



SICAP Case Study 2021 - Lot: Wexford 14-1

“It didn’t start in March 2020...”

An exploration of the relationship and synergies between SICAP and the Primary Health Care for Travellers Programme in engaging with the Traveller community in Co. Wexford before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Thematic Area:	Engagement Strategies with SICAP Target Groups/Communities
Target Group:	Members of the Travelling Community
Thematic Area:	Goal 1:1- Promote Community Engagement and Stronger Communities

1. Introduction

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Travellers were already experiencing a pandemic of chronic ill health prior to March 2020 which only worsened with the arrival of the Covid-19 virus. With a life expectancy estimated at only 63 years compared to 78 in the general population elevated rates of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer and a suicide rate six times higher than that of the settled community (All Ireland Travel Health Study, 2010), the Traveller community in Ireland were affected by severe health inequities before the arrival of this deadly pandemic.

This case study focuses on how Wexford Local Development succeeded in engaging members of the Travelling community in SICAP both in the years preceding and subsequent to the Covid pandemic. It looks not only at the impact of the pandemic and the practical actions that were required as a result, but also at our history of involvement with this community, across programmes in a wide range of areas from health to education and training to employment, some directly funded by SICAP, others with resources secured from or managed on behalf of other statutory bodies.

The lived experience of Traveller women is explored through an in depth interview with two Traveller Primary Health Care Workers, Josie Cash and Bridget Wall. This interview shines a light on the practical challenges to and impact of the work and reveals what these supports mean for women engaged in the programme as well as for their families and communities in terms of social inclusion and participation. An interview with Laura Myles, Primary Health Care for Travellers Project Coordinator for North Wexford, further reveals how the different elements of WLD’s strategy for working with Travellers interact with and support each other and the key role that SICAP plays in underpinning and making possible this work.

The case study also explores how WLD's engagement with this community had to be radically reconfigured to take account both of public health restrictions as well as of new needs in areas such as food poverty which arose as a direct result of the pandemic. For example, providing reliable and accurate health information, promoting vaccine uptake as well as offering support for those that are isolating were some of the new areas of work undertaken by Wexford Local Development through a partnership between SICAP and the Primary Health Care for Travellers projects since the start of the pandemic. These interviews highlight the importance of collaborative relationships with agencies such as the HSE and the local authority, as well as with local community groups, in developing partnerships to address both chronic and emergency needs as well as the positive results that ensue when local communities are mobilised in efforts to support vulnerable Traveller families.

Together these achievements illustrate the value of SICAP as a programme which widens and deepens the impact of Government funding for marginalised communities such as Travellers by directly facilitating the implementation of projects which might not otherwise be viable. This case study provides evidence which demonstrates that embedding initiatives such as the Primary Health Care for Travellers Projects in a wider ecosystem of programmes and supports, such as that provided by a local development company, greatly extends their capacity to benefit from and integrate with other areas of social inclusion work locally. This approach is based on the health promotion model, informed by the social determinants of health and based on the person's interaction with their environment and others to pursue greater health, a concept which sits comfortably with the Community Development principles underpinning SICAP.

2. Context

The total number of Travellers in Ireland is estimated at approximately 30,000, or just under 1% of the general population. In Co. Wexford, the Traveller population is 1,508 (Census 2016), the sixth highest of any county in Ireland. According to the HSE, a combination of poor health and often inadequate or overcrowded accommodation, has contributed to the increased susceptibility of Travellers to contracting and becoming ill with COVID-19. Traveller culture is intrinsically linked to extended family ties, social gatherings (frequently linked with religious events), and travel within and beyond Ireland, all of which further heighten the challenges and risks associated with the pandemic for this community.

