

**The Wheel**

**Sector Skills Programme**

**FINAL EVALUATION REPORT  
AUGUST 2007**

*Prepared by*

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The evaluators would like to thank all those who contributed to this report, particularly the Chief Executive, Training Fund Manager and staff of The Wheel, the Sector Skills Initiative Monitoring Group, the Course Director and staff at the Carmichael Centre, participants in the Stronger Leaders programme, board seminar attendees, Network co-ordinators, trainees and members of the Training Links networks and learningpoint.ie website users and training providers for their co-operation.

#### Disclaimer

*The opinions expressed in this evaluation are those of the writers and not necessarily endorsed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment or The Wheel Limited.*

Susan Coughlan and Bridie Corrigan Matthews

**31 AUGUST 2007**

## SECTION 1 – CHAPTER 1

### 1. Overview of Sector Skills programme

#### 1.1 Background to Programme

In June 2004, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, under the National Training Fund, accepted a detailed proposal from The Wheel to enable it to investigate, implement and manage a programme to deliver solutions for the essential training needs of Community and Voluntary sector organisations. The Department provided €80,000 as part-funding toward the project research.

The main findings of the research that followed were:

The biggest challenges facing community and voluntary organisations are<sup>1</sup>:

1. Funding uncertainty
2. The demands of sustaining and developing their organisations
3. The recruitment and retention of experienced and motivated workers (as staff or volunteers)

Within these constraints, training tends to be *ad hoc*, and does not form part of a coherent strategy, although a majority recognises the advantages that training would provide. Funding for pertinent training is not consistently available, and so it can be seen as a luxury – this fact is true for many organisations and particularly true of smaller organisations. This characteristic is true also in the private sector.

The absence of consistency in training means that there is no incentive for consolidation either by individual training providers or by organisations; this contrasts with other developed countries (such as Britain and Canada), where sectoral leaders have worked successfully in conjunction with Government to develop skills strategies.

Standards in available training vary considerably. This is a function of the relative lack of accreditation and of any other form of quality assurance. Furthermore, there is considered to be insufficient consultation between the organisations and those who train trainers, to assess the value of training, and the impact that has on the voluntary and community sector.

The specification that emerged from the research contained an outline for a developmental training solution for the community and voluntary sector that was:

- Specific in its goals
- Targeted yet diversified in its nature
- Capable of providing tangible benefits that meet needs identified by organisations within the sector
- Deliverable in the period September 2006 – June 2007

This solution was called Sector Skills (which was, in effect, a Pilot Programme) and was part-funded (1 million euro) between September 2005 and July 2007 by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment under the National Training Fund.

Sector Skills involves three linked elements:

- **Training Links Programme** - a network-led training programme, providing supports, resources and advice to organisations to enable them to participate in relevant, flexible and cost effective training. This training programme is implemented and managed by The Wheel.
- **Stronger Leaders** – a Leadership Development programme addressing acknowledged needs of organisations in times of increasing governance issues and heightened requirement for openness and transparency. This programme is specified and overseen by The Wheel, with delivery subcontracted to The Carmichael Centre, following an open tender process.
- **Learningpoint.ie** – a website providing comprehensive information about training opportunities, enabling people to access up-to-date, relevant data on appropriate and suitable training. This programme is fully managed by The Wheel, with the technical aspects of the design and development of the website outsourced.

## 1.2 The Wheel

The Wheel is a national support and representative network for the community and voluntary sector which works to strengthen organisations as well as sectoral infrastructure and environment. It provides a wide range of information, support services, advice, training and advocacy to individuals and organisations in the community and voluntary sector.

The Wheel's core goals, as described in its 5 year strategic plan 2007 – 2012, are to:

- Improve the legal, political and operational environment for the community and voluntary sector
- Strengthen the capacity of organisations to get things done.

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<sup>1</sup> The Wheel 2005: Sector Skills – *Addressing the Training Needs of the Voluntary and Community Sectors*. Dublin: The Wheel

- Build public support for the sector
- Strengthen The Wheel's own ability to deliver

### **1.3 Terms of Reference of Evaluation Report**

The terms of references for this Evaluation Report are to evaluate:

- a) The nature of services provided and to whom
- b) The performance of each of the three elements of the Sector Skills Initiative against their stated objectives
- c) The effectiveness of the approach adopted to training and learning in the sector
- d) The effectiveness of The Wheel as programme implementer and deliverer in supporting and managing the programme

The longer-term question that this evaluation will contribute to addressing is that of the overall effectiveness of the Sector Skills Initiative as a model for the delivery of training in the voluntary and community sector.

In addressing these terms of reference the evaluation plan was to complete a final report by the end of August 2007. As the programme developed (see below), it became clear that an Interim Report providing initial feedback on the progress of the programme would be highly beneficial in terms of keeping all stakeholders informed. Consequently, an Interim Report was completed in May 2007 and this Final Report submitted in August 2007.

### **1.4 Scope of the Evaluation**

The timeframe covered by the Final Evaluation Report is from September 2005 to June 2007. The focus is on the actual implementation period, i.e. October 2006 to June 2007, but also includes a review of the programme set-up phase, i.e. from September 2005 to September 2006.

In addition to the given terms of reference above, following a project management meeting with The Wheel, it became clear that a section making the link between the Sector Skills initiative performance and broader national policy objectives in social and economic policy, specifically areas such as training, learning, social inclusion and employment would be helpful from a stakeholders perspective. Consequently a section was added to address this requirement.

The evaluation team was clear from the outset that the evaluation would necessarily be



focused on programme implementation - inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact on participants and associated organisations. Consequently sectoral impact would be more difficult to assess requiring more time to elapse and a different evaluation emphasis. Therefore it is anticipated that a further phase of evaluation will allow for a more detailed focus on the impact of training received as it relates to the community and voluntary sector.

## 1.5 Defining the Evaluation

In July 2006, The Wheel published its *Tender Requirements for the Evaluation of the Sector Skills Programme*. In response to this request, the evaluators submitted a detailed proposal outlining a response to the design of the evaluation. Following a number of meetings with The Wheel to refine this design a final agreement was reached between the parties, and the evaluation approach and methodology document dated 8 December 2006 was submitted and subsequently approved by The Wheel.

## 1.6 Layout of Report

The layout of this report is as follows:

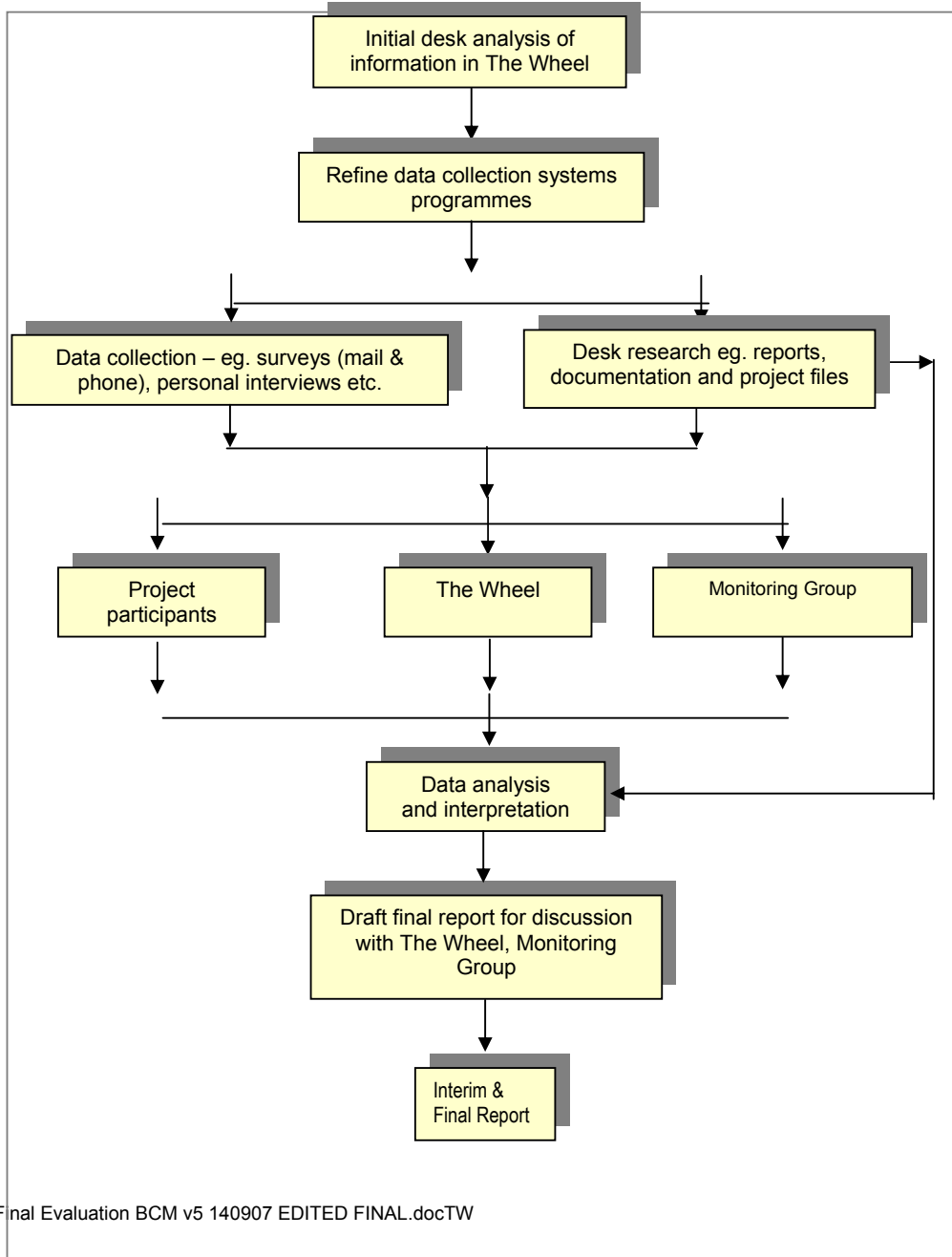
<b>Section 1 - Introduction</b>	
<b>Chapter 1</b>	This chapter contains the background to the programme, terms of reference for the evaluation and the layout of the report
<b>Chapter 2</b>	Outlines the methodology used by the evaluation team
<b>Chapter 3</b>	Provides the Economic and Social Context for the Sector Skills Initiative
<b>Section 2 - Findings</b>	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	Stronger Leaders Programme – findings and evaluation
<b>Chapter 5</b>	Recommendations relating to the Stronger Leaders Programme
<b>Chapter 6</b>	Training Links Programme – findings and evaluation
<b>Chapter 7</b>	Recommendations relating to the Training Links Programme
<b>Chapter 8</b>	Learningpoint.ie – findings and evaluation
<b>Chapter 9</b>	Recommendations relating to the Learningpoint.ie website
<b>Chapter 10</b>	Contains findings relating to the project management and overall delivery of the Sector Skills initiative by The Wheel
<b>Chapter 11</b>	Recommendations relating to the project management
<b>Section 3 - Conclusions</b>	
<b>Chapter 11</b>	Contains Overarching Conclusions and Recommendations
<b>Section 4 - Appendices</b>	
<b>A1 – A4</b>	Appendices relating to Stronger Leaders programme
<b>A5</b>	Reports of each of the eleven Training Links networks

## SECTION 1 - CHAPTER 2

### 2. SCOPE OF EVALUATION

#### 2.1 Evaluation Overview

The evaluation methodology adopted by the evaluation team was a formative approach, with the evaluators working alongside the project from January 2007 combined with a summative approach at the point of reporting on progress including both the Interim Report stage in May 2007 and the Final Report stage in August 2007. The overall evaluation methodology is outlined in Figure 1 below and explained in the following sections.



Following agreement of the evaluator's approach and methodology response in December 2006, the evaluators commenced the evaluation process in mid-January 2007. In the time period from mid-January 2007 to end of July 2007, the evaluators have worked with a variety of data collection processes, as follows:

### **Stronger Leaders**

- Attendance at focus group meetings
- Attendance at Board seminars
- Meetings with representatives of The Wheel & Carmichael Centre
- Review of primary data collected such as application forms
- Review of secondary data collected by the training provider
- Focus group meetings with participants and board members
- Interviews with selected participants and board members
- Review of Stronger Leaders website

### **Training Links Programme**

- Attendance at support series events
- Meetings with representatives of The Wheel
- Review of primary data collected
- Review of secondary data collected
- Interviews with Network Coordinators
- Network Applications
- Network Reports – October 2006, January 2007, March 2006, June 2007
- Independent/external Network Evaluation Reports June 2007
- Financial Data provided by The Wheel's Training Fund Manager

### **LearningPoint.ie**

- Meetings with representatives of The Wheel
- Review of primary data collected by The Wheel
- Regular visits to the website

### **Sector Skills Initiative Project Management**

- Meeting with Wheel Monitoring Group
- Meetings with representatives of The Wheel
- Questionnaire for Wheel Chief Executive and Training Fund Manager

## **2.2 Evaluation Framework & Methodology**

The evaluators met independently on a regular basis to review materials, and plan and schedule the evaluation process. The evaluators also met with members of The Wheel, and, in the case of Stronger Leaders, the Carmichael Centre, to review progress and provide an opportunity or input into the evaluation process as it evolved and was implemented.

As an outcome of the formative evaluation methodology adopted, a number of gaps and changes in data collection were identified and addressed along the way. Selected examples are:

Evaluation of Board Seminars, whilst an important element of the Stronger Leaders programme, had no agreed approach for evaluation. The evaluation team extended their methodology to include a questionnaire for those attending board seminars, a focus group session for board seminar participants and a small number of follow up interviews.

Monitoring tools for Training Links Programme were developed by the evaluation team as follows:

Network Report Templates – March 2007 and June 2007

Financial and Activity Report Temple for The Wheel for June 2007 review

Due to the size of the three programme elements the evaluation team split some of the research and analysis activity in order to focus on specific programmes. Consequently, the sections on the Stronger Leaders programme and learningpoint.ie were compiled by Susan Coughlan who has particular experience in the community and voluntary sector and training, while the section on Training Links was compiled by Bridie Corrigan Matthews who has specific expertise in the Skillnets model upon which the Training Links Programme was based.

## **2.3 Stronger Leaders Programme**

The Evaluators met with The Wheel Training Funds Manager and CEO, as well as the Stronger Leaders programme Director and evaluation advisor for the Carmichael Centre, to review and agree details on the evaluation methodology for each element of the Stronger Leaders programme. The methodology that has been applied by the Carmichael Centre for the Stronger Leaders programme relates to levels 1 and 2 of the Kirkpatrick Model of Evaluation. The methodology that has been applied by the Sector Skills evaluators relates to levels 1-3 of the Kirkpatrick Model of Evaluation, as follows:

Level 1	Reaction	<b>Trainee satisfaction</b> i.e. did participants like the course?
Level 2	Learning	<b>Change in attitudes, knowledge &amp; skills</b> i.e. how much did the participants learn? Was it relevant?
Level 3	Behaviour	<b>Performance in the workplace</b> i.e. how well did participants apply the learning? Has the behaviour in the workforce changed?

The evaluation methodology, applied by the Sector Skills evaluators, is detailed below:

Stronger Leaders	Methodology		Level 3
	Level 1	Level 2	
Participant Training	*End of module evaluation sheets	*Before & after competency self-assessment sheet	Face to face interviews with 4 participants
	*End of course evaluation sheets	Evaluator monitoring of interactive website Regular contact with Course Director Mid-term review conducted with participants by Course Director	Phone interview with board representatives Focus group discussion Review of Feedback from participant organised meeting 3 months after programme end
Board seminars	Written feedback; Reflection from Course Director; Evaluator attendance at 1 Board seminar	Regular contact with Course Director Board questionnaire	Regular contact with Course Director Focus group discussion

\* denotes elements of evaluation conducted directly by The Carmichael Centre

## 2.4 Training Links Programme

With regard to the evaluation of the Training Links Programme, in consultation with an external consultant, The Wheel has adopted the first 3 levels of the Kirkpatrick Model of evaluation, as detailed below:

Level 1	Reaction	<b>Trainee satisfaction</b> i.e. did participants like the course?
Level 2	Learning	<b>Change in attitudes, knowledge &amp; skills</b> i.e. how much did the participants learn? Was it relevant?
Level 3	Behaviour	<b>Performance in the workplace</b> i.e. how well did participants apply the learning in the workplace? Has the behaviour in the workplace changed?

