

> **Exemplifying personal authenticity, patience, fairness, and empathy and having a solution focused approach.**

> **Being flexible and able to offer 10 or more sessions for young people with complex needs.**

> **Following up on referrals.**

GOOD PRACTICE 7:

Mental health problems are an issue for young people, although are often left unspoken

For many young people, mental health is a challenge related to unemployment. Nearly one in five young people interviewed reported suffering from recent anxiety or depression. Significantly, the majority of those who reported anxiety or depression did not mention it to their (SICAP programme) worker, as they did not think there would be any support available. As a result, the majority of participants said that while the service may have been supportive, they were not offered any help to deal with these issues as the service was not made aware of the problem. A much larger group comprising 16 participants reported that they had suffered from emotional distress as a result of recent unemployment. There was a sense from these 16 young people that, if unaddressed, their feelings of psychological distress had the potential to become even more of an issue if they remained out of work and education. Only one young person reported they had been offered help for the psychological distress they were experiencing.

GOOD PRACTICE 8:

A phone call gets a young person out of bed in the morning and that matters

The good practice review found that 'hand-holding' for young people who have complex needs or have low skills/low motivation is an effective approach. Service providers called the following activities 'hand-holding': calling people to get out of bed in the morning to get them up for class; calling around to them if they had dropped out of a group; supporting them to make appointments; and on occasion, attending appointments along with them. 29 of the 42 young people interviewed felt that the staff member working with them had gone above and beyond their role in order to help them.

A number of service managers spoke about how, at first, a 'hand-holding' approach seemed like workers were taking on too much responsibility and that this was inefficient and/or disempowering to young people. It was common in complex cases, for example, to provide 10 or more sessions. However, after monitoring this and reviewing the client outcomes, they agreed that 'hand-holding' is a necessary form of mentoring and is effective in supporting change. Another common sentiment among providers was that 'hand-holding' is about renewing young people's faith in themselves by showing, through action rather than words, that they are important and valued:

> "We call in the morning before a session, this can be really helpful to convince them to engage and participate. Kids can sometimes feel like we've given up on them, but a phone call is a reminder that our staff haven't. (Interview 32)"

In working with young NEETs, it was more efficient to take time to hand-hold, since this was more effective in terms of achieving programme results. Consequently, planning and resource allocation at both the service and funder level needs to ensure that frontline staff have flexibility and time to provide supports appropriate to clients' needs. This in turn has an implication for how service targets are developed and managed.

GOOD PRACTICE 9:

Create an environment that encourages peer support

Peer support is an important resource for young people. It can be encouraged by thoughtful programme planning. The following are examples of how services can encourage peer support:

> **Running skill-based groups with participants of different ages - this can create an environment where older people support younger people through informal peer mentoring relationships.**

> **For hard to engage NEETs, a fun peer group programme can be a stepping stone to more challenging one-to-one work.**

> **Social media message groups can complement face-to-face group dynamics and increase peer support during or after group programmes.**
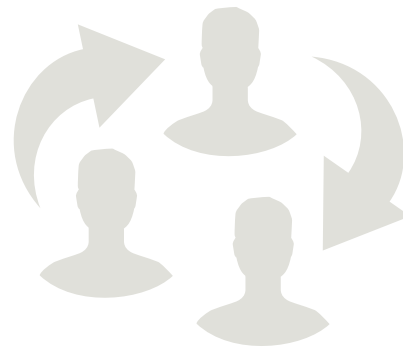
GOOD PRACTICE 10:

Training should be as much like real work as possible

Workplace training programmes are more interesting and relevant to young people if these are structured to reflect elements of the real work environment as closely as possible. Recommendations for achieving this are:

> Make formal work experience an integral part of all programmes, particularly for those who are motivated but lack the necessary skills.

> Ensure young people are aware of the workplace focus and relevance of programmes. Some service providers advised that programme titles should be related to specific jobs that interest young people. For example, naming an interesting job role such as barista or a shop such as TK Maxx is better than a generic title, such as 'customer skills course'.

> Bring people into the programme from the workplace to talk about what it is like to work in specific work environments.

> Include work placements and work trials.

The following spotlight shows how business partnership approaches can lead to particularly good outcomes for young people.