Living in overcrowded or substandard accommodation, many Travellers have struggled to observe the strict isolation guidelines mandated by public health officials. The disproportionate incidence of heart disease, cancer and diabetes which existed within the community prior to the pandemic has also placed Travellers at significantly higher risk of adverse outcomes than similar age cohorts in the general population. Statistics from the HSE bear this out, revealing that between 1st of March 2020 and 10th April 2021, the rate of infection with Covid-19 amongst Travellers was more than three times greater than that in the settled community (HSE, 2021). The median age for cases amongst Travellers was also younger than that in the general population at 23 versus 38 years. However, accommodation and health status are not the only factors at play. Travellers are one of the most socially excluded groups in Irish society, lacking political power and representation and challenged by a history of negative experience in the education system and ongoing discrimination in the labour market. Travellers continue to find it difficult to trust in and communicate with statutory agencies.

Although there are some signs of improvement, it remains a challenge for this community to be fully informed about and able to access essential services, including healthcare. A health promotion approach has been recognised internationally as being most effective in bridging a gap such as this by creating partnerships between marginalised communities such as Travellers and health authorities (Villani, Fay, Kavanagh et al., 2021).

These partnerships focus on grassroots engagement and empowerment as strategies to increase the sense of control that Travellers experience over their own health. In Ireland there are currently 27 such initiatives, developed over a twenty year period and known as Primary Health Care for Travellers Projects (PHCTPs).

Wexford Local Development is the HSE's implementing partner for two of these projects, one in the north of the county and one in the south. Nine local women are employed as Traveller Primary Health Care Workers, six by WLD and three directly by the HSE. All are themselves members of the Traveller community. The projects are supported by two Coordinators. All eleven members of the project team are managed and supported by the SICAP Community Development Coordinator who liaises with the HSE and other local agencies such as Wexford County Council. The particular benefits of this approach in engaging Travellers in SICAP are set out below.

3. Role of SICAP in engaging Travellers

Wexford Local Development has developed an integrated approach to engaging and supporting Travellers to participate in education and training, health and wellbeing and employment focused activities. At its core is the partnership approach between SICAP and the two HSE-funded Primary Health Care for Travellers projects described in the introduction.

Under SICAP we have also developed community-based educational supports in coordination with local agencies such as FDYS and the STAR project. Adult Travellers are engaged through Goal Two workshops in areas such as Driver Theory Test Preparation which allows for deeper relationships to be developed with our team of Client Support Officers who work with each person to identify a goal and assist them to access support to achieve it.

The employment of nine Traveller women as Health Workers as well as the training and engagement of Traveller women as tutors for dedicated after-schools clubs not only facilitates valuable health and educational supports to be provided but also allows these women to become role models to their community. This is of great significance given the ongoing prejudice and discrimination faced by Travellers in the education system and in the labour market.

The WLD SICAP Community Development Coordinator participates in local structures such as the Traveller Inter-Agency Group and the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, bringing perspective and evidence from our work on the ground with the community as well as providing direct support for Traveller representatives on these structures. Our relationships with other key players in this area such as the HSE, Wexford County Council and FDYS are also significant for the success of this work.

While the total range of engagement mechanisms and activities undertaken with Travellers under SICAP is broad, this case study focuses specifically on the relationship between the SICAP Community Development Team and the eleven members of the PHCT projects.

4. Health Promotion and Community Development – Complementary Engagement Strategies

“Mental health is a big issue in the Traveller community. Some nights we’d bring over the sewing machines, and you might say ‘why sewing machines?’, but if there’s something going on with that person, you give them a machine and then they come out and start talking about their problems and then you can work on it.

Whether it be mental health, suicide or physical health, things that would be hard to deal with, by that sewing machine they’d be talking to you and you know, you’d be helping them, listening....”

Josie Cash

Josie Cash and Bridget Wall have been working with Wexford Local Development as Primary Healthcare Workers with North Wexford Primary Healthcare for Travellers Project since 2010. Josie explains how she came into her role: *“When I came out of school, I went to third year in St. Mary’s Secondary School in New Ross, I went straight into working in the Royal Hotel. I got married then and left. When I came to Enniscorthy I thought I’d have no problem getting a job because I had loads of CVs but no, I wasn’t accepted.”*