The evaluation methodology adopted for the Training Links Programme is detailed below:

<b>Training Links</b>	<b>Methodology Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2 &amp; 3</b>
Participating Networks	Training day participant evaluation sheets	Supervisor/trainee post training evaluation sheet
Sources of Information to evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development phase reports (Oct 06)</li> <li>• Implementation phase network reports (Jan 07)</li> <li>• Interim Network Performance Report Template (30 March 2007)</li> <li>• Final Network Performance Report Template (July 2007)</li> </ul>	Regular contact with relevant Wheel personnel  Survey each of the training network co-ordinators  Review of available documentation
Interim Report	Review of October 2006 Network Reports Review of January 2006 Network Reports Review of March 2007 Network Reports	
Final Report	Web research on Government and National Reporting Bodies – making the link to Sector Skills Initiative Review of Network Applications Documents Review of October 2006 Network Reports Review of January 2007 Network Reports Review of March 2007 Network Reports Review of June 2007 Network Reports Review of Network Evaluator Reports Review of The Wheel Sector Skills Report'	

#### **2.4.1 Primary Data Collection**

The primary data collection process was based on a combination of personal interviews with The Wheel and Network Managers, phone interviews with Network Coordinators and case studies. The following table shows that information was collated by the evaluators for each network:

Desk research of applications, network reports for the periods October 2006, January 2007, March 2007 and June 2007, and independent network evaluator reports for the period August 2006 – June 2007,

Ref	Area	Details
1.	Personal details	The project, details of the network
2.	The project	Activities undertaken, stages in its development, stage reached
3.	Organisational-led training	Participants understanding of organisational-led as a concept, how networks have filled that need
4.	Participation in training	First planned training process, relevance to meet business needs, evaluation, quality assessment
5.	Training	TNA – process involved in identification, design and delivery
6.	Certification	No. of modules certified, importance of certification
7.	Achievements	Objectives, obstacles,
8.	The network	Advantages, disadvantages such as costs savings, partnership, additional spending, training delivery, changes in attitudes
9.	Attitudes & reactions to networks	Challenges faced by network during start-up, implementation and delivery, collaboration, management, ownership, intellectual property rights, existing or new networking & collaborations
10.	Impacts	Would the training have been done anyway? impact (short, medium, long term)

#### 2.4.2 Secondary Data Collection

The desk research collected the following information for each network:

Ref.	Description
1.	No. of networks involved
2.	No. of organisations involved
3.	Participation by sector
4.	No. of people benefiting from training
5.	Participation by occupation – CEO, managers, supervisors, specialists, administration, etc
6.	No. of new training courses designed/developed
7.	Grants awarded to networks
8.	Total amounts invested

## 2.5 Learningpoint.ie

The evaluation of the learningpoint.ie facility consisted of an online survey for users and another for Training Providers, statistical data gathered from the site outsourced to a facility called surveymonkey.com, qualitative data gathered from feedback provided by The Wheel, the Monitoring Group and independent research undertaken of the site by the evaluation team.

Learning point.ie	Quantitative data (monthly) aggregated	Online qualitative data from users	Other
Qualitative data from interviews and analysis of info into trends	No of new and returning visitor types (including percentage returning) mapped on a monthly basis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage breakdown of visitors between training providers and training seekers</li> <li>• Average number of pages viewed per visit charted on a monthly basis</li> <li>• Average number of visits per day on a monthly basis.</li> <li>• No of training providers on the site by month of operation</li> <li>• Breakdown of those accessing site on a county by county basis</li> </ul>	Online survey to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation for using resource</li> <li>• Access route</li> <li>• Suggested improvements</li> <li>• Additional comments</li> </ul> Ratings regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breadth of info</li> <li>• Usability</li> <li>• Look and feel</li> <li>• Relevance</li> </ul>	Regular contact with The Wheel <i>Training Funds Manager &amp; Training Information officer</i>  Data from The Wheel on contact with Training Providers and their assessment of impact of learningpoint.ie on their bookings completed in June 07  Sample site searches to find training solutions to particular questions



## SECTION 1 – CHAPTER 3

### 3. Economic and Social Context

#### 3.1 The Sector Skills Initiative

The evaluator team conducted research on current Government policy objectives in relation to social and economic development. The purpose of this research was to establish the wider context for the role, value and contribution of the Sector Skills initiative, in the context of economic and social performance in Ireland, to enable stakeholders with a different focus to understand and appreciate the relevance of the Sector Skills Initiative outside of the immediate community and voluntary sector perspective.

Research consulted includes:

- National Development Plan 2007 – 2013. *Transforming Ireland. A Better Quality of Life for All*
- Combat Poverty Agency Report, June 2007
- Poverty Today, Spring 2007
- The Wheel, Sector Skills Report (2005)
- Leadership Initiative, Future Leaders Evaluation Report, (2007)
- Skillnets Limited, Training Networks Programme, Report 2005
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Development; *National Workplace Strategy, 2007*
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Development, *Regulatory Impact Analysis, Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 2007*
- FAS Labour Market Report, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2007
- Enterprise Ireland Strategy; *Transforming Irish Industry, 2005-2007*
- The *Towards 2016*, National Agreement

The evaluator team concluded that although traditionally the community and voluntary sector had not been viewed as a contributor to enterprise, it is a significant employer (and therefore a

contributor to the economy) and faces the same business pressures and issues as the more traditional SME sector, as well as being a crucial vehicle for helping Government to meet its social inclusion targets.

### **3.2 The Workplace: Meeting Employment Challenges**

**Employees in the voluntary and community sectors are included in the national statistics of the country. Therefore, all of the issues and responsibilities of the employer and workplace apply to organisations operating in the voluntary and community sector.**

The voluntary and community sector is a significant employer. There are over 19,000 organisations in the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, employing over 40,000 full-time and 23,000 part-time staff in 2004 - with volunteers providing the work of a further 31,000 full-time-equivalents.<sup>1</sup>

In 2004 the number of people in paid employment in the community and voluntary sector was equivalent to:<sup>2</sup>

- 50% of those employed in Public Administration and Defence
- 43% of all those in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
- 43% of all those working in Hotel and Restaurants
- 42% of those in Transport, Storage and Communications
- 20% of all workers in the Construction sector
- 9.7% of all those employed in Industry

The sector faces the same employment and legislative challenges as private sector enterprises, and its member organisations are similar in their experiences to the SME sector. Consequently, from a skill-building perspective, whatever supports are available to the private SME sector to meet these business challenges have equal applicability in the community and voluntary sector, which has to address the same business challenges.

### **3.3 Employment, Poverty and Equality**

Employment has proven to be a major factor for people exiting out of poverty and also influences quality of life and social well-being. People of working age who are outside the labour market are particularly vulnerable to poverty or social exclusion. The Sector Skills Initiative has created an environment to enable ongoing training and development. Although

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1 The Hidden Landscape: First Forays into Mapping Nonprofit Organisations in Ireland. Centre for Non Profit Management, Trinity College Dublin, 2006.

2 The community and voluntary sector in Ireland: An overview' Equal at Work project (2007)

its brief was not to specifically focus on groups with low skills and literacy issues, the evaluation team has identified that in its contact with the Training Networks these groups have been included in the training made available under the Sector Skills initiative. Specific data on these categories was not collected, but there is no particular reason why this could not be done.

The rapid pace of economic and social change in Ireland is impacting on the workplace and creating new challenges in the areas of employment rights and responsibilities and policy within the workplace. The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment has acknowledged that the changed labour market environment has also given rise to new concerns about workplace relationships, including issues such as family friendly policies, bullying and racism.<sup>1</sup>

These changes and challenges have been highlighted by a significant increase in employment-related discrimination cases. The number of employment cases referred under the race ground to the Equality Tribunal increased from 43 in 2002 to 85 in 2003 which is a 98% increase.<sup>2</sup> Thirty percent of the case files of the Equality Authority related to the race ground and 2% to the Traveller ground under the Employment Equality Act.

The National Action Plan Against Racism 2005-2008 states that employment training and employment services play a key role in promoting social inclusion in Ireland and help to support the integration of the most marginalised minority ethnic groups into the labour market. The Plan will seek to act as a catalyst for a number of initiatives in the area of employment services and training<sup>3</sup>.

**The Sector Skills initiative works to ensure economic inclusion and equality of opportunity, through a focus on employment, the workplace and poverty.**

The Sector Skills initiative presents an important opportunity for the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment to engage with that part of the labour force and SME sector covered by the community and voluntary sector in a way that is appropriate and beneficial.

This can enable, at a national level, the dissemination and promotion of good practice in governance, employment rights and responsibilities which are part of the Department's remit. In so doing, the Department will take a lead role in recognising and valuing the important and growing role the community and voluntary sector performs not solely from a social perspective — which is the viewpoint more usually taken, and that championed by the policies of the

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, (2003). Statement of Strategy 2003-2005, p42

<sup>2</sup> [www.equalitytribunal.ie](http://www.equalitytribunal.ie)

<sup>3</sup> Planning for Diversity, The National Action Plan Against Racism, 2005-2008, Department of Justice Equality & Law Reform, pg 95.

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs — but increasingly from an economic perspective as well.

### 3.4 Developing Human Capital

“The vision of organisations involved in the application process was to develop local capacity, promote interagency work, combine/co-ordinate resources, and create and distribute training material.”

#### **Southside Community Training Network, Training Links Programme**

In recent years, social capital has been identified as an integral component of social and economic development on both micro and macro levels. Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, networks and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society’s social interactions. These relationships allow people to mobilise greater resources and achieve common goals and as such form the bedrock of the community and voluntary sector. In this context, human capital – i.e. the stock of skills and know-how brought about by education and training is now recognised as a major focus of organisation’s efforts to maintain and improve performance.

Traditionally, in the business context, training gives people the skills to produce more at a lower cost. This creates competitiveness, which in turn generates additional demand. Extra demand stimulates greater output and employment. And the extra output produced to satisfy this demand yields higher living standards by increasing wages and profits.

In the community and voluntary context, the impact of training is likely to be equally significant. It results in:

- Reduced marginalisation and social exclusion
- Increased participation
- Increased skills specific to sector or sub-sector needs
- Improved performance, which in turn improves social networking and social capital gains
- Increased employability

For example, the output of the **Training Links Programme** is to:

- Mobilise community groups to participate in mainstream local development
- Tackle disadvantage by delivering locally tailored learning solutions
- Increase the number of people able to engage in organisational and employment opportunities. Refer to Training Links Case Studies Chapter 6 for more information.

For example the output of the **Stronger Leaders Programme** is to:

- Increase leadership capacity
- Improve organisational effectiveness to meet social needs
- Improve standards of governance and ultimately service delivery or advocacy work

For example the output of Learningpoint.ie is to:

- Increase access to information on training opportunities

### 3.5 Social Exclusion Priorities

The Government's National Development Plan 2007 – 2013<sup>1</sup> highlights a number of goals for social inclusion. These are listed below with examples from the Sector Skills initiative provided.

#### 3.5.1 People of Working Age

*Introduce an active case management approach that will support those on long term social welfare into education, training and employment.* The target is to support 50,000 such people, including **lone parents** and the long term unemployed, with an overall aim of reducing by 20% the number of those whose total income is derived from long term social welfare payments by 2016.

**e.g. One Parent Exchange and Network, Case Study; Stronger Leader  
Participant organisations: Volunteer Centres Ireland, Suicide or Survive,  
Northside Partnership**

#### 3.5.2 Older People

**Older people** are recognised as one of the main groups who may be at risk of social exclusion. The Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016* sets out a vision of how older people can maintain their health and well-being, as well as live active and full lives, in an independent way in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

Priorities that will support the vision for older people include social housing, essential house repairs and improvements in primary health care facilities. Other measures include the Rural Transport Initiative education and training, and support through community organisations to improve the security of their older members

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<sup>1</sup> National Development Plan 2007-2013, Transforming Ireland *A Better Quality of Life for All*.  
www.ndp.ie

**e.g. Senior Help Line, Case Study; Stronger Leader Participant organisations: Limerick Brothers of Charity, and COPE**

### **3.5.3 People with Disabilities**

*Increase the employment opportunities and participation of **people with disabilities** who do not have a difficulty in retaining a job.* The immediate objective is to have an additional 7,000 of that cohort in employment by 2010. The longer term target is to raise the employment rate of people with disabilities from 37% to 45% by 2016, as measured by the Quarterly National Household Survey. The overall participation rate in education, training and employment will be increased to 50% by 2016.

**e.g. Community Transport Training Network Case Study; Stronger Leader Participant organisations: Alzheimer Society of Ireland, National Association for Deaf People, Irish Deaf Society**

### **3.5.4 Integration of Migrants and Foreign Nationals**

Develop a strategy aimed at achieving the integration of newcomers in our society. As an initial action, resources for the provision of 550 teachers for language supports in the education sector will be provided by 2009 and access to other public services through translation of information and supports will be improved.

**e.g. Community Television Training Network, Southside Community Partnership, Case Studies; Stronger Leader Participant organisations: Northside Partnership, Canal Communities Partnership**

The current National Development Plan also includes important EU, national and private investments in regional development, economic and social infrastructure, employment and human resources, equality and promoting social inclusion. Most of the emphasis on equality in the present NDP is toward equality for women, gender mainstreaming, childcare, education and training for educationally disadvantaged and specifically marginalised groups. The Training Links and Stronger Leaders programmes demonstrated positive links toward this social justice and equality agenda, through the following examples:

Equality for Women – AONTAS: Lobbying for Community and Adult Education Network Case Study – broadly addressing equality issues for women through access to community education

Childcare – OPEN: One Parent Exchange Network Case Study – broadly addressing childcare and single parent policy issues

Education and training for marginalised groups – all Training Links Programme Networks impacted positively on this area

### **3.6 Sector Skills Initiative Addressing Social Exclusion**

The central theme of this priority area for the economy is combating poverty and social exclusion. Poverty and social exclusion are defined as:

“People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society”.

**National Development Plan 2007-2013**

The **strong performance of the Irish economy** over the last decade has been an important factor in combating poverty and social exclusion. Firstly, the enormous growth in employment has achieved the following:

- A significant reduction in unemployment
- Facilitated increased participation of women in the labour force
- Reversed the previous phenomenon of involuntary emigration
- Enabled a real increase in standards of living

Accessing and retaining employment has proved to be one of the most **important routes out of poverty**. Success in this area has been complemented by the introduction of the minimum wage, the reform of the tax system and the greater flexibility of the social welfare system aimed at supporting people into employment.

One of the primary outputs of the Training Links Programme has been increasing skills and employability of people in the sector. Given the recognised importance of **employment** as the key factor in **people exiting poverty** as stated above, the impact of the **Training Links Programme** on the lives and opportunities of those who are in **low skilled jobs** and those who are **furthest from the labour market** can be clearly demonstrated in the results of the networks **activities (e.g. One Parent Exchange & Network, Southside Community**

**Training Network, Community Television Training Network, Cork Community Music Network**). These activities make a real and decisive impact on people, their families and their children who are living in poverty and/or in socially disadvantaged environments.

In similar vein, the primary outcome of the **Stronger Leaders** programme has been the demonstrated increase in the leadership skills and governance capacity of chief executives, senior managers and Board members operating in the sector. Likewise, **Learningpoint.ie** has demonstrated that it has the capacity to be an effective vehicle for linking people to training and development opportunities where previously no such mechanism existed.

### 3.7 Summary

In the last decade in particular the role and recognition of community and voluntary organisations has increased in importance as part of local and national development. At local level, the representation and active participation of the community (and of specific groups within it) has been a central feature of the 'partnership' response to social exclusion. Local community development groups or projects have been formally recognised (especially through the Community Development Programme) as vehicles for empowerment and capacity-building in disadvantaged areas.

At national level, the sector has also increasingly gained recognition through its representation on the National Economic and Social Council, the National Economic and Social Forum, national Social Partnership, and all its related bodies. The Towards 2016 national agreement calls for a greater role for the community and voluntary sector, and also notes that Ireland's future development rests on the recently accepted assumption from Government and the social partners, that social and economic development are two sides of the same coin. It's not a case of the former happening once we've secured the latter. It's now a case of the latter cannot further progress without addressing the former. That step-change in Government policy requires a fresh look at all the components of policy implementation. The days of viewing the community and voluntary sector as a 'vocational sector' are gone. If first class professional public services are to be delivered by the sector, then it cannot be refused access to the same type of business supports that the rest of the SME sector in the private sector have access to.

The Sector Skills initiative has demonstrated that it has the capacity to address the key training needs of the community and voluntary sector in a strategic manner. It can be further focused to advance Government policy with regard to skills-building in the Irish workforce in relation to specific sub-groups of the labour force in the community and voluntary sector and its constituent parts.



## **SECTION 2 – CHAPTER 4**

### **4. Stronger Leaders Programme Activities and Findings**

#### **4.1 Programme Background**

The Stronger Leaders programme is a tailored professional development course for leaders of community & voluntary organisations subcontracted by The Wheel to the Carmichael Centre for delivery. The Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups is a centre for small national voluntary organisations and a resource for the voluntary and community sector set up in 1988 to nurture and support the development of organisations in this target group. The body of knowledge gained in relation to the needs of these groups is considerable, through organisational support on a consultancy basis and the provision of training courses.

The Stronger Leaders programme was then designed and delivered by the Carmichael Centre in close collaboration with The Wheel. It was based on a model called the 'Future Leaders' Programme<sup>1</sup>.

#### **4.2 Programme Objectives**

The objective of the Stronger Leaders programme was to create a specialist, affordable, high-quality leadership training programme specifically targeting CEOs and senior managers in the community & voluntary sector to provide them with the skills, knowledge, structure and support to steer and develop their organisations successfully in the current environment.

A further objective was to lay the groundwork for Board discussion and implementation of change within participating organisations by providing development opportunities, e.g. Board seminars for voluntary members of Boards of participating organisations.

At the end of the Stronger Leaders Programme it was envisaged that participant CEOs will be able to:

- Understand their leadership style and develop strategies to capitalise on strengths and overcome weaknesses
- Lead teams effectively and build strong relationships internal & external to the organisation

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<sup>1</sup> This was developed through the Leadership Initiative, a partnership involving IBEC, ICTU, International Women's Forum Ireland, The Sia Group, The Wheel and the public service and was intended to provide leadership training for women managers.

Longer-term objectives for the Stronger Leaders programme were to build a community of interest among the leaders of the sector on whom the future health and viability of the sector depends.