Spotlight: Providing a bespoke programme for the retail outlet TK Maxx

On hearing that TK Maxx was establishing a local outlet, Westmeath Partnership set about planning, in partnership with the local TK Maxx branch, a training programme for TK Maxx customer service roles. Staff visited a nearby outlet, spoke with management, took photographs of the store and interviewed existing staff in order to ascertain the customer service style and skill set required by TK Maxx. Following this process staff found that a 'friendly, outgoing customer service style' and familiarity with the outlets POS (Point of Sale) system, visual merchandising and 'up selling' were deemed as particularly useful skills by current employees. These skills became specific modules within the course whose title was clearly identified with the outlet 'TK Maxx Customer Service Skills'. There was no 'guarantee' of employment for participants after the course, as they had to undergo an interview. The service provider felt that this added to a 'sense of achievement' to the programme and created a 'competitive atmosphere' that would 'spill-over' during the eight week training. Older participants (over 24 years old) often provided informal supports to younger members. This approach was also informed by the TK Maxx preference for hiring staff of differing ages. Part of the training took place in the actual retail store, prior to the local outlet opening. The transport barrier was circumvented by the service liaising with management and requesting that all participants be rostered for the same four days so that car-pooling could be used. The service organised the community welfare officer to come and advise the class as to the number of hours they could work while maintaining current benefits. TK Maxx HR was kept informed of the hours for which participants were available. In return, the service requested that TK Maxx gave an interview to those that the programme specifically recommended. The Partnership also sent the CVs of programme participants to the central UK recruitment unit, who were supporting the hiring at the local office. The fact that no applicants were invited to interview through this avenue, highlighted the success of the tailored partnership approach, and showed that forming partnerships with local branches of large chains is effective in creating job opportunities. This programme resulted in 10 participants being hired by the local TK Maxx.

GOOD PRACTICE 11:

No 'talk & chalk' - novel ways of learning are needed

Many NEETs have had somewhat negative experiences of school. This means that community education and workplace training needs to be clearly differentiated from the school environment. This can be achieved by using action-based rather than classroom-based learning and exploring different teaching techniques. The following strategies assisted providers in re-thinking the learning environment:

> **Hiring tutors that have experience with the NEETs group and can deliver engaging learning in outreach and non-classroom settings.**

> **Hiring tutors who have had a different career or qualifications prior to embarking on a youth/ social care/community career, as they can bring a 'real world' perspective to teaching i.e. utilising a trained chef to provide cooking workshops.**

> **Encouraging current tutors to compose modules/programmes that include off-site and innovative learning techniques.**

GOOD PRACTICE 12:

Even the playing field by considering culture

Young people from minority groups are more likely to experience additional barriers than their peers. It is important to consider the culture of young people to ensure programmes are designed to be inclusive. Ways to do this include:

> **Providing culturally appropriate supports for a variety of groups, including Travellers and people from other ethnic minority groups.**

> **Not making presumptions about the needs of young people from those groups, but consulting with them to understand what they want.**

> **Ensuring that tutors understand the needs of young people from minority groups and can work effectively with them.**

> **Forming interagency groups with representation from the minority group to help with planning for services and courses.**

> **Considering the role of the family and other social structures when encouraging young people from minority backgrounds to engage with the programme.**

Spotlight: Some culturally focused programmes have an 80-90% retention rate

80-90%
RETENTION RATE

One SICAP service provider, knowing that young Travellers are not always easy to engage, strived to be culturally sensitive and developed a programme that responded to their specific interests. 'We hired an older male Traveller to teach tin-smithing and wagon building to young Traveller men.' Having successfully engaged the young men in practical learning courses, the staff were able to bring them into more challenging, but still culturally appropriate and interesting activities: 'An interesting offshoot from this was that the tutor ended up doing another course, 'oral histories,' with the group. We think this worked because they felt it was appropriate to them and because they had enjoyed the practical, hands on workshops'. The staff were proud of the fact that they had successfully engaged young Traveller men: 'our retention in that programme was very high. It was 80% - 90%'.

GOOD PRACTICE 13:

Only with significant supports can young people make the leap to being their own boss

While enterprise supports may not be appropriate for the majority of young people availing of SICAP services, for a small number of highly motivated young people this path may be suitable, particularly:

> **Where a young person is already engaged in self-employment type work.**

> **Where a young person comes from a culture of self-employment.**

> **Where a young person has expressed a very strong desire not to have a boss or work in traditional employment environments.**

If self-employment supports are provided, it is useful to ensure that:

> **The programme meets an identified need, i.e. there are enough people for whom self-employment is an appropriate path and are interested in the course.**

> **The programme provides intensive, on-going support and business mentoring.**

> **The programme is tailored to the specific capacities, needs and challenges experienced by the young people engaging in it.**