She was encouraged to apply for the training course in primary healthcare that was starting in Bunclody: *“I said I’d try anything because I’m bored and I did used to love working and I loved mixing with the settled community....I got a place and I loved it. But I never expected to get a job out of it. So when the interviews came up and I got it I was more than delighted, couldn’t believe it really. Especially working with my own community, helping my own community.”*

Bridget was equally surprised to secure a role in the project as her self-confidence had been low before she started the course: *“When I started the course first, I’d be afraid to talk up, you know, to talk up in a crowd or speak out or anything. But I found as I went on in the training course, it built up my confidence.”*

She too was motivated by the prospect of working with her own community: *“What I was really anxious for, I heard that it was to work with your own community, to improve their health...I knew it was needed, it’s a thing that was really needed in the community.”*In their day to day work, Josie, Bridget and their seven colleagues in the north and south of the county bring culturally sensitive information about health issues out into the community, speaking with individuals and families about cancer screening, heart disease and diabetes, and, in the past almost two years, the Covid-19 pandemic.

Groups - the most effective form of engagement

Prior to Covid, SICAP supported the development of a network of groups for women and girls in the community. These groups are led and facilitated by the nine workers who are in turn supported by their coordinators and the SICAP Community Development Coordinator. Encouraging women to join the groups is the first step in engagement and gently building trust is the most important element of this process according to Josie and Bridget: *“We’d say come in sure and you can get a cup of tea and we’ll have an auld chat and catch up...we get one person that knows what’s going on in the group then they tell the next person ‘ah sure Josie’s only in there like and she’s learning us all about health and she’s talking about the mental health, do you know?’”*.

As women become more comfortable participating in the groups, their confidence begins to grow according to Bridget: *"I've seen women, they'd walk in at the start of the group and they'd be real quiet, they'd be afraid to talk up. And now you see them coming and they'd be laughing and talking out...that gets up their confidence"*.



From left: Bridget Wall, Laura Myles, Bridget Connors, Minister Joe O'Brien T.D, Elizabeth Berry, Josie Cash

This new found confidence in turn has a positive effect on their ability to self-advocate with services: *"I think it changes them, it gives them the confidence to look after their kids in school, to talk up for their kids. It gives them more confidence if they want to get medical cards or things done in their house, it gives them more power, do you know? To get that done...they seem to be stronger in their confidence."*

This is particularly important when interacting with health professionals. Josie explains that as the women gain in confidence and knowledge of how services work in the groups there is also a ripple effect on their family members: *"The information we give them, they're empowered to give it on. We give them helpline numbers, we give them all the information about the heart, diabetes and all that and then they've the confidence to go in with their families to talk to the doctors, do you know? And to know exactly what's happening there as well."*

They'll ask what the doctor is saying because sometimes the big jargon words, they don't understand them. So now they have that confidence to ask the doctor, 'could you explain it to me?' Because we'd be saying it to them 'say it to the doctor, don't just leave with a prescription, not knowing what's wrong with you'."

Bridget elaborates: *"If we have say, six or eight in our group, the way we look at it is, that's six or eight people but if we give them the information and give them the confidence to go out, you're helping not just them six or eight, you're helping all their families, their sons, their daughters, their mothers, their fathers, their uncles...they're there in the community to help all of them, do you know? And they're passing on all that information."*

Beyond health information – issues and challenges that arise in this work

SICAP has extended the reach and capacity of the PHCT projects by funding activities and outings and connecting the team and the community with other supports in the programme such as training programmes, one to one action planning and community-based learning supports for children. Travellers have also been supported to participate in local decision making and policy bodies, all the while supported by being part of a wider team in Wexford Local Development.

The holistic view of the person and the community which is central to this model is borne out in the reality of the day to day work of the projects in the course of which Josie, Bridget and the team are regularly asked to support Travellers with job applications, educational issues, housing and accommodation as well as in accessing medical and other services.

“If they have anything on their mind they might talk about it when they’re in the group or if they have any stresses, like forms to fill in or advice, or education, keeping the youngsters in school, we’re there for them you know, with the groups” explains Bridget.