The expected outcomes of the programme over the longer term were:

- improved linkages between community and voluntary organisations
- stronger leadership in the community and voluntary sector
- awareness within the sector of the relevance, importance and availability of a tailored programme of professional development for leaders

### 4.3 Programme Structure & Content

The Stronger Leaders programme was divided into four modules and delivered in one, two and three day units over a six-month period. Each module comprised three stages (see figure below):

***Pre-Module work – E-learning modules (Knowledge-based learning)***

Module 1	Leadership and Self-Development	Objectives: Increase participants' self-knowledge and understanding, enabling them to recognise their personal value system and leadership style
Module 2	External Environment and Strategy Development	Objectives: Enable participants to develop organisational strategy in the context of the external environment
Module 3	Organisation Development	Objectives: Develop participants skills in creating organisational structure and governance needed to underpin implementation of strategy
Module 4	Team Development	Objectives: Enable participants to focus staff on organisational mission and optimise team performance

***Continuous Professional Development, Peer learning groups and CEO mentoring***

Pre-module work focused on developing knowledge of the module content. The first three course days and the last day were on a residential basis (three nights in total).

Detail of the Stronger Leaders trainers is included in Appendix 1. Programme dates are included in Appendix 2.

In addition to the four modules, the Stronger Leaders programme involved Board seminars for voluntary members of participating organisation's Boards; peer learning groups; mentoring; invited guest speakers on themes relevant to each of the module themes; and a learning support website. Each of these elements is briefly described below:

Board Seminars - Four two-hour seminars, consisting of input and Q&A, to expose Board members to relevant content from the Stronger Leaders programme and focus on the Board role within that content, including opportunities to network with Board members from other organisations and question & answer sessions.

Guest Speakers - A guest speaker, either an expert from within the sector or a CEO with specialist knowledge, was programmed one per module at the end of the day. (See Appendix 3 for list of guest speakers).

Peer Learning Groups - Participants were assigned to a Peer Learning Group of four members to provide peer support in the execution of post-module activity and a confidential setting to discuss sensitive matters.

Mentoring Programme - Participants were introduced to the concept of mentoring and encouraged to identify and approach potential mentors independently.

E-learning - The programme was supported by a website intended to support preparation for modules, administration and group communication.

#### 4.4 Stronger Leaders Programme Data

Thirty-two CEOs and senior managers completed the course that was run in two blocks (Block A and Block B), each with 16 participants, the first between October and April 2006/2007 and the second between November and May 2006/2007.

##### 4.4.1 Participants and Sector

Participants	Sector	Number
Canal Communities Partnership Macro Building Management Limited Blanchardstown Area Partnership Northside Partnership Tuam Community Development Resource Hospital Family Resource Centre Darndale Belcamp Village Centre	Community Development	7
Alzheimer Society of Ireland National Association for Deaf People Irish Deaf Society Open Door Trust St. Joseph's Foundation Limerick Brothers of Charity	Disability	6

Participants	Sector	Number
Forbairt Naionrai Teo Gaelscoileanna Teoranta The Blue Box Creative Learning Centre Francis Street Community Education Centre	Education	4
Irish Red Cross Society Meningitis Trust Ltd Debra Ireland Cappagh Hospital Trust	Medical	4
Dara Residential Services Cope	Homeless	2
Comhlamh	Development Aid/ Development Education	1
Ballymun Community Law Centre	Legal Aid	1
One Family	Family Support	1
Suicide or Survive	Mental Health	1
Glencree Centre For Reconciliation	Reconciliation	1
Limerick Rape Crisis Centre	Sexual Violence	1
Volunteer Centres Ireland	Volunteering	1
Irish Association of Young People in Care Smyly Trust Homes	Youth	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

Of the participants four were senior managers and the remaining 28 were holding the most senior post in their organisation usually named Chief Executive or occasionally as Development Officer.

#### 4.4.2 Attendance

The attendance levels for both the training course and the board seminar elements of Stronger Leaders were very positive.

Event	Number
Course Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 85% (27 participants) attended 100% of the programme</li> <li>○ 12% attended (4 participants) 11 days out of a total 12 days training</li> <li>○ 1 participant attended 10 out of 12 days training</li> </ul>
Board Seminars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 122 board representatives attended the board seminar series giving an average attendance of 15.</li> <li>○ 30 out of 32 participating organisations attended at least one board seminar and 16 out of 32 attended 3 or more.</li> <li>○ 2 participating organisations attended no board seminars</li> </ul>

#### 4.4.3 Regional Spread

Breakdown by regional distribution

Region	Number
Dublin Of which 16 are National Organisations And 9 are area specific	25
West - Clare, Limerick x 3, Tuam, Galway,	6
East - Wicklow,	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

#### 4.5 Overview of the Learning Gained by Participants

100% of participants reported a very significant growth in their knowledge and understanding of the themes and issues dealt with in the Stronger Leaders programme. While the learning relating to governance issues was the most often cited by the participants, it is fair to say that all of the modules were mentioned as being important, effective or positive. Participants took most from those modules that were most relevant to their leadership and/or organisational issues at the time. A selection of participants' responses to the most significant learning or thing they got out of the course reflect this:

"Clarity on the role of board, role of CEO, a sense of place of our organisation in the community and voluntary sector, clarity on structures, policies, procedures and networks"

"A development towards maturity on so many facets of leadership"

"The importance of networking, creating relationships with other CEOs and networking with other not for profit organisations."

"The importance of me as a leader in setting, communicating and championing the organisation vision"

"Stronger Leaders flagged areas of competency and lack of competency for me"

Participants and their board members unanimously reported that the Stronger Leaders programme had a very powerful and positive impact on each of them individually. 100% of participants reported that the Stronger Leaders programme met their expectations. Many said their expectations were exceeded and most reported a significant number of unanticipated outcomes as well.

“My expectations were far exceeded -the course hit the mark exactly in terms of my needs”

Of the many positive aspects of the course that took the participants by surprise the most often cited relates to the support from the group. For example, 70% of participants in group B mentioned the huge levels of support from all participants as an unanticipated outcome.

“Didn’t expect the group to gel and work so well together”

Linked to this, between 40 and 50% of participants across both groups mentioned the realisation that many of their leadership problems and organisational concerns are shared by their peers and not unique to them.

“The reassurance for me as CEO that I am not alone in my experiences of my role and its inherent difficulties was very important”

Both groups mentioned their increasing awareness of the importance of a programme like Stronger Leaders to support the upskilling and development of the community and voluntary sector.

The course raised participant’s own expectations of themselves and the standards they themselves apply. Overall participant confidence increased as they became more aware of what they are capable of and developed a more ‘can do’ attitude.

## **4.6 Key Impacts of the Stronger Leaders Programme**

### **4.6.1 Overall**

The quantitative data collected from all 32 participants is tabulated in appendix A4. In analysing both the quantitative and qualitative information collected by the evaluators, the key impacts that participants reported most frequently were:

- Participants’ existing skills have been reaffirmed
- Participants have increased confidence
- Participants are more self-aware as leaders
- Participants have new and improved knowledge and skills to draw on
- Participants have increased competencies
- Participants have improved networks and are less isolated
- Participants are clear about and in touch with their leadership ability

- Participants are very clear about the differences between leadership and management and are empowered to be leaders
- Participants are more strategic
- Participants are motivated and energised to make a difference in their organisations

#### **4.6.1.1 Confidence**

Confidence is an issue in the community and voluntary sector. CEOs, board members and supporting agencies are all aware of this fact. Developing the confidence of leadership in the community and voluntary sector is key to making a lasting impact on the sector's continued growth and professionalism.

“Issue of alienation, isolation and lack of worthiness for CEOs are very common in the community and voluntary sector. We've learned that what we do instinctively is right and that's given us confidence.”

“The course has given us the tools to achieve the blue sky vision, the belief that if you follow the paths e.g. planning, reflection, measuring and do the important things - you will succeed. It has taken the anxiety and mystery out of what it means to lead an organisation effectively”

Having participant existing skills, knowledge and competencies affirmed, reaffirmed and acknowledged is a critical component of building confidence in the individual and in the sector as a whole.

Participants recorded a growth in their level of confidence as a result of doing the course. They identified that with increased confidence, other benefits come particularly an openness to transformational change (“it changed my mindset”), to doing things differently, to feeling empowered to lead and to feeling less dependent on external circumstances:

“I'm personally more confident, professionally more effective and organisationally we are better structured with better prospects for future development”

Board members also noted the change in their CEOs confidence:

“I see more confidence in her. With regard to our strategic plan, she's got a good focus with rolling it out. She has good ideas and asks for help if she needs it” (vice-Chair)

#### **4.6.1.2 Self-Awareness**

The course impacted significantly on participant's self-awareness and the power and value of this often tended to surprise. One participant wisely indicated that this was not the part of the course that he enjoyed most but it was the part that made him think the most!

"I have a better understanding of my own personality type and how it influences how I operate and make decisions."

For those that had difficult situations to deal with in work or needed to work on this aspect of their leadership style this outcome was enormously beneficial but all participants reported that they felt they know and understand their strengths and their weaknesses better as a result of doing the course.

"Personally I am more aware of the things I was not doing e.g. appraisals and performance management and how I can now implement these, professionally I have gained support (by networking) and confidence (by sharing my experience). The organisation has gained on many levels - board development, team building, and strategic planning."

"I have greater awareness of my own personality and style of management and the skills I have gained to change some things"

#### **4.6.1.3 Knowledge and Skills**

Participants described their experience of the Stronger Leaders programme as a 'run through' or 'dip in' to leadership and management principles. Consequently feedback tended to focus more on learning relating to new knowledge and understanding than specific skills picked up. Having said this, those participants that were interviewed spoke about the Stronger Leaders programme as a resource they will continue to draw from in terms of developing their practical skills particularly in areas such as time management, team building, strategic planning, board effectiveness and communication.

"I'm glad that I did it. I haven't really implemented all that I learned yet but I will."

Participants reported a widening and deepening of their skills base and the increased confidence that comes with having a resource or 'tool-kit' to refer to when needed.



“Widened depth of skills and knowledge in fundraising, governance and industrial relations”

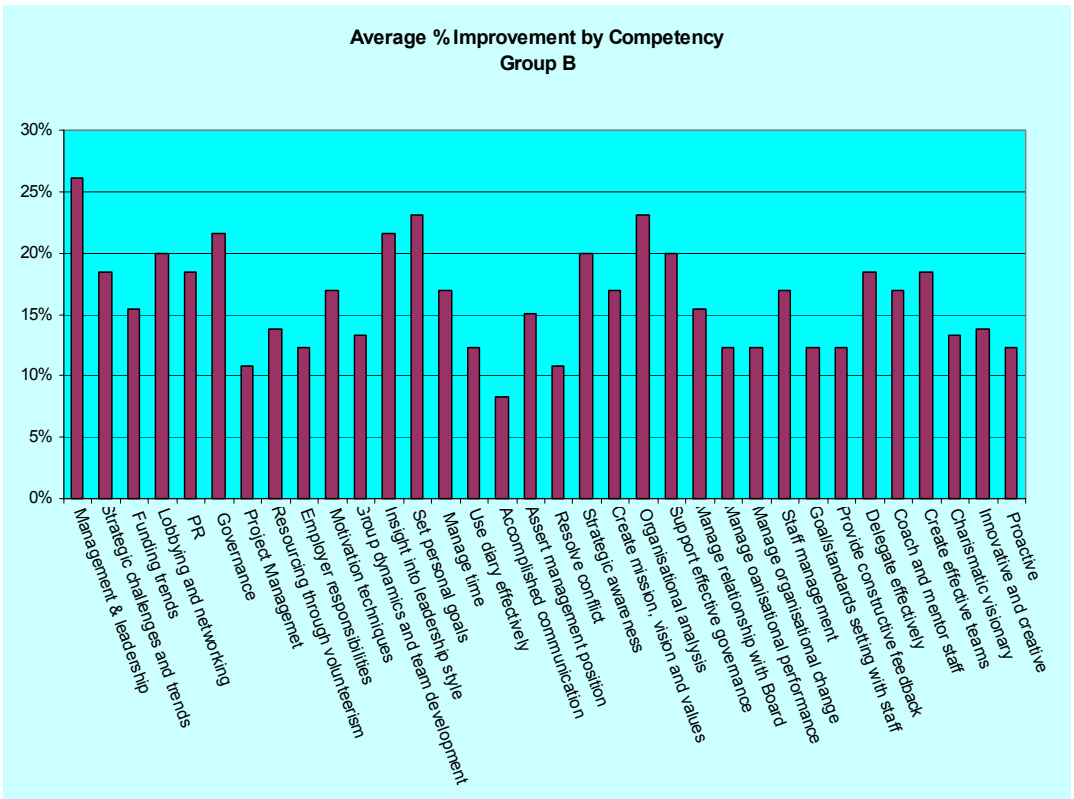
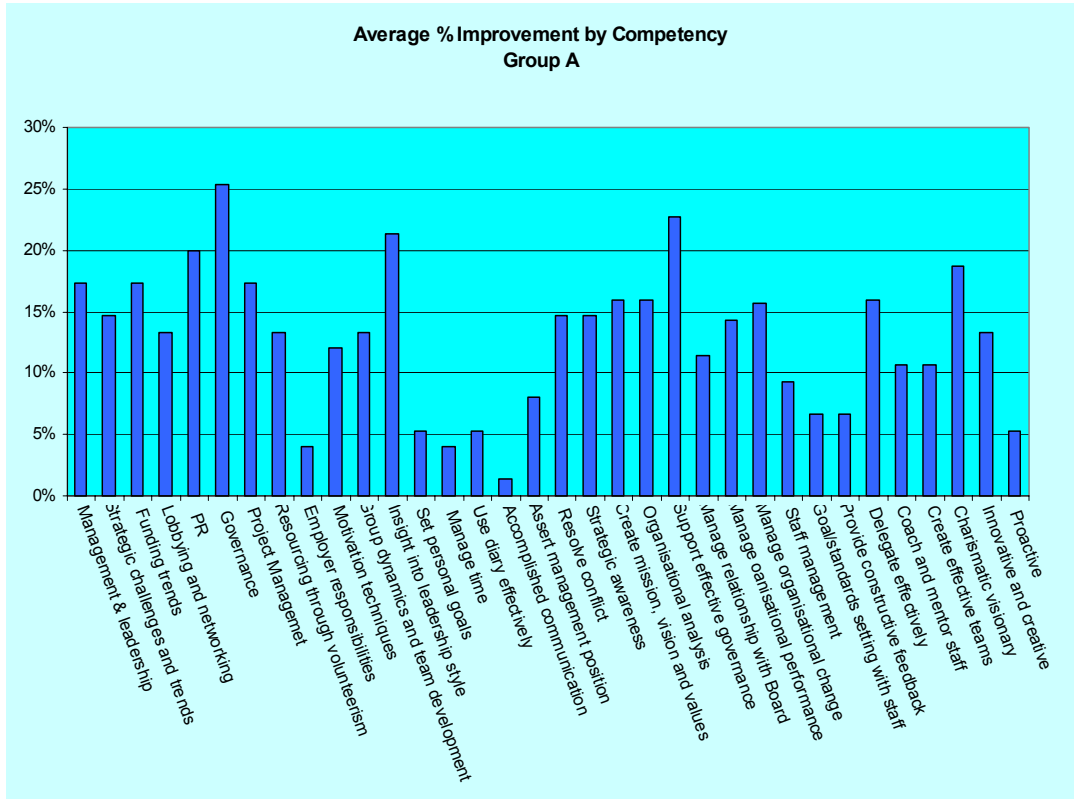
“Time management, difference between leading and managing, communications, project management and dealing with difficult behaviour”

“Improved skills in the area of HR, including annual goal setting and performance management.”

#### **4.6.1.4 Increased Competencies**

Aligned to the changes in participant’s skill sets, knowledge and understanding, participants clearly identified increased competencies across the whole range of those required for leadership. Competency questionnaires were filled in by participants in Block A and Block B before the course started and again between two and three months after course completion. See tables below.

Overall, Programme B participants indicated a more consistent rate of improvement across the competencies. This correlates with a higher satisfaction rating with the degree to which learning objectives were met in almost every module in the immediate reaction sheets. This would seem to indicate that adjustments made to the material and timing of the areas within modules for Programme B were successful.



The table below summarises the top five competencies (in terms of level of change from before to after the programme) across group A and group B. It shows a high level of consistency across both groups.

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Group A</b>	Governance	Support Effective Governance	Insight into leadership style	PR	Charismatic /visionary
<b>Group B</b>	Management & Leadership	Set Personal Goals Organisational Analysis	Insight into leadership style	Governance	Lobbying and Networking Strategic Awareness Support Effective Governance

Overall, Programme B participants indicated a more consistent rate of improvement across the competencies. Some drops in ratings across both groups e.g. areas like employment and HR, can be explained by participants over-rating themselves before the course due to a lack of understanding of the subject area. The competency ‘accomplished communication’ scored lowest across both programmes, suggesting more time should be allocated within the course structure for this area as it is an area of skills development requiring practice and feedback.

#### **4.6.1.5 Networking**

Participants are less isolated in their roles as leaders as they now have a network of other leaders across the voluntary sector they can network with. Participants also report seeing the need to break down barriers between the voluntary and private sectors.

“My current practice regarding networking has been challenged. This experience proves there is a better way of networking and I’m going to take that back to my organisation.”

“The Wheel is an inspirational organisation. I learned so much to benefit my organisation but the main lesson is that I am not alone in dealing with the challenges CEOs experience each day.”

#### **4.6.1.6 Leadership Ability**

Most participants found new clarity on the difference between managers and leaders, and this has empowered them to take up their leadership roles more assertively or decisively in their organisations.

“I have become a stronger leader and more efficient manager. I do more listening. I learnt skills and methods to become a leader and manager with strength.”

“I have had the opportunity to examine past work and explore how I can do things differently in the future. I feel I will be much better equipped to lead my organisation in the future.”

One participant decided to lead her strategic planning process rather than to hire consultants as she had done before.

“This course has allowed me to take ownership of the organisation and the job, ownership of my own leadership, of my relationship with the chair and with the board”

One of the areas that participants were most animated about in their feedback is the new-found clarity they have about the differences between leading and managing. It is fair to say participants were enlightened in this area.