Spotlight: For the right group and with significant time and resources, young people can progress from informal income generation into self-employment

Mayo North-East Partnership adopted an innovative approach to supporting young people into self-employment. The traditional 'start your own business programme' was modified to suit those younger people, who saw self-employment as the best option for them. Some young people were already engaged in making money in the informal economy, others found it challenging to work with authority figures. The course was about providing the skills to turn existing informal income generation into a formal business. The innovation in this approach is best explained in the interviewee's own words: "We adapted our [usual] approach for supporting self-employment to the young people... Literacy was a huge issue and it took time for these young men to let us know they had difficulties filling in the necessary forms. Our approach had to be quite different - more telephone contact, more support, more one-to-one sessions. NEETs need a different approach in relation to self-employment. You can't provide run of the mill support. There are elements of running a business that aren't common sense for young people. They don't have the life experience of failed businesses, the tax system and accounts or working with authority." The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance was noted by the interviewee as an extremely valuable scheme to support young people through this transition. It was also observed that self-employment programmes were found to be particularly relevant for young Traveller men who were engaged in some informal entrepreneurial activity and had a cultural understanding of self-employment. The outcomes from this targeted programme were notable - nine NEETs were involved in this programme and four of them progressed into self-employment.

Partnership working

GOOD PRACTICE 14:

Partnerships benefit from structure and maintenance

The following structural elements were consistently regarded as effective in creating and maintaining positive relationships and good interagency working:

At the strategic level

> **Establishing committees with a strategic planning focus and including NEET engagement on the agenda.**

> **Clearly outlining common objectives.**

> **Ensuring clarity on what each service does and how duplication can be avoided; as well as having clarity on working processes or the case management approach being used (i.e. through a Memorandum of Understanding).**

> **Planning and holding formal review meetings, at both staff and management levels.**

At the practice level

> **Informal, ongoing communication between staff.**

> **Opportunities for frontline staff to share good practice and reflect on local service delivery with their colleagues in similar positions.**

Spotlight: A unique approach to partnership

Paul Partnership, based in Limerick City, has a long history of working in partnership with multiple providers. They took an innovative approach to the delivery of SICAP: 'We delivered our programme with nine other small partnership groups. We can, together with the other nine agencies, access the most hard to reach young people and adults.' This method was a reflection of the organisation's belief, developed through years of community development work, that organisations which are embedded in the community will have the best access to the most excluded people and, therefore, the most impact. This approach took substantial time to set-up and manage. A positive working relationship with the partners was achieved initially through a series of meetings to agree the collective approach. These discussions and subsequent review and planning meetings were built on the understanding that positive interagency relationships needed to be built, and that this could only be founded on mutual respect. This meant being clear about how each organisation could add value to the partnership.

In this service delivery arrangement: 'we were all equal partners, this was a collective relationship… We think our partnership model is an example of good practice as the local community groups are closest to the local communities. We are in the city centre, whereas these local community groups are located in the places where people who need them are. Some of the staff live and work in the same area, therefore, there is a really genuine connection to the community'. Overall, this approach was considered to be one where a focused application of the principles of community development yielded significant returns in relation to the number of hard to reach young people who were engaged and maintained in the programme.

GOOD PRACTICE 15:

Prevention is better than cure – engaging with schools

Schools have an important role to play in supporting young people to access information and referrals that they will need when leaving the school environment. In general, providers may not have prioritised direct engagement with schools, since this work does not directly count towards achieving SICAP programme targets. However, many view this work as important in ensuring that young people do not fall through the gaps. A key goal of school based work is to inform the choices of young people by ensuring access to accurate information about their options. SICAP service have a well-developed understanding of what employers are looking for and are well placed to communicate this to young people. In addition, SICAP providers have detailed information on the large range of training programmes, state schemes and supports for further training and employment. This is vital information for young people who are still in school and are looking to clarify their next steps into employment or training.

Spotlight: Reach out to young people before their NEET status becomes entrenched

Prior to SICAP, Waterford Partnership ran a programme in conjunction with a local community school. There were a number of early school leavers attending this programme. The School Liaison Officer came to the Partnership and explained that there were eight young people that wanted to undertake the Leaving Certificate Applied option, but required outside intensive support. 'We funded this programme for years; some schools didn't like us providing this programme, but on the other hand they couldn't provide one-to-one support that such individuals required. This programme continues to provide at-risk young people / early school leavers with support to complete their Leaving Cert - about 70 or 80 young people partake each year and our success rate is 95%'.