Employment, for example, is one area where Josie and Bridget actively assist Travellers, often encouraging them to avail of programmes like Tus which is also managed by WLD. The importance of both functional and digital literacy has become very clear during the pandemic. Empowering the nine Traveller women working on the primary healthcare team to become confident in using online platforms such as Zoom as well as to use other internet-based services has been a priority for SICAP with a Client Support Officer providing regular support to the team in this area.

They in turn encourage others in the community to work on their literacy and avail of supports. *“Everything is on a phone now, I tell them this, everything is on the phone”* says Josie. *“If you’re going to look for a job you may go on your phone, so you need to know how to read and write, you need your education.”*

The location of the projects within the local development company, under the same roof as SICAP, means that there are easy and effective referral pathways available through which Travellers can be assisted in many of these areas. SICAP Client Support Officers are in regular contact with their colleagues on the PHCT project teams and offer workshops such as driver theory test preparation to encourage young Travellers to re-engage with education and learning.

Notwithstanding this, ongoing discrimination poses a significant barrier to these attempts to encourage Travellers to engage with training and seek employment. Josie explains: *“There’s a lot of Travellers looking for work now, I’m after filling out loads of forms for Travellers to go on Tus scheme, loads of forms for interviews for meat factories and things like that for Travellers. But although nothing comes back, at least like we’re after trying. It’s very hard for Travellers to get work, very hard.”* Bridget agrees: *“A member of my family is working at the moment but they has to hide the fact that they are a Traveller, they hide their identity.”*

Young Travellers on training courses who need to source work experience placements can also encounter closed doors. Josie describes the situation of girls studying to become a beautician but unable to secure a placement: *“Them same girls would go into them hairdressers and go into them nail bars and give them money to get their hair done but yet they weren’t able to give them six weeks’ work experience. Travellers do want to work, people tell you they don’t but they do, they do...”*

Countering the impact of prejudice and discrimination

Societal prejudice and discrimination has cast a long shadow down the generations which must be considered when a programme such as SICAP attempts to intervene and break the cycle of exclusion. The determination of Bridget, Josie and their peers in attempting to push back against the resulting hopelessness is all the more notable for this. Bridget elaborates:

“Travellers are after being put down so much, for years you know, they’re not trusted in a work environment, not employed...then the parents know the way they were treated in school so I suppose it’s very hard for the child to get the confidence, for the parents to let their children go through the same thing and have them expect something at the end of it. That’s why we’re trying to make the change for people, to encourage it as well.”

It is clear from this that the task is not only a practical one of filling out application forms, which can be a barrier to those who have left school with literacy problems, but also about maintaining hope in the face of ongoing discrimination against Travellers in the labour market. Encouraging children and teenagers to stay in school is vitally important to the two women but the reality of this prejudice means they are faced with an uphill battle to convince young Travellers of the value of education.

Josie describes her experiences:

“My two boys, Bridget is the same, we made them go on and do their Leaving and we’d say to them ‘you will get jobs’ and you go out there and give out all those applications for interviews and they all keep coming back ‘no, no, no...’ They feel let down really because we’re kicking them out to school every morning and we’re saying ‘you will get jobs now’...they were even in with me last night, two young fellas, saying ‘I don’t see the point of school’.

One fella looked up at me and he said to me ‘we won’t get a job sure’ and I said to him ‘listen to me, you’ll have them certs, at least ye’ll have them...you’re encouraging them to go to school and then...I’d never tell them that my boys sent away for interviews and they didn’t get the jobs, you can’t tell them because you’re discouraging them, two lovely lads...’.

It is not just on a personal level but also within their role that Josie, Bridget and the team work to counter negative stereotypes. They have delivered cultural awareness training to many service providers and organisations, including the staff of Wexford Local Development, with the aim of increasing sensitivity to the particular issues, challenges and preferences that are characteristic of the Traveller community.

This has generally been a successful endeavour and the women have gained obvious satisfaction from bringing about an important change in perspective amongst staff in healthcare, educational and other settings. Bridget describes this experience:

“You find when you walk into a room with people who have never met with Travellers before that they end up with a completely different opinion of Travellers afterwards. It’s the pleasure of seeing the impression that you’ve made on those people when you’re after walking out and showing that Travellers are not all like you see in the media, the stereotypes, you know? To see the respect that they’d have for you when you’re finished, it’s really rewarding.”