“This course changed my thinking. Now I see myself as a leader rather than a manager and that will have remarkable effects at every level within my organisation. I’m being much more strategic.”

Feedback from chairs and/or CEOs makes a very strong connection to participants being more strategic upon completion of the programme. Participants, too, report this in very specific ways.

“More than anything else participating on the course induced a paradigm shift in my thinking. Practical implementation is up to me.”

“I used the approach to strategic planning on one department within our organisation and it went very well. Now I have the confidence to lead the whole organisation through a strategic planning process where previously I would have felt I had to rely on external consultants.”

#### **4.6.1.7 Motivation**

In general it seems the course has provided all participants with new motivation and energy for the work. They report feeling more focussed and capable and are eager to apply their new

learning within their organisations. Interviews took place up to three months after the course finished for some participants, but their enthusiasm and motivation for implementing change had not dimmed.

“I have been reinvigorated in my role as CEO.”

“It has given her more energy for the role. It was a really good opportunity for her.”  
(vice-chair)

#### **4.6.2 Board Seminars**

**72% of participants rated the board seminars as 80 - 100% successful in terms of meeting their objectives.**

**23% rated the board seminars as 70-40% successful**

The Board seminars were an innovative feature of the Stronger Leaders programme designed to support leadership, implementation of change and more professional practice within the community and voluntary sector. By giving Board members and particularly chairs an insight into the content covered by participants, the hope was that Board members would develop their skills as leaders, and that CEOs and senior managers would be well supported by their Board when they introduce change in the future. Feedback from participants and those Board members that attended the seminars were unanimous in their support for the concept having had very positive experiences of it. One Board seminar attendee noted that it was a major challenge for the tutors to get two days material into a two-hour presentation and felt their success in this was down to the quality of the tutors. Having said this, he expressed a preference for a workshop format in recognition of people’s different learning styles. While the opportunity for discussion and interaction would have obvious benefits in terms of quality of learning outcomes for Board members, it would require a greater investment of time, and this would have implications for the cost of the programme.

“Our Board reaction has been positive with much useful food for thought.” (Board member)

“I thought it was excellent.” (Board member)

#### **4.6.2.1 Impact of Board Seminars**

Feedback from Board members through questionnaires, a focus group and interviews with a selection of chairmen confirmed that the seminars' members provided Board members with:

- Insight into participant's learning
- New learning opportunity or to refresh existing learning in a new context
- Networking opportunity with Board members from other organisations
- An opportunity for people with different roles in the organisation to engage with new ideas and discuss/rethink how the organisation does its business
- Improved communication between Board and CEO
- Greater awareness of legal obligations
- Increased awareness about how to be responsible and professional Board members
- Increased confidence about implementing change relating to governance issues, Board meetings and Board development
- Greater clarity around the role and importance of boundaries
- Greater understanding of the role of the chair and the importance of it.
- Importance of monitoring Board performance and giving space for planning and visioning
- More awareness about managerial issues
- Creation of shared language and understanding between CEO and chair or senior manager and CEO.
- Laid the groundwork for implementation of change

#### **4.6.2.2 Feedback from Board Seminars**

In interviews with the chairs and/or CEOs of organisations involved in supporting participants on the programme they were extremely positive about the value of the seminars. One CEO, who attended all four, spoke about the unique opportunity the seminars provided for him and the chair to have a 'refresher course' and to discuss and rethink how they do business. He spoke about the fact that governance is a very popular topic, both in and outside of the sector at the moment, but 'most courses just talk about it, they don't tell you how to do it,' and clearly he found this extremely valuable.

"The Board seminars have reinforced, re-energised and refocused previous learning"  
(Board member)

"The sessions have certainly changed my mindset and the way I have looked at situations" (Board member)

It did prove difficult to get full attendance from all participating organisations at the seminars. All those that attended were very glad they did but felt it was communicated to them in too narrow a fashion, as the motivation to attend was pitched at the idea of supporting the organisation's participant on the course. The finding is that Board members found the seminars very rewarding from a personal point of view and would have tried to attend more seminars if they had been made more aware of this personal benefit in advance.

“From my own personal point of view I found the course hugely interesting, educational, dynamic, with very interesting participants and excellent tutors. If I'd been more aware of it I would have seen it more as an opportunity for me.” (Board member)

“My real sense is that it's influenced his thinking, enabled him to be more lateral and to approach strategic planning and goal setting in a broader sense. It's been really useful in how the dynamic of the senior management team works.” (Board member)

Two organisation chairs were so enthusiastic about what the Stronger Leaders programme has achieved that they expressed an interest in participating on the course themselves in future. Participants noted that the Board seminars benefited the whole organisation not just their Board members that attended.

#### **4.6.3 Peer Learning**

**31.5% of participants rated the peer learning groups as 80 - 100% successful in meeting objectives.**

**27.5 % rated the peer learning groups as moderately successful and 41% as unsuccessful**

This aspect of the course was its least successful feature, with only 50% of the peer learning groups functioning. There were two purposes to the peer-learning groups and, with the benefit of hindsight, these were somewhat conflicting. The first intention was to create prototypes of work teams that CEOs might encounter (hence the Carmichael Centre used participants' Myers Brigg's profiles to create the groups) and the second was to provide a learning support group for participants. Practical tasks, such as delivering a difficult message to a member of staff, developing a PR strategy or dealing with a conflict, were set and communicated via the e-learning website. The mid-term course review session revealed participants were not accessing the website and were largely unaware of the task aspect to the groups. Participants gave the following reasons from their experience of why the peer learning groups didn't always work:

- There was no need for them
- Unclear about their purpose
- Groups had no obvious things in common - work areas, similar problems etc.
- Geographic distance
- Group dynamic meant that people self-selected who they got peer support from
- Difficulties finding time and dealing with logistics in arranging to meet

The 50% of participants who did meet in peer learning groups found them useful but did not undertake the specified tasks. Those groups that did meet up to 3 times tended to be Dublin based and were focussed on using the group for support purposes.

#### 4.6.4 E-learning Website

**18% of participants rated the e-learning website as 80 - 100% successful in meeting objectives.**

**59% rated the e-learning website as moderately successful and 23% as unsuccessful**

The Stronger Leaders website was set up to support participant learning and communication. As a platform for communication and information exchange it is an excellent resource, but it was used very little by participants. It detailed information about course content, posted articles of interest to particular modules, and provided a message or discussion board for participant use. The Carmichael Centre acknowledges it needed to be more proactive to foster regular participant use of the website. Quite a few participants described themselves as technophobes and a significant proportion had never used discussion boards before, so they really needed to be inducted into using the website. As participants were hesitant, tutors and the Carmichael Centre reverted to providing photocopied handouts to participants rather than posting material to the website, thereby further undermining its use.

Participant's reasons for not using the site were mostly to do with time constraints, lack of familiarity with the internet and reluctance to communicate via the message board. Those that did visit the site found very little happening on it, so did not return.

#### 4.6.5 Mentoring

The intention of the programme was to introduce participants to the idea of mentoring and to assist interested participants to find a mentor. In the first instance, the input on mentoring was not effective and had to be supplemented by written information. This clearly needs to be revised for future Stronger Leaders programmes. Despite this, those participants who were



interviewed seemed to have a clear understanding of the mentoring concept and were keen to find themselves a mentor, but somewhat unsure as to how to go about it.

So much was going on for participants in terms of integrating new learning that it wasn't until weeks after the programme was over that they began to think seriously about identifying a mentor. The Carmichael Centre provided participants with details of consultants offering paid mentoring services and also offered to help find appropriate mentors for participants for whom payment was not an option. So far, none of the participants have availed of this offer. Participants interviewed felt they could only be clear about what they need from a mentor and what they are looking for in a mentor once they completed the programme.

There is an opportunity for the Carmichael Centre with The Wheel to establish mentoring as a practice within the sector and by so doing to support participant's continuous learning and development. In this context the Carmichael Centre will run an evening for alumni on the subject of mentoring in the Autumn 2007 as part of this programme. In a sense, the success of this element of the programme can only be judged after that event has taken place.

#### **4.6.7 Guest Speakers**

**58.5% of participants rated the guest speakers as 80 - 100% successful in meeting objectives.**

**31% rated the guest speakers element as moderately successful and 10.5% as unsuccessful**

Guest speakers were invited to speak to participants on particular topics as an additional element of input on the programme. While the idea was a good one and the speakers themselves were of a high quality, the timing didn't work from the participant's point of view, coming as they did at the end of a day's training. See appendices for full details.

The speakers were:

**Brian Harvey**, a Dublin-based consultant who works for voluntary and community organizations, trusts, foundations and government agencies in Ireland, Britain and continental Europe.

**David Duffy**, the founder and Managing Director of Prospectus Strategy Consultants. Prospectus was established in 1991.

**Seamus Boland**, CEO of Irish Rural Link and a member of the Carnegie Rural Commission and a Board member of The Wheel

**Stuart Garland**, CEO of Volunteering Ireland with broader experience of community-

based youth projects, youth homelessness, European Volunteer Service and international learning.

## **4.7 Impact on Organisations**

The additional motivation and energy that participants gained from the course is being transferred to the organisations they work for. Participants are highly motivated to effect positive change in their organisations in general. Having completed the course, an enthusiasm and energy has been added to that motivation.

The positive impact of the Board seminar in laying the groundwork for change in organisations is another important factor.

Participants are effecting a combination of changes - small changes in their own management styles, how they relate to the chair, how Board meetings are run as well as larger changes such as putting Board development programmes in place, doing strategic planning very differently, focussing on communication more, and so on. There is no shortage of evidence of these types of changes being applied from the participants' feedback below:

“Since the course I have worked with our management team and have begun a strategic planning process using the model we worked with on the course, I've also changed how we record Board meetings and minutes and have been getting good feedback from the Board.”

“Our organisation has gone through a lot of change - structures particularly - over the past four years. The course has helped to clarify what is needed, and we will implement change particularly in relation to governance and structures.”

“I've revisited our organisation's mission and vision based on what we did on the course and have totally changed ours as a direct result. We are so SMART about our meetings now - they are very focussed on strategy.”

The course has impacted on board members and staff in organisations. As a conservative estimate the impact of Stronger Leaders training is likely to impact an average of 5 to 7 staff members and 6 to 9 Board members per participant - an extended reach of over 450 people.

“Based on what we learned in the governance module our Board is in the process of restructuring. It was perfect timing for us.”

“Our administrator has grown immeasurably in confidence and ability, mostly because she has deputised for me while doing the course. We have also had long, interesting discussions about each module, and her insights have been very valuable to both of us.”

“We had a great five year strategic plan but lacked the resources to implement it. Now I feel much more capable about helping the Board to implement the plan.”

In general participants are very positive about implementing change and plan to implement change on multiple levels over time, e.g. in governance, in strategic planning, in personal management style, in team building and in communication in their organisation. The biggest concern is the difficulty of creating and protecting “thinking space” or “creative time”. Participants believe that contact with each other a few times a year in a learning context could prove very helpful in sustaining the momentum and commitment to change implementation and are exploring ways to go about setting this up with support from the Carmichael Centre and The Wheel.

#### **4.8 Impact on the Sector**

While it will take time before the true impact of the Stronger Leaders programme will be realised in the community and voluntary sector. Research evidence in the SME sector shows there are direct links between skilled management, competitiveness, growth and development. Management talent and skills are understood as fundamental to Ireland’s enterprise development and internationally, the link between management skills and business success is firmly established. The impact trends that were identified at this stage are listed below.

- Addresses a gap and a need in the sector
- Builds confident leaders in the sector
- Supports the sector to meet current and emerging challenges
- Stimulates new and creative thinking
- Changing the way Boards and organisations traditionally operate.
- Supports the growth and development of the voluntary and community sector to play an even more positive role in Irish life and society.

The community and voluntary sector, like many others, is facing many challenges - increasing competition for funding, greater requirement for evidence of outcomes, increasing regulatory environment, changes to the Charities legislation, drive for organisations to avoid duplication

or merger, increased emphasis on customer service and satisfaction and the demand for high quality professional standards throughout. As we have seen earlier there is a lack of appropriate relevant training opportunities to support the sector to meet these changes responsibly and efficiently, and consequently the Stronger Leaders programme fulfils a real, and many would say urgent, need. Leadership in the community and voluntary sector to date has not been invested in. The Stronger Leaders programme can impact strongly on the sector by setting an example regarding the importance of appropriate training, the need for board support to embed it within organisations and by leading the sector in establishing practices such as mentoring, peer learning and e-learning.

“This has been my first opportunity in 10 years in my role as CEO to access tailored leadership training.”

“I’m impressed by the creation of the programme as it has figured out what the community and voluntary sector needs to allow it to come to its full potential.”

Many participants spoke about the timing of the course and wished it had been available to them years ago.

“ It’s been very important, but I did it too late. I needed it when I started the job as, in terms of staff management, I made a few mistakes I wouldn’t have made had I done the course then.”

“It’s the first time I’ve had specific leadership training in 9 years. What would I / could I have achieved if I’d had this 8 years ago!”

As noted earlier, the community and voluntary sector has a tendency to lack confidence in its abilities relative to the commercial or corporate world. Many see the Stronger Leaders programme not only as a way of building stronger leaders in the sector ‘but of building ‘stronger leadership teams’ and building “networks of confident people” within the community and voluntary sector.

Within the community and voluntary sector historically, there has often been a tension between Boards and organisations. Often Boards were tolerated or seen as a necessary structure but not one that contributed to the growth and development of the organisation. A culture of keeping Board members at a distance evolved. More recently this pattern has changed, and voluntary sector organisations are looking at ways to animate and activate their boards as a force for positive growth and development. The Stronger Leaders programme has

contributed very positively to this trend becoming more of a norm as CEOs and Board members alike consistently reported how helpful they found the sessions, how they have led to change and how together they are discussing how best to involve the Board more fully in the organisation's future.

“Long-term this course will help to bring about a change in culture. I hope it will have knock-on effects for other sub-groups, and I am hopeful that we can develop a sound plan to involve board members more.”

## **4.9 Stronger Leaders Key Strengths**

The key strengths of the Stronger Leaders programme were:

- Relevance of the content to programme participants and the sector
- Balance between theory and practice that the course maintained.
- Group dynamics and support
- Course design and quality
- Role of the Carmichael Centre
- Value for money
- Innovative developmental approach

### **4.9.1 Relevance**

The course design was based on a clear and deep understanding of the particular needs and context of the community and voluntary sector. This has proved to be central to its success, ensuring a relevance for participants that many have not experienced before on other courses. Participants spoke about the focus of the course being firmly on the reality of the situation in Ireland while covering models in the States, the UK and elsewhere. This consistent relevance and focus to the situation of the Irish community and voluntary sector has not been available to participants before. This explains why their strong view is that the Stronger Leaders programme meets their needs better than other training they have done before. Two participants who have completed Masters in voluntary sector management stated that the Stronger Leaders programme was far more beneficial to them. In addition, chairs and CEOs of organisations that have supported participants on the course voluntarily indicated that they would be interested in doing the course themselves in future.

“Whoever created the course is in the sector and knows what we come up against. This is not the same as all the other courses I have done “

“This has been the most practical course of any I have done. It’s totally relevant to the job. I have a Masters in non-profit management, but this was better.”

#### **4.9.2 Balance Between Theory and Practice**

One of the ways the course ensured its relevance and the transfer of learning was through the commitment to balance input from tutors with discussion and process time. This approach was inclusive of all learning styles and allowed participants to apply the material to their organisations, situations they are encountering and problems they need to solve. Feedback from participants and Board members consistently referred to the practical examples provided, the emphasis on role play (which proved particularly popular) and the focus on participant’s own organisations as one of the most invaluable aspects of the programme.

“I wanted a course that combined theory and practical - got that. I have no formal management training. I needed a framework to work with. Got that. I found out how to name what I do. Super!”

“The most significant learning for me has been the distinction between governance and operation and management and leadership.”

#### **4.9.3 Group Dynamic**

Participants from both the A and the B blocks reported that strong bonds and mutual respect and trust developed quickly within both groups. Important factors in the course design and approach that supported this were the diversity of participants (different sectors, levels of experience, disciplines), the approach to confidentiality, and the residential component which provided sufficient social time for participants to get to know each other and bond as a group. It is worth noting that some participants crossed over from Block A to B or *vice versa* due to unavoidably missing dates with their own groups. This did not seem to affect the positive group dynamics in any way. There is a clear gap in the sector for peer networking and team work and the success and strength of the group dynamic within Stronger Leaders demonstrates the potential for positive development in this area in the future.

“”The networking dimension was more important than I anticipated.”

“Reviewing past mistakes has been a very safe and strengthening experience in the group. I have also felt validated for work which has had positive outcomes.”

#### **4.9.4. Programme Design and Quality**

The course design was based on an already proven model<sup>1</sup> and adapted to meet the particular needs of the community and voluntary sector. The course approach was described as a 'concentrated run-through' of leadership and management principles and practice. While most participants were happy with the length (12 days) and pacing (across 8 months) a few felt the course could be lengthened to allow some new material to be added.

The approach to the design and implementation of the programme was of the highest quality. Course tutors had national or international reputations and were experts in the community and voluntary sector. The tutors' groundedness in the community and voluntary sector was a unique feature of the programme, as so many of the participants had never experienced a training programme delivered by trainers who could relate to their particular experience before. This is an important and powerful point and was a key component to the success of the programme.

"Course was very well thought out, tutors were excellent, appropriate for the material. It was all excellent. For me the programme hit the mark perfectly."