Organisational development

GOOD PRACTICE 16:

Pool tables and flower baskets are better than corporate environments

A space that is welcoming to young people is essential to bringing young people through the door, helping them to feel valued and encouraging them to remain connected to the service. Creating a sense of common ownership of the physical space where services are delivered can help young people to feel like the environment is theirs. A sense of ownership builds young people's self-confidence and makes it easier for them to engage. Providers agreed that, if you do not have access to a community facility, the next best thing is a café or a library. These options need to be considered while preparing the programme budget.

Spotlight: Creating community friendly spaces

Laois Partnership Company spoke about how creating community friendly spaces is a long-term commitment. To provide healthy, positive and community accessible facilities, the organisation invests in space working together with providers and the community to access funds and gain community support. 'In one of the estates we are based in, there was a training centre belonging to the HSE and they sold it to the council five years ago. Our service manager approached the county manager and asked for use of the community centre. We got a Leader grant, took over the building and refurbished it. People know the building. The first thing we did is 'open the gates to the community' and it has never been vandalised. People own it. They have the hanging baskets they made in the centre lining the streets'.

GOOD PRACTICE 17:

Follow-up is a key part of ensuring young people do not fall through the cracks

Service providers used a variety of systems to ensure that clients receive appropriate follow-up. In general, service providers ensured that young people with more complex cases or lower motivation and skills received more personalised and targeted follow-up. The majority of young people interviewed agreed that follow-up supports were important, not just in their initial search for a job or training course, but also as they began their journey. Service providers stated that the following factors made follow-up effective:

> **Ensuring that young people feel that contact is not judgemental. They need to know that the service is there for them if things go well or not so well. The provider can also play a role in supporting young people to use learning to create next steps actions.**

> **Simple systems, such as record keeping, or dedicated time for follow up calls, are important to ensure that all young people receive this service and no young person falls through the gaps.**

GOOD PRACTICE 18:

'If it's not in IRIS, it didn't happen'

The Integrated Reporting and Information System (IRIS) forms the backbone of national programme performance and monitoring processes. For many services, transitioning from paper systems to IT information management systems took more than 12 months to reach a point where staff were confident and consistent in the system use. Factors that were considered useful in supporting this transition included:

> **Having a named person responsible for supporting staff in using IRIS.**

> **Undertaking quality audits to help staff to better understand the standard required and what is needed to attain this standard.**

> **Ensuring that staff understood that data collection is not an addition to the work, but is a core aspect of the work.**

> **Having at least two people on the team with the skills and capacity to support other staff members in the use of IRIS and ensuring that these staff attend all Pobal IRIS training.**

> **Reviewing the possibility of merging any pre-existing forms with requirements from Pobal, for example consent forms, in order to reduce duplication.**

> **Integrating information on the use of IRIS into staff performance reviews.**

GOOD PRACTICE 19:

Training, supervision and regular meetings support the team in maintaining skills and morale

Training for frontline staff is important for enabling the service to work with a vast array of needs and case complexity. Having a team with a shared skill set means that people from diverse work backgrounds are more equipped to communicate and problem solve. They are also in a better position to develop common language and frameworks, in addition to their specialist knowledge and career experience. Training that was considered particularly pertinent to the work includes: career guidance, coaching, motivational interviewing, and technical IT skills related to data management, social media and website management. Staff highlighted the need for a supportive, solution focused culture within their teams. Opportunities to discuss and strategise the work formally and informally were considered key to this, alongside supervision and managerial supports.

Conclusion

The research found that, overall, young people regarded SICAP services as having met their needs. The vast majority of young people found the service to be of high quality, with staff going the extra mile, showing care and being non-judgmental and engaging. The efforts of staff were noted and appreciated by young people, who prior to accessing these supports had experienced significant challenges and hardship in their efforts to gain employment.

A flexible, individualised approach was considered key by service providers, who were able to name a large number of specific approaches and ways of working that together represent good practice in working with NEETs in Ireland. Good practice was identified across all stages of service delivery from initial advertising of the programme and engagement of young people, through delivery of supports to young people and follow-up post referral. Good practice was also identified in relation to interagency partnership and collaboration, and internal organisational development.

Young people viewed the programme as having an impact on their progression, as the vast majority stated that their progression was due, entirely or to a significant degree, to SICAP supports. Even those who attributed their progression to other factors or who had not made progression considered the support and learning they received from the service providers to be very important and worthwhile. Young people believed that the range of individualised supports they received helped them to clarify what they wanted to do and take the first steps on this journey.