SICAP helps to broaden the web of connection and relationships

Bridget talks about the positive impact of delivering cultural awareness training within Wexford Local Development and of being part of the SICAP-led Community Development Team: *“The team is lovely. We seem to be after building a bond, knowing one another, so we’re getting on well together.”* Being part of the Community Development team has also facilitated and deepened relationships between the Traveller projects and the wider community, particularly with other groups engaged under SICAP. Josie elaborates:

“We had a great day out with the Roma community up in Enniscorthy. It was a fun day that we had, with the FDYS, it was very good. I love mixing, there were Romanian children and it was lovely.”

Bridget adds to this:

“We went up to the Shannon (in Enniscorthy) and we mixed with the older age groups, the women’s groups up there as well. We met with them which was very good, very interesting. There are groups like that in New Ross too that we meet with, the settled community, we’d meet with them as well.

They are very interested in what we do in our groups and we were interested in what they do in their groups which was very good, getting on, getting to know one another like. If the settled ladies have a ladies’ day out we’d always be invited to them.”

These community connections both within and beyond Wexford Local Development proved invaluable with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. The new activities and ways of working which had to be developed as well as the challenges which emerged are described below.

The impact of Covid – new ways of connecting and the ever present challenge of mental health

Josie and Bridget describe being inundated with calls from members of the Travelling community when the pandemic first hit, Josie explains this experience and how being connected within WLD helped her and her peers to respond:

“I was dealing with about twenty people in the day and I was just worn out – ‘Where will we go to? How long do we have to stay in?’ There were a lot of basic things and WLD were very good, they were able to give out food parcels and that helped the community an awful lot. We gave the names of all the people who needed them.

Covid was very difficult. I know it was across the board but Travellers do like mixing. Travelling people died, with the Covid, some were old, more had underlying conditions things like that but nobody could go to funerals and that was terrible. Covid had a big impact on the Travelling community and I know it had a big impact across the board too.”

In a team effort between the Primary Healthcare projects, SICAP and Tus, food parcels were assembled and distributed at the height of the lockdown, local community groups were alerted to the needs of Traveller families who were isolating and came to their assistance with food



shopping and new activities were dreamed up to keep up people's spirits as well as their physical and mental health.

Bridget describes how older adults were encouraged to cook with packs and recipes to make soup and brown bread, a SICAP supported initiative which proved very popular with the community during the lockdown. Josie describes the 'Colour my Canvas' initiative whereby Traveller girls, who were missing their weekly groups, were invited to colour a canvas distributed by WLD:

"We gave canvases and art materials out to the groups because they were at home, we couldn't bring them in, and we gave them out canvases to colour. The canvases they did were beautiful, we're hoping to get them put up in Wexford hospital."

Nonetheless, the pre-existing crisis in mental health which had already blighted the Traveller community worsened significantly during the pandemic. There were several instances of young Travellers taking their own lives during this time and this has had a profound impact on the community. Bridget, Josie and their colleagues have been on the frontline of this crisis, both personally and professionally, and realise the importance of their project in supporting those affected: *"I'm not praising ourselves now or anything but only for us a lot of Travelling people wouldn't have got through it because mental health was a big, big thing and there's a lot of suicides..."* says Josie. Bridget explains how they supported people in this situation: *"You were making phone calls and telling them like, if they could go out and go for walks, as much as they can to get out of the house..."*

The fact that the groups had to cease for long periods of time had a big impact on the women who had been attending according to Bridget:

"They suffer a lot with depression, mental health is a big thing in the Travelling community. I find with Covid and the lockdown the women in all our groups, they seem to be closed off a lot, they're asking us a a lot about starting up the groups again, they're eager for to get out." She adds: *"There's some women like, they'd never mix or get out of their house and then you know we talk around them to try to start our group. And we get them into the group. And we keep them chatting, we keep them involved, keep them chatting. They can't wait for it to start again, to get out and about."*

The seemingly simple but profound significance of the groups as a means of supporting mental health and social participation is illustrated in these words.