#### **4.9.5. Role of Carmichael Centre**

The course director from the Carmichael Centre, Sheila Cahill, attended every module and delivered the governance module to participants and the governance input for the board seminar. Hers was a consistent supportive presence, in her quiet facilitative role she provided the mechanism for quality control on the course. There was only one occasion when evaluation feedback made it clear that participants weren't happy with one of the guest speakers (guest speakers gave short inputs for about an hour at the end of two-day block modules) so this speaker was dropped for the B group. In addition, Sheila made modifications to the course as it rolled out and worked closely with this evaluator to identify any issues and address them.

Sheila's expertise and knowledge (and that of the Carmichael Centre) of the community and voluntary sector was fundamental to the success of the course both in its design and implementation. Participants identified this as a factor in 'keeping it real'.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Future Leaders Programme* was a 15 - 17 participant programme over 15 days developed through the Leadership Initiative, a partnership involving IBEC, ICTU, International Women's Forum Ireland, The Sia Group, The Wheel and the public service and was intended to provide leadership training for women

“Felt we were listened to at the beginning. Carmichael Centre fulfilled on that.”

“Sheila Cahill was so helpful, facilitative and encouraging - it was above and beyond the call of duty and a key component of the success of the programme.”

“very dedicated”

#### **4.9.6. Value for Money**

Although participating organisations were charged the subsidised rate of €1,700 the total cost of the programme per participant was €6,500 which is the equivalent of €542 per training day. For 12 days training and for the quality of the training received in comparison with other similar courses, this represents value for money. For example, the Senior Executives Programme run by the IMI over 14 days costs €935 per day and is all non-residential and the residential “Mini-MBA” programme run by the IMI over 5 days is €1,183 per day.

For many of the smaller organisations the combination of releasing their CEO for the 12-day course duration was just as much a challenge as finding the available funds within their budgets and this represents an investment by the sector in the training. While few mentioned the importance of the subsidy unprompted, when asked they reflected that it was necessary in order for their organisation to participate.

#### **4.9.7. Innovative and Developmental**

The Stronger Leaders programme has firmly introduced two fundamental principles for strong growth and development in the sector. The first is the importance of investing in leadership and leaders (while the principle of investing in people and in leaders is firmly established in the business world, it is often paid lip service more than practical attention in the community and voluntary sector) and the second is in clearly understanding and developing good governance. While these ideas are not new in themselves, a leadership training programme that teaches, demonstrates and holds both leadership and governance from the perspective of the community and voluntary sector certainly is.

“I have had very positive feedback from the two Board members that attended the seminars....we (his chair and he) had a meeting to exchange views; I think he got as much out of the two hours as I did out of a full day. He is very keen to share what we

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managers. It was aimed at increasing the personal & leadership skills and knowledge of women in middle management to enable them seek promotion and to lead effectively in senior management roles



have both learned with the other board members and is very enthusiastic about encouraging the Board to become more proactive.”

#### **4.10 Stronger Leader Key Weaknesses**

No fundamental weaknesses were identified by participants, their organisations or the organisers of the Stronger Leaders programme.

For the purposes of an overview of the effectiveness, efficacy, appropriateness, need, value or otherwise of the Stronger Leaders programme, there is no evidence, based on the data, that any fundamental changes should be made to the course content and design or in the evaluation and quality control methods adopted by the Carmichael Centre. It would seem more important to stick with a model that is working and explore making minor adjustments as recommended in the internal evaluation.

At the time of data collection, there was evidence that some of Group A participants (the first course) considered minor adjustments to aspects of the course design and format may be required. They made some suggestions for improvements and developments that relate to the detail of the course content and format as well as the additional elements to the course such as the peer learning, mentoring etc. Examples relate to views on whether:

- the course should be more days (14 instead of 12) delivered over a longer timeframe to create more group work and processing time on the programme
- whether there should be mandatory pre and post module ‘homework’ with deadlines for practical rather than academic papers
- whether content needed to deliver more on leadership (e.g. spend more time on personal effectiveness and awareness) than on management

#### **4.11 Performance Against Stated Objectives**

**4.11.1 Objective One: Create a specialist, affordable, high-quality leadership training programme specifically targeting CEOs and senior managers in the community & voluntary sector to provide them with the skills, knowledge, structure and support to steer and develop their organisations successfully in the current environment.**

Stronger Leaders is specialist, it is affordable, it has been recognised to be of high quality, it reached 100% of its target group and there is evidence (and growing) that the skills,

knowledge structure and support is supporting further growth and development of 32 organisations within the community & voluntary sector.

**4.11.2 Objective Two: Lay the groundwork for board discussion and implementation of change within participating organisations by providing development opportunities e.g. board seminars for voluntary members of boards of participating organisations.**

It is clear that while the course provided the fuel for change the seminars have provided the circumstances to enable change to take place. All participants and board members have or plan to implement change in areas such as governance, strategy, communication and change management. One of the participants from a relatively young and small organisation referred to the governance sessions as 'crystal clear' and listed a whole programme of work that she and her board have subsequently agreed.

**4.11.3 Objective Three: Participating CEOS will understand their leadership style and develop strategies to capitalise on strengths and overcome weaknesses.**

Insight into leadership style was ranked amongst the top three competency areas for significant change and growth (out of a possible 34) across both Groups A and B. Participants are much more aware of their strengths and also the areas they need to develop. Strategies being employed include working closely with senior management teams and/or the organisation Chair, identifying and selecting a mentor and working actively to create an alumni peer network that will provide further learning inputs as well as networking opportunities and peer support

**14.11.4 Objective Four: Participating CEOS will lead teams effectively and build strong relationships internal & external to the organisation**

Participants are more aware of what it requires to build and lead teams. They are more committed to team building as a strategy in delivering organizational change and they are more focused on building strong relationships outside their own organisations in the community and voluntary sector and with business and other networks.

#### **14.11.5 Objective Five: Build a community of interest among the leaders of the sector on whom the future health and viability of the sector depends.**

This element of the programme is a work in progress. The course itself, the board seminars, the emerging alumni peer network and potentially the mentoring relationships that will be established as a result of the programme will all contribute positively to building a community of interested leaders in the sector.

### **4.12 Achievement of Intended Outcomes**

Based on the evidence thus far, the outcomes anticipated for the Stronger Leaders programme have been achieved. They are:

- Improved linkages between community and voluntary organisations
- Stronger leadership in the community and voluntary sector
- Awareness within the sector of the relevance, importance and availability of a tailored programme of professional development for leaders
- Greater awareness of networking and its importance
- More aware of need to take up leadership role

### **4.13 Summary**

In summary:

- The Stronger Leaders programme has proved to be an excellent example of an effective tailored response to meet the leadership and management training requirements of the community and voluntary sector.
- The training that has been delivered has been of a very high quality and participants have been very satisfied with it on all levels
- The expectations of those participants that have completed the course were fully met and in many cases exceeded
- Participants report significant learning and growth at personal and professional level and have begun to apply that learning at an organisational level
- Participants reported unanticipated positive outcomes that they found to be equally important. These tended to relate to networking, Board support that came from having Board members attend the Board seminars and how the course complemented activities they were already engaged in, such as strategic planning or team development.

- Participants are extremely happy with the course content and most particularly on the course emphasis on linking theory to practice.
- The Programme has been excellently supported, managed and administered by the Carmichael Centre
- Board seminars are deemed to have been very productive and useful by those that attended
- All participants have clear intentions to implement the learning and many have initiated change at multiple levels within their organisations
- Networking aspects of the Stronger Leaders programmes have been invaluable to both CEOs and board members - meeting a very clear need that CEOs say is very difficult to find suitable opportunities elsewhere to address.

## **SECTION 2 – CHAPTER 5**

### **5. Recommendations for Stronger Leaders**

In general, feedback has been excellent and extremely positive. The Evaluator's view is that a number of points should be considered for the future development of Stronger Leaders as detailed below.

#### **5.1 General/ Overall**

There is an urgent need for the Stronger Leaders programme to be made more widely available.

#### **5.2 Programme Content**

Any future development of the Stronger Leaders programme will need to take account of the Carmichael Centre's own evaluation and what it has to say regarding the course content, structure and delivery. However, in general terms, the consensus view that has emerged thus far from all levels - Board members, participants, Carmichael Centre and The Wheel is that while the programme is very successful as it is, it is an intense learning experience and more time may need to be allocated to the process aspects of the course e.g. group discussion, workshop formats, etc. There are no aspects of the programme which should be dropped altogether, although the guest speakers series wasn't very successful due, primarily, to the schedule of their slot at the end of two-days training when people are getting ready to go home.

- Reschedule and refocus the guest lecture series. Invite more speakers from a public sector, public policy context and background.
- If possible increase the time available for group work and processing particularly in the areas of communication, managing teams and personal effectiveness.

#### **5.3 Programme Experience**

Extend the time available on the course for some elements, as above to have more time. The options are to increase the time available by adding one or two days into the course or by creating more time by making more of the course residential and doing training in mostly 2 day blocks. While this would add to the cost of the course the possible benefits that could be achieved (listed below) may make it worth the extra investment.

- create more time for learning and processing learning which is needed.
- help peer learning groups work more effectively

- create opportunities for guest speaker programme to work better
  - create more opportunities for networking
- Base the course in a learning environment rather than a hotel at least for some of the time
- Explore how best to support deepening the effect of the added-value elements of the programme such as better promotion of e-learning; more assignments between modules; improved structure and timetable of learning activities and events in order to ensure maximum impact

#### **5.4 Programme Promotion**

High profile marketing of the course is important as it adds to the course status

- Brand the course clearly and make the connection with funding from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment clear
- Involve alumni in directly promoting the course to peers

#### **5.5 Board Seminars**

There was much discussion about the logistics and format for the board seminars throughout the Stronger Leaders programme. The main recommendations for change are:

- Change the format to allow for workshop format similar to the Stronger Leaders programme. Board member 'buy in' to this approach would need to be sought and more organisational resources would need to be applied to achieve this.
- Run the seminars in two locations over longer sessions than the two-hour evening format - ideally over a day. Choose a Dublin city centre venue and a venue outside Dublin.
- Build opportunities for networking more formally and centrally into the format.
- Invest more resources and devise new strategies for better promotion and marketing of the Board seminars. Inform board members better about the benefits of the Board seminars and use course participants to get Board 'buy in' for attendance.
- Give Board members advance notice of course content and the evaluation process so they can plan responses at Board meetings .
- Send information on Board Seminars out in advance and include the biographies of the presenters.
- Use quotations from Board members who have attended this Board Seminars series to help promote the next series
- Get Chairperson and other Board members contact details on a separate sheet of paper as part of the application process.

- In advance of final acceptance on to the course seek participants' commitment to work proactively to get Board members to attend asking them to state what methods they will use. Participants that did work quite hard to get Board members interested found it challenging and said this was indicative of how things are in the sector - everyone overstretched.

## **5.6 Peer Learning Groups**

To be effective, the first approach required peer learning groups to be task-based with sufficient scheduled time to debrief on learning, for example, on residential days when there is more time available to the group. There is no time available within the current schedule for debriefing on specified tasks. For future Stronger Leaders programmes, the support group idea is a more realistic option and consequently organisations of peer learning groups should ideally be based on both geographic and sectoral commonality.

- Provide clearer communication and input on the purpose and concept of peer learning would be helpful as the evidence shows that participants were unclear about how to use the groups.
- Reconsider the types of tasks set. Make tasks more explicit and shorter.
- Run the peer learning groups as peer support groups, set them up based on commonalities of sector, type of organisation and geography. Be flexible if participants want to change groups.

## **5.7 E-Learning**

- Use of the e-learning website in supporting learning on the Stronger Leaders programme needs to be given further consideration. A more structured approach is needed, and then participants need to be 'sold' the idea.
- Promote website better showing how it is useful and what participants can expect from it.
- Provide participants with training in e-learning skills and in how to use the discussion board.
- The website needs a dedicated convenor. Consider inviting an alumnus or someone in the sector to 'convene' or 'curate' the website. A fee could be paid for this function.
- Some participants felt that more direction and focus could be given re background reading, e.g. specific chapters or pages of books to address the fact that people don't have time to read books on reading lists from cover to cover. Posting interesting and short articles from journals and magazines would also be welcome.

## **5.8 Mentoring**

- Survey with individual participants to clearly establish mentoring needs within 8 weeks of completing the programme
- Explore developing the mentoring aspect of the programme outside of the course contact time.

## **5.9 Accreditation**

One area where there is room for improvement with the overall framework of the Stronger Leaders programme is in the area of accreditation. There is a demand from a majority of participants for the Stronger Leaders programme to be accredited - some would wish it to be accredited retrospectively if that were possible. A majority of participants see accreditation as necessary to validate both the quality of the course and their efforts in completing it. Accreditation is seen as important in terms of

- Signalling competency
- Providing a record for future career prospects
- A selling point and additional motivating factor for doing the course
- Opening up opportunities and greater flexibility of movement between the community and voluntary and the business/corporate sector

Recommendations are:

- Research possible routes to accreditation and explore the likely impact accreditation would have on the programme. Ideally accreditation should be at diploma level.
- Accreditation as a feature of the programme should not put potential leaders off - it should be possible for participants to self-select whether they will pursue accreditation or not. and there should also be room

## **5.10 Alumni**

It appears that there will be increasing momentum for the establishment of a Stronger Leaders Alumni. This reflects the enormous value that participants placed on the networking aspect of the Stronger Leaders programme. Having had the opportunity they are reluctant to let it disappear.



Such is the demand that Group A organised an overnight residential (in Glencree Reconciliation Centre managed by a participant) in July 2007 to explore how they can continue to work together as a group. Group B have organised a similar session (in Kilkenny) in November 2007.

While it is very positive that the groups are taking the initiative, The Wheel either alone or jointly with the Carmichael Centre should set up an Alumni service for all existing and future graduates of the programme. What this service might involve can be negotiated through consultation with existing alumni. However, the basic elements of the service should be to create opportunities for networking, refreshing on course material, practical group activities potentially covering areas where participants would have liked more time e.g. communication and Myers Briggs as well as new areas suggested by participants such as self care and stress management.

### **5.11 Evaluation**

Integrate external evaluation elements into the programme and schedule and apportion more time for this as participants proved eager to reflect on the value of their experiences on the programme. Given the time limitations on the programme, it was difficult to get time for focus group contact with participants consequently meetings with both group A and B were less than an hour. A number of participants - particularly in group A - felt this was insufficient time to give proper attention to the evaluation. The Carmichael Centre rectified this with Group B and the session was more productive and the participants were happier with the process.

- Integrate all evaluation into course planning and the timetable
- Communicate clearly with participants about the opportunities to participate in the evaluation and allocate them time to prepare.

## **SECTION 2 – CHAPTER 6**

### **6 Training Links Programme**

#### **6.1 Programme Background**

The aim of the Training Links Programme was to demonstrate the effectiveness of an organisational-led approach to training and development and to promote and support the development of training networks.

#### **6.2 Programme Objectives**

The objectives were:

- to enable the development of a fixed number of existing or new networks of community and voluntary organisations throughout the country
- to provide much needed opportunities for sectoral co-operation and shared learning
- to support the commissioning of customized, localized solutions, appropriate to the network's needs
- to avail of cost efficiencies and other collective benefits

The expected outcomes of the programme were:

- improved linkages between community and voluntary organisations
- better co-ordination of existing and new training structures
- better value for money in purchasing training

#### **6.3 Programme Structure and Content**

The programme was based on an approach developed by Skillnets Limited for the private sector<sup>1</sup>. In the Training Links programme organisations were encouraged to come together in a network, to identify shared training needs and to apply for a subsidy for training to address the identified need. Each network had a nominated lead organisation which made the application to The Wheel. Each network also had a steering group made up of member organisations in the network. A key element of the model is the role of the Network Coordinator who may work for a member organisation in the network, or who may be brought in for the purposes of the programme. S/he works with the steering group and the network

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<sup>1</sup> Skillnets is an enterprise-led support body whose mission is to enhance the skills of people in employment in Irish industry to support competitiveness and employability

members to ensure the training needs analysis takes place and to provide accountability in terms of reporting to The Wheel as well as undertaking the work to make the training courses happen.

This model allows organisations and their staff to decide on their own training needs, and to develop solutions to those needs. Organisations were free to choose the training methods, courses, trainers or priorities which are most relevant to them and have those choices supported to make them happen.

The Training Links Programme represented an excellent one-off opportunity to avail of an innovative model that could be easily tailored to address the training needs of community and voluntary organisations. This programme offered organisations a chance to access funding towards the development of training programmes and the building of valuable links with other organisations within the sector.

The Training Links Programme enabled groups of organisations to come together as training networks to achieve a common purpose or address a shared issue of importance in relation to the development of skills. Each Training Network is made up of a group of organisations that have shared training needs in the same sector and/or geographic region, addressing similar issues.

### **6.3.1 Design Phase**

The Training Links Programme structure can be described as follows:

- *Research on, and adaptation of, Skillnets Limited Training Networks Model (Sept 05 – March 06)*
- *Advertising and selection process (April 06 – June 06)*
- *Development Phase (August to September 2006)*
- *Implementation and Performance Phases (October 06 - June 07)*
- *Review & Closedown Phases (May 07 -July 07)*

A detailed description of the research, design, advertising and selection phases as well as one relating to the Training Links programme can be found in the 'Project Management' section of this report.

### **6.3.2 Development Phase**

During this period (August – September 2006) each of the successful networks conducted the following activities:

- **Analysed the training and development needs** of participants, identifying skills requirements and priorities for action.
- **Developed training needs analysis** and finalised training plans and associated costs with The Wheel.