Another aspect of group work which often goes unappreciated but has an equally strong impact on mental health is the opportunity to get out and have fun. The women have taken part in outdoor activities such as kayaking as well as yoga classes and dance. Josie's account of the significance of the groups for young Travellers is particularly poignant in this regard and points to the level and depth of exclusion that Travellers experience from a very young age:

“We’ve loads of girls in groups now and they’re all married and have children now but they always come back, them girls that we brought up from young like. We’d have an outing for them, bring them to bowling alley or something like that. They really look forward to that because they’re not accepted anywhere else like, they’re not allowed in anywhere else, do you know what I mean?”

Them young girls and boys are really depending on WLD. The groups that they do, that’s their ‘out’, like going to a disco because they’re not allowed in anywhere. We have that big hall up there in the Church Institute in Enniscorthy and we blare out a radio and let them dance to their hearts’ content, that’s the very same as if they’re after being at a big disco! And they felt wanted, you know? Other than that they’re not allowed in nowhere else.”

5. Perspective of the PHCT Project Coordinator

Laura Myles, Coordinator of the PHCT project in North Wexford, attests to the value of the projects being situated within the SICAP-led Community Development team in Wexford Local Development:

“Our work is all about the community and so it is a very good fit for us. The Traveller women that are employed as health workers, they’re very well aware that they’re part of a team, that it’s not just myself, we fit into a bigger organisation. It keeps us all really well informed on what’s going on in the wider WLD context and helps us to build relationships with the SICAP Community Development workers as well which is great.

We’re not a standalone project, I don’t think any programme should be standalone really, we have that support from other workers, from our Coordinator if someone’s not around, which can happen, everybody knows who they can contact if they need to talk through an issue or anything like that and that’s there because we’re part of a team.”

She describes the many ways in which being part of the SICAP team has helped her and her colleagues to reach on work that would not otherwise be possible given that the PHCT projects are part-time with limited resources:

“Someone from SICAP comes into the groups and does a needs analysis so if anyone wants more than training or some other support, they can be referred onwards in WLD. It makes the women in our groups, the Traveller women feel included through that connection with our groups which is really good.

Then there are the residents’ committees that have been established on halting sites with the support of SICAP Community Development workers, that’s work that we would not be able to reach on without their support.”

Laura highlights the key role that the projects play in mediating between Travellers and service providers, underscoring the importance of building confidence, knowledge and assertiveness which forms such an important part of the group work:

“I think there’s huge potential there with the relationships that we have built up through our work and the SICAP programme, helping members of the community to feel more competent and confident and if you like, take more control over their lives and feel confident in doing that.

We find that in our work with the community, particularly if they've had bad experiences with a service provider you know, it's almost like sometimes they'll give up."

SICAP also supports those women from the projects who go forward to represent their community on local and regional structures concerned with Traveller issues which Laura describes as a way of *"building knowledge, confidence and awareness"* in advance of the meetings.

Laura describes how WLD's social media channels have helped to communicate stories about Travellers that counteract the negative coverage that the community normally receives in the media:

"Something like bringing the women kayaking in Bunclody, something they wouldn't have done before, we are able to publicise that through SICAP and WLD. I don't think we could do that as a standalone project, it helps to be part of a bigger organisation. It's getting the message and amplifying the message and actually having the time and resources to do that because the PHCT is not a well-resourced programme, you know, we have been doing an awful lot with very little for an awful long time."

Making connections with other SICAP supported community groups proved invaluable during the periods of lockdown. In one area, SICAP connected the project's efforts to support a Traveller family who were isolating with a local group who arranged for shopping and other provisions to be dropped to their home:

"Since then we've actually built on that relationship because it wouldn't have been a group that we would have had had a lot of contact with in the past. Now we use their community building, we have our meetings there, the women can connect in with the team on Zoom calls using the group's technology so it has worked out really well" explains Laura.