### 6.3.3 Implementation Phase

During this period (Oct 06 – June 07) the networks were involved in the following activities:

- **Assembling** members – continuing the drive to recruit members to the training programme
- **Clarifying** the objectives – ongoing review and clarification of training needs as those have been identified by initial members in the development stage
- **Identifying** roles and responsibilities - establishing the network structure, co-ordinator and evaluator
- **Developing** the working plan – for roll out of training to members
- **Attending Support Series Workshops** – provided by The Wheel to help support networks, network co-ordinators
- **Rolling out the training programme** – according to their own devised training plan.

### 6.3.4 Review & Evaluation Phases

Networks were required to complete all training activities on or before 30 June 2007, and to provide an end of programme report to The Wheel, as well as an independent evaluator report.

### 6.3.5 Support Series for Networks

As part of the Support Series Workshops, networks were provided an Evaluation Guideline to assist them in collecting information for reporting to The Wheel. A separate and independent evaluation of each network was required as part of the funding and approval mechanism of the Training Links Programme.

### **6.3.6 Quarterly Reports**

As this was a new project in the community and voluntary sector, and as much learning as possible was to be collated, The Wheel established quarterly milestones for reporting which would not all be necessary should the programme be repeated:

October 2006

January 2007

March 2007

June 2007

After review of the first two reports, the evaluation team proposed a standardised report template for the March and June reporting periods, in order to enable networks to report on key performance indicators and to provide The Wheel with a more accurate report on actual achievements and progress, as well as challenges the networks might be facing. It was at the March Report that a number of issues were identified with some of the networks and The Wheel Training Funds Manager was able to respond with assistance and guidance.

### **6.3.7 Independent Evaluators**

All networks engaged an independent evaluator to complete an evaluation report on the networks activity, performance against targets and impact. In most cases the independent evaluation reports were completed satisfactorily, in others the evaluation reports did not relate to the format outlined in the Guidelines provided to the networks. Those that did not relate to the Guidelines were brief and lacked detail.

### **6.3.8 Data Analysis & Interpretation**

The primary and secondary data have been presented in numeric and percentage format where possible.

The analysis of the data has focused on the terms of reference and the Training Links Programme aims, in particular, on the three main themes of the evaluation:

to enable the development of a fixed number of existing or new networks of Community and Voluntary organisations throughout the country

to provide much needed opportunities for sectoral co-operation and shared learning

to support the commissioning of customized, localized solutions, appropriate to the network's needs

The evaluation has also endeavoured to identify the impacts of the Training Links Programme on the networks and organisations. Following this, conclusions have been formulated.

### 6.3.9 Closedown

At the time of writing this report (i.e. August 2007) networks are finalising their financial obligations to The Wheel and completing all necessary compliance, grant drawdown, and close-off procedures during the period immediately following 30 June 2007 programme finish.

This evaluation will therefore not take into account the financial closedown aspect of the Training Links Programme as it is outside the timeframe of the evaluation and the scope of the agreed evaluation process.

## 6.4 Approved Networks - Name and Sector

The following networks were the eleven successful networks from a total of 36 applicant networks. The selection process for the networks was independent of The Wheel and more information on the selection process can be found in the Project Management chapter.

Network Name	Sector Description	New/Existing
Community Television Training Network	Media	Existing
Community Transport Training Network	Transport	Existing
Cork Community Music Network	Children	New
Learning and Performance Network	Homeless	Existing
Lobbying for Community & Adult Education	Community Adult Education	Existing
Medical Research Charities Group	Medical	Existing
Neurological Network	Disability	Existing
One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN) Southwest Training Network	Lone Parents	New
Rape Crisis Network	Sexual Violence	Existing
Southside Community Training Network	Community	New
Senior Help Line Network	Older People	New

In total, eleven (11) networks were funded under the programme resulting in one additional network (i.e. the target exceeding the initial 10) receiving funding. This was as a result of the possibility to fund a higher number of networks based on the high proportion of networks meeting the selection criteria, and the funds available to fund the projects.

It is important to note that following:

- the Training Links Programme provided a catalyst for the formation of new networks
- the Training Links Programme provided an impetus for existing networks to collaborate and to focus on strategic training and learning implications for organisations and people in the sector

## 6.5 Programme Data and Outputs

### 6.5.1 Areas of training conducted by networks

The networks delivered learning and training programmes in a number of key areas as follows:

#### Learning & Training Activities

Network Name	Areas of Training Delivered
Community Television Training Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upskilling of groups to take up community TV; networking sessions</li> <li>• International seminar in the area of community media; new technologies</li> <li>• Governance</li> <li>• Legal issues regarding broadcasting codes &amp; standards development of a website to be used as a training tool</li> </ul>
Community Transport Training Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of trainers</li> <li>• Social auditing</li> <li>• Enhancing drivers qualifications to enable operation of cross-border services</li> <li>• Governance</li> </ul>
Cork Community Music Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sibelius – training in specific musical software</li> <li>• Community performance</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Child protection policy issues</li> <li>• Method of music instruction</li> <li>• Volunteer recruitment and retention</li> </ul>
Lobbying for Community & Adult Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Planning a campaign</li> <li>• Networking with other members groups</li> </ul>
Medical Research Charities Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media/Pr</li> <li>• Employment Law</li> <li>• Health and Safety</li> <li>• First Aid</li> <li>• Customised programmes in conjunction with genetic scientists in Trinity College – ‘Science for Non-scientists’ and ‘Patient Registries’</li> </ul>

Network Name	Areas of Training Delivered
Neurological Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realising the benefits of networking between member organisations</li> <li>• 5 day management programme including planning, team building and staff management skills and competencies</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• PR</li> </ul>
One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN) Southwest Training Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Taster programmes' in specific areas to ensure actual needs of the trainees are met</li> <li>• 15 week Leadership programme (FETAC level 6)</li> <li>• PR &amp; communications</li> <li>• Mentoring programme</li> <li>• Fundraising workshops</li> </ul>
Rape Crisis Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance issues and Board support</li> <li>• Strategic planning</li> <li>• HR</li> <li>• Sharing of resources and networking</li> </ul>
Southside Community Training Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying volunteers</li> <li>• Networking sessions resulting in huge sharing of resources</li> <li>• Community involvement</li> <li>• Employment law</li> <li>• Building local leadership</li> <li>• Funding Applications</li> <li>• Health and Safety</li> <li>• Equality Training</li> <li>• Personal development</li> <li>• Women in decision making</li> <li>• Effective minute taking</li> </ul>
Senior Help Line Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and Training workshops for volunteers working on a telephone helpline for elderly people including listening/communication &amp; conflict</li> <li>• Specialist subject delivery - Elder Abuse &amp; suicide prevention delivered by HSE specialist staff</li> <li>• Coordinator team training in stress, self-management &amp; active citizenship for volunteers</li> </ul>
Learning and Performance Network *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers programme – to bring a consistency with regard to competencies, skills, knowledge and theoretical frameworks among the Homeless service delivery sector</li> <li>• Sectoral Induction – through an online programme, offers informed choices in development &amp; knowledge to staff working within the sector</li> </ul>

\* This network faced a number of challenges in the design, delivery and achievement of its training programmes and individual trainee targets, as outlined in appendix A4. In summary, it is the evaluator's view that the timescale of the Training Links programme did not lend itself to the ambitious challenges set by this network in the time period and the complex and detailed process required of establishing sectoral standards for a wide geographically dispersed group of member organisations.



### 6.5.2 Target vs Actual Achievements

The table below provides a summary of all the training that took place.

Network Name	Member organisations in each network		Total Trainees <sup>1.</sup>		Total Participants <sup>2.</sup>	No. of training programmes organised <sup>3.</sup>
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Actual	
Community Television Training Network	11	13	97	148	578	28
Community Transport Training Network	31	28	675	641	658	14
Cork Community Music Network	10	12	120	153	153	7
Lobbying for Adult & Community Education Network	11	12	85	47	131	13
Medical Research Charities Group Training Network	7	10	108	125	125	14
Neurological Training Network	12	12	154	125	189	15
One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN) Southwest Regional Network	13	26	58	94	124	12
Rape Crisis Centre Organisational Development Network	16	16	60	50	55	9
Senior Help Line Network	12	13	350	322	382	19
Southside Community Training Network	15	34	171	181	230	17
<b>Total of 10 networks</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>1,878</b>	<b>1,886</b>	<b>2,625</b>	<b>148</b>
Learning & Performance Network <sup>4.</sup>	11	10	922	351	351	55
<b>Total of 11 networks</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>2,800</b>	<b>2,237</b>	<b>2,976</b>	<b>203</b>

- <sup>1</sup> Trainees: the number of individual people to benefit from the training.
- <sup>2</sup> Participants: the number of participants to benefit from the training. In some cases, the same person attended more than one training programme.
- <sup>3</sup> Training programmes varied in length from a half a day to five full days depending on the network member's requirements.
- <sup>4</sup> This network has been shown separately because faced a number of challenges in the design, delivery and achievement of its training programmes as outlined in appendix A4.

The networks were asked to indicate how many people would be impacted by the overall training (i.e. train the trainer, sharing of learning and information, in-house training activities as a result of the training) either during or immediately following the Training Links programme (some training was due to finish in the eight-week period following the end of June programme deadline). These figures are included in the table above.

From the reports, interviews and evaluator observations, the networks tried to adhere to their original plans, only making changes where they proved to be impractical for a variety of reasons, such as changes in organisational requirements; the emergence of previously unidentified priorities as a result of the training needs analysis and the ongoing network meetings and events.

## **6.6 Findings related to the training networks structure**

The network structure adopted by the Training Links Programme is based on the Skillnets Enterprise-led Model.

It is the evaluation team's view that the model has worked very well for the Training Links Programme. From the perspective of managing a project and networked training activity the model has enabled the networks to be organised and effective and this is evidenced in the various cases studies and references by networks regarding the value of the Steering Committee overseeing and feeding into the network's requirements.

The network structure has also helped to identify roles and responsibilities and for some networks enabled the sharing of the workload as members "bought" into the structure (**refer: One Parent Exchange Network case study**)

### **6.6.1 Steering Group**

The Steering Committee undertook the essential decisions to operate the network. Typically they decided the events, selected trainers, reviewed training programmes, controlled the

finances, etc. In the case of small networks, the contracting organisation, the network coordinator and all active members took part in the management discussions and decisions.

“Meetings are going well, in most cases they are well attended and all members are in cooperation. Discussion includes the up and coming events, finance and progression.”

Cork Community Music Network

“Two members of the steering committee have provided in-kind contributions to the training network through their assistance to the network manager and providing a training course with a waived training fee.”

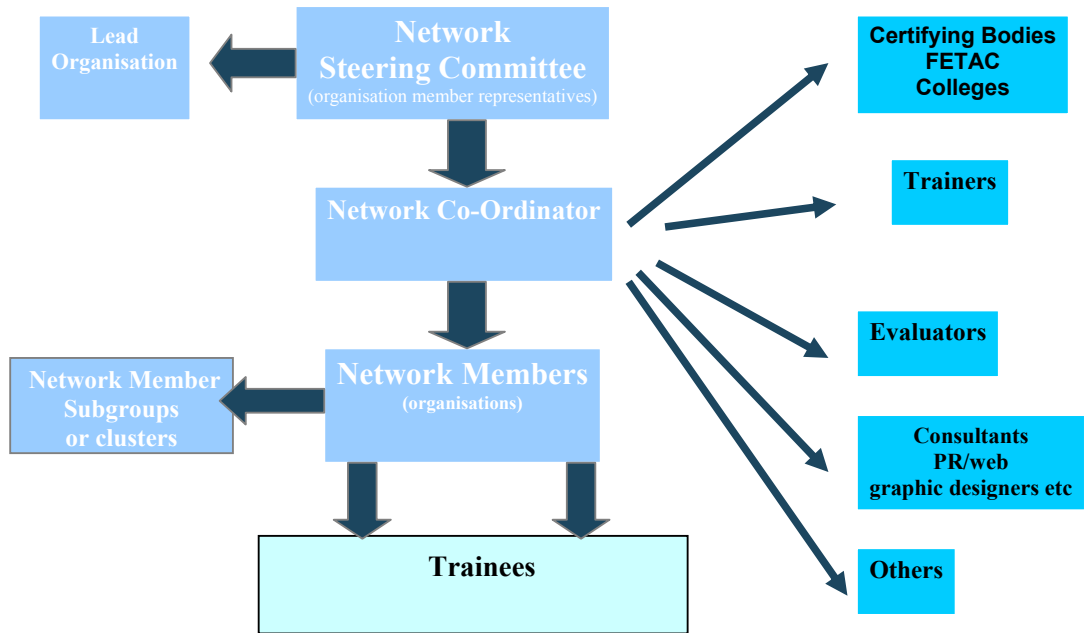
Neurological Alliance Network

“Going forward it has been agreed that while no formal steering group will continue for the network, groups in each county will rotate taking responsibility for the co-ordination and recording of network meetings. The work/action plan of the network will be agreed on a quarterly basis in advance and OPEN will support with its implementation.”

One Parent Exchange and Network

In the larger networks, the lead organisation, the network coordinator and representatives of the organisation formed the core group or management committee. In most cases, they held special management meetings, but in a small number of networks the meetings were attached to other network or training events.

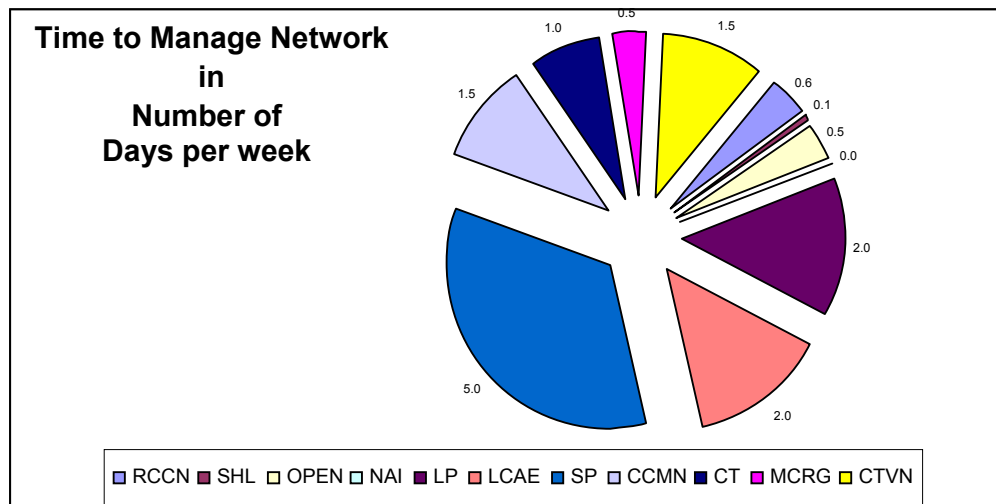
## Network Operating Structure



*Note: This is a typical network structure*

### 6.6.2 Network Coordinator

All the networks have a network coordinator. The network coordinators are, in most cases, existing staff members seconded on a part-time basis from the lead organisation. According to the Network Coordinators, the level of time and commitment required to manage the network had been significantly underestimated - 72% had this view. This resulted in some cases in a number of organisations within the networks having to share network tasks.



All network coordinators attended a support series of workshops over a period of four days organised by The Wheel and also had the benefit of a series of templates and guidelines, to assist in organising and facilitating their activities and responsibilities.

As part of the Training Links Programme support structure, The Wheel commissioned a series of seminar learning events. The purpose of these events was:

- To enable networks to get started and up and running as quickly as possible
- To present the key success areas of the training links programme
- To provide timely advice and guidance to network co-ordinators to enable them to meet the objectives of the Training Links Programme
- To address the networking and learning needs of network co-ordinators during the stages of the programme:
- To encourage sharing of experiences, and effective practices in the management of the network through group exercises and participation
- To ensure network co-ordinators the best opportunities to be effective and to operate a well managed Training Links Programme
- To provide timely information, interventions and effective training and support services for network co-ordinators

### 6.6.3 Support Series Workshops

The workshops provided guidance and support to participating networks in the management of the training links network projects, as follows:

Workshop Series Description	Dates
Module 1 –Getting Started – Revised Training Needs Analysis, Training Plans and Budgets	August 2006
Module 2 – Evaluation of Training & Performance	September 2006
Module 3 – Building Network Sustainability	January 2007
Module 4 – Accreditation and Certification of Training	March 2007

Evaluation tools were designed and provided to participating networks by an independent provider, as follows:

- Course evaluation & trainee data (level 1)
- Post evaluation training form (Level 2)
- Network review sheet
- Guidelines for Network Evaluations

The network coordinators reported on the elements that supported their network training and barriers they faced, as follows:

### **Supports**

- Presence of a network support structure: support/commitment from lead organisation and Steering Group
- Opportunity/willingness to share resources, knowledge between member organisations
- Commitment of network members
- Effective organisation, coordination and promotion
- Reduced training cost/value for money
- Relevant/high quality training material
- Accepting the need for training
- Identifying training need common to others
- Experienced training providers/facilitators
- Need for up-skilling/retaining staff
- On-site training
- Support/flexibility of The Wheel

### **Barriers**

- Releasing staff from work for training, especially concerning small organisations
- Time constraints/commitment.
- Time for planning, time from workplace for networking (especially concerning Board Members, CEOs, Managers, and those in smaller organisations)
- Geographical dispersion
- Distances/costs of staff travel
- Creating effective communications procedures
- Attitudes to training costs
- Shortages of specialist and subject matter training providers

“Naturally there were challenges along the way, in particular trying to schedule training at times that suited members and to work within the short timeframe of the Training Links Programme, but overall I have found the whole experience to be an extremely positive one and would like to thank all those who supported me along the way.”

*Community Television Training Network*

From the feedback and interviews with network coordinators it is clear that they require a diverse range of skills to do the job e.g facilitation skills, training and development knowledge, people skills, communication skills, and the ability and empathy to enthuse others, cajole the less interested/otherwise preoccupied and deal simultaneously with the advanced and open organisations, as well as less advanced organisations.

#### 6.6.4 Degree of Difficulty in Managing Training Networks

Respondents	High		Medium		Low	
Network Coordinators	8	72%	2	18%	1	10%

Other challenges mentioned related to the slowness in getting the network off the ground; getting mobilised, and gaining and building commitment of new members to the organisation. Furthermore, the networks highlighted the myriad of challenges faced in organising training events and activities for larger groups of people, many of whom may work for the sector in a voluntary capacity and or who are geographically dispersed.

In terms of the impact of the training on the organisations, the network coordinators reported a positive commitment to further invest due to:

- Noticeable improvements on the job
- Increased levels of confidence and commitment
- The need to develop personnel, including up-skilling & cross-skilling
- A means of sourcing and retaining staff
- Increased motivation arising from training, many of whom had not received any/much training before

“In the past all available funding has been almost solely directed towards the provision of direct services, thus adding to the difficulties of prioritising and planning organisational development”

#### 6.6.5 Evaluation of Training by Networks

Networks adopted the Kirkpatrick Model of Evaluation as a result of the Training Links Programme support series designed and delivered to assist and train Network Coordinators in running, managing and responding to the needs of a training network. Therefore, all training

programmes delivered by networks were evaluated to a minimum of Level 2 of the Kirkpatrick Model, as follows:

After each training delivery, trainees were asked to indicate whether they were satisfied that they could apply what they had learned to their roles within their respective organisations. Trainees were asked to indicate their satisfaction by circling one of the numbers on a 5-point scale, with 5 indicating strong satisfaction and 1 indicating strong dissatisfaction.

Trainers and Network Coordinators were then in a position to adjust programmes to respond to trainee needs, content, delivery and or relevancy of training, etc.

In some cases, networks reported that evaluations were also carried out after the training programmes whereby a trainee's peer or supervisor was asked to comment on the impact of the training on person's performance at work.

Examples of feedback from Network Coordinators on relevancy of programmes to members needs as a result of evaluation feedback and analysis, are as follows:

“Respondents strongly agreed that the trainees’ skills and knowledge increased as a result of the training programme (an average rating of 4.5 out of 5)

Respondents strongly agreed that the skills and knowledge acquired by the trainees had been used in their roles within their organisation (an average rating of 4.66 out of 5)

Respondents strongly agreed that trainees’ job performances had improved as a result of the training (4.5 out of 5)

It is clear from the above comments that Network Coordinators were able to objectively analyse and report on the impact value of training delivered in their networks.

Some Network Coordinators found the level of evaluation required of them by The Wheel too onerous:

“The evaluation required of this funding stream is more onerous than is often required and that needs to be clearly identified at the time of application”.

**Rape Crisis Network Ireland**

Finally, the feedback from networks in their June end programme reports and independent evaluators’ reports, clearly indicates that the overwhelming majority of networks found that the opportunity to conduct a focused training needs analysis, design and deliver training specific to those needs, and the ability to evaluate and analyse impact of learning and training



immediately, as being highly beneficial. Networks were able to analyse objectively and in a timely manner the majority of training delivered in their networks and reported that the training was made especially relevant to members because of its focus on the specific sector, organisations and learners involved.

### 6.6.6 Certification

Formal certification was provided by two networks. However, a number of networks responded to requests from trainees that their achievements would be acknowledged by issuing certificates of participation.

The general consensus from networks was that the lack of formal certification / accreditation for programmes was not an issue – however, the evaluator notes that where networks were asked to provide trainees with certificates of participation, this area should be considered in the future.

The evaluators noted that some of the trainees have existing qualifications, so did not feel it was necessary to formally receive certification for this programme.

#### Certified Training Programmes Delivered by Networks

Name of Programme	FETAC Level/Equivalent	Name of Awarding Body	Network Name
Leadership Programme – Advocating for Policy Change	Level 6	FETAC	One Parent Exchange and Network OPEN
Social Audit Technician Certificate	Level 5	Institute of Social Auditing of Ireland (awaiting accreditation by FETAC)	Community Transport Training Network CCTN
MiDAS Driver Assessor/Trainer	Level 5	CTAI/CTAUK	Community Transport Training Network
MiDAS Passenger Assistant Trainer	Level 5	CTAI/CTAUK	Community Transport Training Network
MiDAS Driver	Level 2	CTAI/CTAUK	Community Transport Training Network
Passenger Assistant	Level 2	CTAI/CTAUK	Community Transport Training Network
DI PCV Licence	Level 2	DVTA NI	Community Transport Training Network
Minibus Emergency & Evacuation Procedures	Level 2	CTAI/CTAUK	Community Transport Training Network

## **6.6.7 Challenges Facing Networks**

### **Limited Capacity**

Some networks have members that are very small organisations and have voluntary workers. Therefore, some have reported that it had been difficult to free up trainees for participation in programmes – even though the training had been identified as vital and urgent.

### **Limited financial resources**

A number of the networks reported that while training is high on their agenda and they have a strong desire to up-skill their workers, they do not have the budget to invest in training – so funding from The Wheel had been vital in this regard.

### **Limited time**

Many organisations are under-staffed, workers often find it difficult to free up time to attend training activities. While they acknowledge that training is important and that they need to acquire certain skills, training activities are often low on their list of priorities when they are faced with a number of important tasks, all demanding their attention.

### **Geographical barriers**

Many networks have geographical spread members. Many networks worked to overcome this barrier by delivering the training on a local or regional basis. However, in some cases it was necessary for groups to travel long distances to attend training sessions where the funding could not accommodate or enable localised sessions.

### **Travel costs**

“For organisations that have volunteer workers, funding was not always available to cover these costs and were covered for trainees, but the necessity to travel (even within regions) proved a deterrent for some potential participants in the programme”.

*Rape Crisis Network Ireland*

## **6.7 Impact on the organisations**

The evaluators found that the network approach was deemed to be very beneficial in terms of creating a shared sense of ownership of the training activities and a shared desire for the training to succeed. This approach was beneficial by facilitating members to meet and build links with each, to share their knowledge and expertise in various areas, to give advice to each other and learn from each other's experiences. It also provided a forum for the discussion of

challenges and opportunities relating to work. For some, this was a welcome and unexpected off-shoot of the Training Links Programme and the “networking of the networks”.

### 6.7.1 Extracts from network impact reports

Appendices A3.1 – A 3.11 provide a detailed overview of each of the networks. This has been written by the evaluator team based upon the final reports received from the networks by The Wheel. The following table provides a summary of that information as it relates to the impact of the programme on the respective networks and members organisations:

Network name	Training activity – impact on the member organisations
Community Television Training Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the network reported that there is increased exchange of information and support, in particular, amongst members who are currently involved in establishing Community Television services. The following were the high level outputs of this extremely cost-effective (relative to final output) training programme:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building strong network links</li> <li>- Documentation of Training Sessions (DVDs) available for future training use</li> <li>- Fostering sector development</li> <li>- Building a community amongst those involved in community television in Ireland and internationally</li> <li>- Case studies and on-site visits</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Documenting the training through video recording has assisted in the training being available to far more than those who originally attended each of the sessions (i.e. members have been able to use it for their own training sessions within their own organisations and are planning further training using this material) and will result in higher levels of trainees for the same investment over time i.e. the cascade effect</li> <li>• All the material generated as outputs from the training seminars has been compiled for use on the Community TV Training Network website (currently under construction). This too will prove to be a further resource for the sector. This has greatly impacted on the initial trainee and participant figures from an original 97 trainees to reach 578 participants within the timeframe of this evaluation and many more as the community television movement progresses its plans in Ireland.</li> </ul>
Lobbying for Adult & Community Education Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluations conducted after the training showed that:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Respondents strongly agreed that trainees’ skills and knowledge increased as a result of the training programme (an average rating of 4.5 out of 5)</li> <li>- Respondents strongly agreed that the skills and knowledge acquired by the trainees had been used in their roles within their organisation (an average rating of 4.66 out of 5)</li> <li>- Respondents strongly agreed that trainees’ job performances had improved as a result of the training (4.5 out of 5)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• As a result of the Training Links Programme, the training programmes developed specifically to address lobbying activities in the run-up to the general election had a number of positive results, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Online Mailing List and Discussion Forum</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated effective communications between geographically dispersed members</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Support signatures</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The collection of over 1500 signatures relating to demands for improvements to the adult learning sector</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Parliamentary Questions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In excess of 20 parliamentary questions raised in Dáil Éireann before the election, on the topic of adult learning</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Government Commitments</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stated commitments in the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour election manifestoes to abolish fees for part-time courses at higher level. The Progressive Democrats, the Green Party and Sinn Féin also promised AONTAS they would address this issue if in government after the election</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Resource packs have been produced as a result of the training and development programmes. These packs contain posters, information and advice on how to lobby and how to organise lobbying events, templates for press release and letters to election candidates, and cards to hand out to any canvassers outlining the most important issues for those working in adult and community education. A number of the groups involved in the Training Network used the resource packs when conducting their own lobbying activities</li> </ul>
<p>Medical Research Charities Group Training Network</p>	<p>Outcomes included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coverage of networking activities in 2 high profile newspaper articles</li> <li>• Provision of local and accessible training for a number of network members</li> <li>• Ability to negotiate with trainers on provision of courses</li> <li>• Other courses provided by the network were devised specifically for this group and so would not have been available elsewhere. These three specific workshop sessions were on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Science for non-scientists;</li> <li>○ Patient registries; and</li> <li>○ Intellectual property rights.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>These programmes have helped to develop the knowledge and competencies of non-science workers in the sector and have helped to improve the manner in which training needs are assessed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Training Links programme has added tremendous value to small organisations involved in the network and particularly to their staff</li> </ul>
<p>Neurological Training Network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neurological training – a programme was designed with input from a qualified clinical psychologist and experienced trainer; this is the only programme in the country available to staff working with complex neurological conditions with no formal medical training</li> <li>• For the 5-day management programme, supervisors noted a positive impact on the participant's knowledge and skills with ratings of 28% strong before the programme and 66% strong after the programme</li> <li>• The benefits of networking with other staff in similar positions in other organisations was one of the areas of most impact for the participants, which was constantly re-iterated throughout the evaluation process</li> </ul>
<p>One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN) Southwest Network</p>	<p>The main impacts of the training programme as identified by the members are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to tailor made, appropriate and accredited training</li> <li>• Enhanced capacity of participants to engage effectively within their own communities</li> <li>• Participants have developed skills to advocate for policy change at local, regional and national levels</li> <li>• Enhanced leadership capacity to support sustainability of local lone parent groups</li> <li>• Opportunities to build alliances with other groups in addressing the needs of lone parents at local, county and regional levels.</li> <li>• Increased active citizenship levels within communities</li> <li>• Increased capacity to address group development issues more effectively and strategically</li> </ul>

<p>Rape Crisis Centre Organisational Development Network</p>	<p>As a result of the learning from the networking experience the following has occurred:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 Rape Crisis Centres (RCC) staff now working with training participants so that their special skills and knowledge can be shared and passed on to others in similar roles.</li> <li>• 5 Board Members have worked closely with their own staff in order to share the knowledge gained</li> <li>• 5 centres have develop plans to meet identified gaps</li> <li>• Training for individual centres has been “customised” to suit specific centre needs</li> <li>• The training programmes have focused on building capacity in skills and knowledge and have included new Board of Management Members</li> <li>• The impact such training has had on centres and staff has been extremely beneficial</li> <li>• The flexibility of the Training Links programme funding to deliver training locally and on member organisation premises has increased the ability of staff to attend training. Sourcing training centrally has allowed RCCs to utilise their minimal local resources for other purposes and ultimately benefits survivors of crisis. Providing for training through a focused training programme is more efficient and cost effective.</li> <li>• For the RCC Network the project has enabled members to centralise training, minimise time and costs involved in centres contracting individually with trainers, arranging training, conducting evaluations and other administrative duties required of the process, by each member centre.</li> </ul>
<p>Senior Help Line Network</p>	<p>The main impacts of the training programme as identified by the members are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant changes and improved processes in leadership, roster management and call logging have resulted from the training</li> <li>• A specialised 6 module programme has been refined for delivery to all Network members and staff, setting a minimum training standard for all</li> <li>• Senior Help Line has worked strategically with HSE staff for specialist subject delivery e.g. Elder Abuse and Suicide Prevention</li> <li>• Maximising the use of internal resources and staff, and reducing costs</li> <li>• Increased professional approach to evaluating both trainees’ needs and in identifying and delivering expert training solutions</li> <li>• Up-grade in knowledge and skills gained by trainees is having a profound effect on confidence and commitment</li> <li>• Increased awareness of value of the training</li> <li>• New sub-network groups of co-ordinators have been formed in order to improve communications and networking around the skills needs</li> </ul>
<p>Southside Community Training Network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a significant change recorded in the knowledge (57% increase), skills (45% increase) and attitudes (50% increase) of participants, following the various training programmes</li> <li>• 89% of participants felt the courses were of personal benefit and 85% felt the courses were of benefit to their organisations</li> <li>• Other impacts on organisations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increasing the employability of staff through generating increases in skills, knowledge or confidence of those who participated</li> <li>○ Organisations more open to releasing staff to attend training, understanding that it can be of great benefit</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Respondents to the evaluation surveys held that networking, which occurred at the training sessions, was extremely beneficial to their organisations. This networking allowed participants and members to exchange experiences and to act as mentors to each other</li> </ul>

Community Transport Training Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Train the Trainer programme had a positive knock-on effect and has enabled trainers to provide training to their own staff and those of neighbouring organisations</li> <li>• The training has been focused on the practical skills required to improve the performance of the staff engaged in managing and operating transport services and to consider the skills and knowledge required to plan for the transition to a post carbon world. This latter impacts directly on the transport sector, especially as more and more people in the future will need to switch from being car dependent to being reliant on public transport.</li> <li>• The availability of the training information in individual groups will provide an important reference point going forward for each group and the extent to networking among staff and management in individual groups has been impressive in terms of transfer of knowledge and learning</li> <li>• Indications are that the training has been successful in changing attitudes through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stated improvements in job performance (82%)</li> <li>- Helping of work colleagues to improve skills and knowledge (93%)</li> <li>- Willingness to use the skills and knowledge learned (86%)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The provision of the training has also highlighted the value of networking and experience sharing among members as a valuable tool and resource for further organisational development</li> </ul>
Cork Community Music Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The training has certainly enhanced the skills of participants and extended the scope of the training they can provide</li> <li>• The effect of improved participant skills has been immediate</li> <li>• The opportunity to take part in the programme has raised awareness of the need to address skills associated with running a viable local community music service, and provided the opportunity to begin to meet that need. The chance for trainers to gain recognised accreditation provides motivation and has the potential to build employment opportunities</li> </ul>
Learning & Performance Network	<p>As this programme will continue beyond the funding time frame of the Training Links programme, the following impact has been measured and more will materialise as the programme is completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The network has proven to be a very vibrant, open and inclusive forum where sectoral specialists from the homeless sector can share expertise in a safe and supportive way</li> <li>• The level of open consultation has ensured that the detail, vision and outcomes from the homeless sector induction and manager's programmes will be realised</li> <li>• Sector wide consultation on the Managers Development Programme has enabled the identification and development of skills and competencies that have formed the basis of the development of a new managers programme specifically designed for the sector</li> </ul>

### 6.7.2 Level of Active Participation by Member Organisations in Network Meetings

Respondent	Number of Respondents		
	High	Medium	Low
Network Coordinators	5 (45%)	4 (36%)	2 (18%)

Typically, the level of individual participant in the network meetings was at CEO or senior manager level - five networks reported a high involvement and a further four reported a medium involvement.

The networks undertook a wide range of tasks, including evaluating training needs, developing training materials and courses, selecting trainers, providing courses and securing certification.

In some cases, a core group, the Steering Committee, was the main activity performer, and in the other cases all the network members were involved.

### 6.7.3 The Added Value of the Training Links Programme

Respondents (11)	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
Network Coordinators	11	100	0	0

All Network co-ordinators are quite definite in their responses that the Training Links Programme has added tremendous value to the sector and organisations operating in the network.

### 6.7.4 Effectiveness of the Model and Comparison with other Approaches

Network Coordinators	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
Overall would you consider the Training Links Programme an effective model for the delivery of training in your sector?	11	100	0	0
Overall, was the organisational -led approach to training more effective than alternative approaches?	10	90	1	10

100% of network coordinators responded that the Training Links Programme was an effective model for the delivery of training in their sectors and organisations, and 90% believed that the organisational-led approach to training is more effective than alternative approaches that networks had tried – such as individually sourcing trainers and off-the-shelf programmes, because they did not have the resources – either people or finances – to identify, design and develop effective and customised training solutions to meet specific needs.

#### 6.7.5 Availability of New Training Materials

Respondents		Yes	
Network Coordinators	Number	Number	%
Did the network produce new training materials or products	11	9	82%
Will the network make all training materials freely available to other members/new members	11	11	100%
Will the network continue to use and disseminate the training programmes and materials?	11	5*	45%

\* this can only be done where continued funding and resources are available to the network

The majority of networks reported that new training materials were developed as a result of the funding received.

Furthermore all networks indicated that the materials developed and or purchased will be shared with all other members who did not have access to the training at the time of the Training Links Programme and or other members and trainees in the future (**refer: Learning and Performance Network case study; Lobbying for Community and Adult Education case study; Senior Help Line case study, One Parent Exchange Network case study**).