Looking to the future she sees continued value in the partnership with SICAP: *"Covid has prevented us from doing a lot of Community Development work"* explains Laura *"but I would see an opportunity now to get back out into the community with the SICAP Community Development officers, for us to work alongside them, you know? It's not just about building relationships now but looking at assessing the needs in the community, finding out what Travellers want because it could well be different than it was pre-Covid."*

Laura believes that agencies need to acknowledge the changes that have happened in the Traveller community and respond accordingly:

"It's not good enough anymore for agencies to say that members of a certain community don't want to work. They need to listen to the people on the ground, they need to talk to the communities themselves and find out what they want and to ensure that there are opportunities there for them as well."

Finally, the issue of mental health is one which she believes is of deep concern for the women and within the community: *"It's important to mention mental health and suicide because they are huge issues. It's such a difficult area to be working in day to day and although we're used to it, we say these things so often, so many times, in so many different ways it can feel a bit jaded but it's still shocking to hear. We can't lose our outrage, can we?"*

6. Impact of this Work on the SICAP Horizontal Themes of Community Development and Equality

The many ways in which the work described above contributes to these horizontal themes are clearly illustrated in the testimonies above and are summarised in brief below:

Community Development

- Collective, integrated response where the process is of as much importance as the task or activity – trust, empowerment and participation are cornerstones of this approach.
- The importance of groups for participation, confidence, assertiveness and multiplying the impact of health promotion activity into the wider community.

Equality

- Building confidence which leads to greater capacity for self-advocacy and increased participation
- Better understanding of health and other systems thereby improving access and benefit from services
- Cultural awareness – dispelling myths, facilitating person to person encounters to overcome damaging stereotypes and build greater understanding
- Creation of role models – Traveller Health Workers are an inspiration to women and girls in their community who do not have many role models in the labour market
- Being embedded in a bigger organisation and an ecosystem of programmes facilitates greatly enhanced access to resources and support, amplifying the impact of the Primary Healthcare for Travellers Projects. Being part of a large local development company has meant that the projects can gain a higher profile for their work, develop an enhanced ability to more effectively counter negative stereotypes and gain an extended reach into the community.
- The projects can also become engaged in areas other than health which would otherwise be beyond the capacity of a part time programme. These areas include education, employment, enterprise and training, all of which are supported under SICAP.

7. Conclusion

This case study has focused on the relationship between SICAP and the Primary Healthcare for Travellers projects also managed by WLD and the ways in which this model of working has facilitated the engagement of Travellers in community development, education and training and decision making and policy structures.

There are several learnings from this study that may be of benefit in understanding how greater engagement of Travellers with SICAP can be achieved – these are summarised below:

1. **Group work** was identified by all of the research participants as being the most important tool to engage Travellers. A Community Development approach, building trust, inviting and encouraging participation and providing safe and enjoyable activities and environments are central to this.

The relationships developed by Primary Healthcare Workers in the field over a long period of time have meant that many Travellers have been persuaded to take the most important first step back into a group setting thereby building their confidence and self-efficacy. SICAP's community development focus dovetails perfectly with this work, supporting group work which in turn facilitates individuals to avail of other services internal and external to the programme.

2. 'Internal' partnerships such as that described in this case study illustrate the **value of smaller programmes such as the PHCTP being located and integrated within a local development company**, particularly in relation to a social inclusion programme like SICAP. The team feel part of something bigger and can draw on extended resources and networks to progress their work while Travellers themselves can progress within an ecosystem of projects and programmes such as SICAP, TUS and the Local Employment Service, building trust in services in the process and gaining in confidence to take further steps down the line.
3. **Discrimination** and **racism** continue to negatively affect Travellers who remain largely excluded from the labour market despite some movement in the educational sphere. This must be borne in mind when planning and delivering initiatives under SICAP and beyond – the legacy of ill treatment in terms of access to services has generated deep levels of mistrust.

Leaders in the community such as Josie and Bridget are making great efforts to convince others of the value of education and the need to make their voices heard. **The enduring legacy of discrimination must be recognised and the efforts of leaders within the community supported when examining possible approaches** to addressing the social exclusion of Travellers using the resources available through SICAP.

4. The onset of Covid has catapulted everyone into an online world, a challenge for most but particularly for the Travelling community where basic **literacy** can be a barrier to participation. Initiatives which directly or indirectly support literacy and **digital literacy** are therefore vitally needed and can prove to be an effective engagement strategy in and of themselves as WLD's experience with Driver Theory Test Preparation workshops has shown.
5. **Mental health** difficulties continue to blight this community, a situation exacerbated by the introduction of restrictions as a result of the pandemic. This issue was also reported in the survey of the Travelling community carried out by the HSE and reported in September 2020.

Being able to participate in a **community group, listening, forming trusted relationships** and having access to **opportunities** to meet others and try new things, however modest, are all **important counterweights to the despair** experienced by many Travellers. The intrinsic value of group work and supports should never be underestimated in prioritising actions that aim to promote engagement within SICAP.

Below are links to videos made by Wexford Local Development which illustrate different aspects of the work that we do with the Travelling community that are touched upon within this case study:

Bridget talking about how she felt when Traveller Ethnicity was formally recognised in 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvseX7R9UfM>

Traveller Pride Week 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SR_cEcV5rLc&t=11s

Overview of Traveller Health Programme & the work it does in Co Wexford:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p8SpmGwc9A>

Link to **Needs Analysis commissioned by Wexford County Council on behalf of the Traveller Inter Agency Group**. Many activities undertaken under SICAP directly respond to the findings of this research: https://www.wexfordcoco.ie/sites/default/files/content/Community/Traveller-Needs-Analysis-2018_0.pdf

References

1. Villani J, Daly P, Fay R, Kavanagh L, McDonagh S, Amin N. A community-health partnership response to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Travellers and Roma in Ireland. *Global Health Promotion*. 2021;28(2):46-55.
doi:10.1177/1757975921994075
2. Traveller Service User Experience Survey, HSE, September 2020
3. Report on the National Traveller COVID-19 Accommodation Preparedness Checklist, Prepared by The National Social Inclusion Office, Health Service Executive and the Traveller Accommodation Support Unit, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, July 2021
4. Census 2016, Central Statistics Office
5. All Ireland Traveller Health Study, 2010

Appendix

Further detail on the engagement of Travellers under SICAP 2021

- 102 Travellers received supports under SICAP in 2021, of which 99 are caseload, representing 10% of the overall caseload for 2021.
- Collaborative work with Sports Active Wexford to deliver outdoor physical activities for groups including kayaking, yoga, dance and walking.
- Ongoing collaboration with the HSE Traveller Health Unit in the South East Region including connecting Travellers with services such as the Mental Health Nurse, dissemination of information related to the Covid-19 pandemic including guidelines on testing and isolating, vaccines etc.
- Production and distribution of a pocket-sized information card with phone numbers for important services related to mental health in collaboration with the Suicide Resource Office of the HSE and FDYS
- Mental health related activities including outings to Our Lady's Island
- Lockdown activity packs distributed to young people and families including the 'colour my canvas' activity and healthy eating packs including recipes and ingredients for soup and brown bread
- Collaborative initiative to distribute food parcels to families in need of support with Food Connect, Tus/Little Jobs Scheme and CYPSC Healthy Ireland programme
- Facilitation of connections and relationship building with other SICAP local community groups in specific areas such as Clonroche, Taghmon, Ferns, Ballycanew and Bunclody
- Ongoing support to the Traveller Inclusion Project situated in Drumgoold Community Centre in Enniscorthy – collaborative work with FDYS, food parcels, back to school kits and materials for children and family activities
- Participation in the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and the Public Participation Network, supporting Traveller community representatives and bringing evidence from SICAP work on the ground to inform decision making.
- Distribution of educational packs for families at back to school time
- Delivery of Everyday Internet Skills programme in a group and one to one context to the Traveller Health Care Workers by a SICAP Client Support Officer – support to access Zoom and also to avail of services online.