With regard to the third question asked of network coordinators, only 45% indicated that the network would be in a position to disseminate on a longer term basis the learning and training materials resulting from the Training Links Programme. Of the remaining 55%, only one network indicated that it would be in a position to continue to deliver training (i.e. web based sectoral induction Learning and Performance Network) post funding. The remaining 45% indicated that further training and dissemination of learning programmes and materials would not be likely without further funding and resources.



## 6.8 Impact on the community and voluntary sector

The views reported by the networks with regard to the short, medium and long term impacts of the Training Links Programme on the sector are as follows:

### Short - term

- Immediate increase in knowledge and skills levels
- Increased performance
- Increased networking among groups both locally and nationally
- Receipt of practical and relevant training for members
- Increased job satisfaction through increased knowledge and certification
- Transfer of knowledge to those who did not attend training

### Medium - term

- More professional service provision from organisations to those who use their services
- Increased organisational efficiency and capacity
- Realisation of the value of networking and combining resources

### Long - term

- Capacity and willingness to undertake further training
- Organisational improvements and service delivery
- Potential new partnerships and collaborations arising from relationships developed between organisations as a result of training networks

“AONTAS intends to use the foundations established through the Training Links project to form a Community Education Network. The aim of the Network will be to act as a conduit for lobbying and media work. It will be open to all AONTAS members in the community education sector and will build on the work of the Training Links project by encouraging its participants to join.”

### **Lobbying for Community and Adult Education**

“Cork Academy of Music have been the Co-ordinator for this programme and have found the process easy to work with. We have found The Wheel co-ordinators to be very supportive and always felt included. We have gained a lot of experience by working on this programme and we would like to continue as co-ordinators.”

### **Cork Community Music Network**

“OPEN intends to continue supporting the on-going development of the Network. As part of our current strategic plan we are working to establish regional forums across the country.”

**One Parent Exchange Network**

## **6.9 Key Strengths – Training Links Programme**

“The scheme was of great benefit to the members of MRCG, allowing them to gain access to training which might not otherwise have been available, particularly in the areas specific to the membership – i.e. the specially designed workshops on Science for non-scientists; Patient registries; and Intellectual Property Rights.”

**Medical Research Charities Group**

Prior to the establishment of the networks, The Wheel identified a number of potential advantages of the Training Links Programme:

- Relevance of customised training to specific groups
- Participation of people in new and innovation training and learning initiatives
- Commitment of member organisations and existing networking groups to the initiative
- Responsiveness of the sector, its members associations, organisations and workers
- Training linked to organisational development and strategic economic and social issues
- Collaboration of member organisations in the development and design of new, innovative and strategic learning opportunities
- Emergence of new networks

### **6.9.1 Relevance**

The establishment of the Training Links Programme under the Sector Skills initiative has enabled organisations and their employees to identify and drive specific organisational training needs. Furthermore, organisations involved have engaged in networking actively to build relationships with their clients, providers and suppliers, professional advisors and other stakeholders (**e.g. AONTAS – Lobbying for Community and Adult Education Network Case Study**) to strengthen organisation capabilities. It is clear from the evaluations and network reports that resulted from the Training Links Programme that there is within the sector a large untapped reservoir of experience that can be shared with other organisations in the network, and with other networks (**e.g. Rape Crisis Network Ireland – Developing Organisational Strategy and Capacity**; feedback from Coordinators on the value of the

Training Links programme in enabling networking, sharing of experiences and the building of relationships with other sectors and organisations).

The ability to come together with a “focus”, to collaborate, identify, design, develop and deliver has been a key success factor of the programme, ensuring relevance for participants that many had not experienced before when attending other “off the shelf” training programmes. The focus on specific and relevant training content and materials has had a major impact on a number of levels, including increased knowledge, skills, ability, confidence and performance. This explains the consistent level of positive reports coming through the network reports and evaluations.

The evaluation team are of the view that this underpins the integrity and relevance of the Training Links Programme. Networks have identified and openly reported back on findings and challenges.

The four new networks have all identified and report back in their respective end of programme reports the value and impact of the Training Links Programme. Some of the collective comments are detailed below:

“Finally, this whole process would have been unachievable due to constraints of resources, time and finance. One of the most influential and meaningful aspects of this training was the opportunities to share experiences outside of the formal training setting. The final result has been to achieve raised levels of participation in almost all member groups, develop the [regional] coordinators as a new network willing and committed to working together (and independently) with support from the central team at the Summerhill Headquarter, Co. Meath.”

**Karen Fay/Damian Leneghan, Coordinators, Senior HelpLine**

“Leadership roles taken on by participants from various elements of the programme will significantly contribute to sustainable community development.”

**Olive Power, Coordinator, One Parent Exchange Network**

“Contact with The Wheel proved to be of immense benefit. It was supportive and informative, in particular the training days organised for the 11 networks. The contact with The Wheel also helped to keep me focused, on target, and at times calm! Thank you for your work to help us realise our goals, for your vision in sourcing funds and for your commitment to the process.”

**Sandra Campbell, Southside Community Training Network**

### 6.9.2 Networking

Networks have reported numerous important benefits for organisations such as helping to overcome the isolation experienced by CEOs, owner-managers, centre managers, senior managers and others, through sharing of ideas and experiences, learning from one another, and improving ways of managing the organisation and its pool of human resources.

### 6.9.3 Training Design & Quality

Almost all networks reported designing and developing new training programmes to meet the specific needs of their organisations and sector. Also, by pooling resources and group purchasing, networks have identified solutions to common training needs, e.g. the cost of accessing training by individual enterprises was reduced (**e.g. Neurological Training Network**). Gaining the critical mass necessary for buying power allowed various groups of organisations (particularly the smaller, more vulnerable and isolated groups) to design training activities in a way that they could not on an individual basis.

In general, networks reported that trainees and Network members were very positive in relation to the quality of the training provided.

#### Positive

“Excellent training. Very practical and plenty of discussion. Really enjoyed it and the group was very open and welcoming.”

“The trainer was excellent. She was clear, concise and very knowledgeable.”

“The last session was fantastic. Very practical, with mock radio interviews and campaign images.”

“Trainer was excellent – well prepared with practical applications for the learning.”

“Really enjoyed the day. Thought the trainer was excellent. Reference to real-life case studies and examples were very useful, as were tips on timing re. inside workings of the Oireachtas, etc.”

#### Constructive

“There is a lot of very useful information, but needs to be more participatory if information is to be retained.”

“More examples which can be applied in community settings would be useful.”

“Far too much information in the course. Appears most of the time is spent listening. Needs to be more participatory, as we could get all the information in a handout. Listening for that length of time is tiring and makes it hard to take in the information.”

“Found the training session too ‘overhead’ focused. More involvement and group-work would benefit the training throughout the day.”

Networks have clearly identified the importance of engaging with trainers that have good understanding of their specific sector’s needs.

#### 6.9.4 Commitment of Network Members

Networks have reported that the “organisational-led” model has increased ownership and commitment by members and their employees. The self-directing nature of the Training Links Model has enabled the organisations to determine the aims of the network, its purpose and the way it wants to operate. By establishing decision-making within the network the outputs and success of the network have been established in each member, as well as in the collaborative group. Ownership of the network by the participating organisations has ensured that the activities, methods, processes and outcomes are directly **relevant** to their operational needs.

The analysis of the various Network Reports submitted in October 2006, January 2007, March 2007 and June 2007, as well as interviews with the executive of The Wheel, and interviews with the network coordinators, explored the level of ownership and commitment in the networks. Feedback has been analysed and is presented below:

#### The Relationships between the Network Coordinators, and Network Members

Respondents (11)		Open/ trusting		Cautious/ testing		Complex/ problematic	
	Number	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Network Coordinators	11	8	72	2	18	1	10

There were no instances where the evaluators found lack of commitment to the network or where the training networks were not organisation-led.

### 6.9.5 Role of the Network Coordinator

In the 11 networks all have reported that the Network Coordinator is the key person, providing the glue that binds the network members and activity together. Others who provide services to the network included trainers, subject matter experts, sector specialists/stakeholders, and academics. The key driver of the network was the promoting organisation, who signed the contract with The Wheel, on behalf of the network.

### 6.9.6 Value for Money

The Training Links Programme enabled companies to spread the cost of training between member organisations within the network (usually a larger number of companies) and also encouraged the advantages of bulk purchasing. This had a dramatic effect on the cost of training, with over 72% of the responding network coordinators stating that they had achieved cost savings.

Most of these organisations have stated in their applications and subsequently in their reports that they do not have access to funding for training.

#### Cost Effective Approach to Training (No. of respondents 11)

Network Coordinators	# responses		Yes		No		Don't Know	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
	11	100	8	72	1	10	2	18

### 6.9.7 Innovative and Developmental Approach

The opportunity to test the network model in the community and voluntary sector has been presented an innovative and new approach. The Training Links Programme has been derived from the experience of the Skillnets Enterprise-led Network Model, and the significant benefits that model have seen for those involved. Organisations have clearly reported new ways of networking, working, sharing of knowledge and expertise, and developing responses to common organisational needs.

The following innovative and development features were reported by the networks:

<b>Organisation-led</b>	Where the organisations control and decide on all aspects of the training process – training needs analysis, training content, selection of trainers, advisors, etc.
<b>Organisational ethos</b>	Where the training is designed to meet business needs
<b>Employee focused</b>	Focused on training people working in the organisations and building in- capability and capacity
<b>Flexible</b>	Minimise constraints on organisations when they identify their own needs
<b>Co-funded</b>	Individual members/organisations have to contribute financially – both in terms of cash and resources
<b>Innovative</b>	Trying new concepts and ideas, adding to the body of knowledge, bringing new ideas to existing organisations
<b>Wide range of potential partners</b>	Boards of Management, CEOs and staff coming together Large organisations transferring knowledge to smaller organisations Professional inputs from trainers, subject matter experts, academia and other advisors

## 6.10 Key Weaknesses – Training Links Programme

### 6.10.1 Timeframe for Delivery of Training

The timeframe for the Training Links Programme was August 2006 to June 2007.

Many networks reported that, in hindsight, this timeframe restricted the type and duration of some of the programmes originally identified. In particular, both timing and level of funding had an impact on the ability of networks to delivery “certified” programmes, as certified programmes involve a longer timeframe for delivery.

### 6.10.2 Timing of Programme

With regard to planning and preparation for the application and training needs analysis, that occurred prior to August 2006, some networks noted that the summer months are, in general, very difficult in terms of getting hold of people, organising meetings, arranging activities, etc. Examples of feedback from networks:

“The summer months do not suit community and voluntary groups in general. It is very difficult to track down the relevant contacts within community organisations during these times, and very difficult to organise meetings, etc.”

“The timeframe for the programme overall was extremely tight. Because the Lobbying for Adult and Community Education Network was newly established as a result of the funding received from the Training Links Programme (i.e. it was not an existing Network), it would ideally have had a lot more time at the beginning of the programme to ensure full buy-in and commitment from all Network members.”

### **6.10.3 Support and Monitoring**

Some of the networks reported that they would have liked more individual support and monitoring visits from The Wheel to help keep them on track and to provide one to one advice and guidance. This feedback is significant in terms of running the programme again as The Wheel provided four support workshops for all network coordinators during a 9 month period and also met individually with each coordinator twice over the same period. If more is needed then the role of the Training Funds Manager will need to be reviewed within The Wheel.

## **6.11 Training Links Programme – Performance against Objectives**

### **6.11.1 Objective One: to enable the development of a fixed number of existing or new networks of Community and Voluntary organisations throughout the country**

The four new networks formed as a result of the Training Links Programme represent a new initiative and this impact is directly attributable to the Sector Skills Programme.

All four new networks have all reported on the positive impacts of coming together with a common purpose, the resulting alliances, raising of awareness of each other, shared learning and experiences, and the opening of new doors with regard to taking on renewed levels of responsibility:

“As their confidence soared through the training elements individuals and groups began to see themselves as leaders and realise what they could achieve. Groups now have new leaders as a result...people have taken on responsibilities rather than waiting for things to happen.”

One Parent Exchange and Network



## **Sustainability**

All networks report their respective plans to continue the network and its networking (i.e. not specifically training activity) after funding ceases on the Training Links Programme.

All networks reported – and this is further referenced in the independent evaluators' reports and respective application forms – that without the funding provided by the Training Links Programme – little or none of the training activities would have taken place. This is further reflected in various quotes that have been highlighted and referenced by the evaluation team throughout this section of the external evaluation report.

In conclusion, therefore, the following network sustainability initiatives will continue:

All 11 networks will continue to communicate, meet, share, plan and maintain the relationships, momentum and synergies created as a result of coming together under the Training Links Programme

Approximately 50% of the networks will continue to deliver a small amount of training as a into the September and October – as a result of the tight timeframe of the programme and the impact of summer holidays clashing with end of Programme date.

For the majority of networks (i.e. 9 of 11), little or no training activity will be possible and/or will continue beyond that which had been planned and funded by the Training Links Programme. Two networks report that training will continue with some limited resources available.

### **6.11.2 Objective Two: to provide much needed opportunities for sectoral co-operation and shared learning**

Networks unanimously reported that the opportunity to come together to share and co-operate had a powerful and positive impact on their respective ability to deliver much needed training to people in their sectors. The majority of networks reported the following:

- This is the first time Network members have been able to engage in a planned and focused training process
- This is the first time CEOs and senior managers from other member organisations have had the opportunity to come together to discuss and plan strategically
- Without the funding none of the organisations would have been able to come together in this way
- Members have been able to plan the training process and to steer the direction and shape of the training programme

“The lifetime of the Training Links Programme has been marked by many proactive activities undertaken by the network. The Network has gone from strength to strength having grown in many ways. Members have gained both individually and collectively. The network has proven to be a very vibrant, open and inclusive forum where sectoral specialists can share expertise, knowledge and information in a safe and supportive way. The level of open consultation has ensured that the detail, vision and outcomes from the sectoral induction and manager’s programmes will be realised.”

**Learning and Performance Network**

All Networks reported that the network approach was very beneficial in terms of forging links. Networks and their members found experienced opportunities to meet other groups working in their respective sectors – in some cases groups they knew about but had not engaged with previously.

AONTAS, for example, reported that the Network approach was particularly beneficial for them in terms of strengthening their relationship with their members, finding out more about the day-to-day work of their members, getting to know individuals within their member organisations, and facilitating the participant groups to find out more about AONTAS’ day-to-day work and their overall role in the adult learning sector.

**6.11.3 Objective Three: to support the commissioning of customised, localised solutions, appropriate to the network’s needs**

“This was the first time that Network members had participated in an organised training network. There was a lot of work done at the initial stages to make sure that the training being provided met the needs of the network members.”

**Neurological Training Network Ireland**

All networks reported that the funding had enabled them to identify, develop and delivery training that was specifically customised or developed for their sector and organisations. Furthermore, training was delivered to members operating in isolated regions and areas.

Providing networks with the funds to bring together experts, and or to source subject matter experts (refer Medical Research Group Case Study) has resulted in benefits not initially contemplated. For example, the Medical Group Network will:

“... continue the network, however, the format for member involvement will have to be

amended from that envisaged by this programme. Member workloads mean it is difficult for members to commit time and staff to such structures ..... Members will be able to feed their requirements in to one central point and to have this person address the training needs as required, with a small group to advise on a project basis.”

## 5.15 Summary of Findings

- The Wheel’s Sector Skills Initiative has, beneath the umbrella of the Training Links Programme, provided the community and voluntary sector the opportunity to come together, to pool resources and experiences in order to access, develop and deliver training to both voluntary staff and employees operating in the sector
- The Programme has provided a catalyst and a focus for the networking of groups both within specific sectors and across diverse community and voluntary sectors as a whole
- The Programme has brought a new dynamic and dimension to the organisations and networks involved in the Programme
- Four new networks have been born as a result of the Training Networks Programme – until the Programme’s advent, these organisations often worked independently and autonomously of each other. The Programme has enabled a platform for coming together, the recognition of each other’s aims and objectives, built understanding, provided opportunities to collaborate, enabled open discussion, planning and working together to build sustainability through upskilling of voluntary and community staff and employees
- For the existing networks the Programme has provided an opportunity for them to renew their shared impetus, to come together to avail of the opportunity to identify, develop and implement new and innovative training programmes to their groups, and to collaborate and achieve cost efficiencies not previously possible.
- The Training Links Programme has enabled participating sectors, organisations and members to identify and assemble their respective organisational training and development needs in line with best practice in the “workplace” in order to consider and where possible, address the many shared organisational performance and sustainability issues
- The training delivered has been based closely on the needs analysis carried out in the development period after networks were selected for the Programme. As the Programme

progressed for some networks a number of appropriate adjustments have been made to accommodate drivers of change impacting the organisations

- The training that has been delivered has been of a very high quality and participants have been very satisfied with it on a number of levels – knowledge and appropriateness of trainer; quality and appropriateness of content and materials; relevance given legislative, social and economic dynamics, etc
- Organisational membership has exceeded the initial targets – this indicates a need within the sector and the attractiveness of the networking model in enabling organisations to access and deliver training
- The Programme has been well managed and administered by The Wheel – the support of the Training Funds Manager and Support Series Workshops have played an important part in keeping the Programme on track, enabling a good level of interaction, communication and awareness of targets and objectives
- Many of the organisations that have participated have reported positive impacts as a result of the training
- The Training Links Networks have reported that training is more focused, relevant and specific to the needs of organisations in the community and voluntary sector
- The network approach has encouraged organisations to think longer term and to develop and participate in more comprehensive training courses. This is evidenced by the interest in accredited courses and longer-term courses.
- Whilst some of the training has been slower than planned to take off, findings to date by the Evaluators are that there is commitment to achieving end Programme targets, increasing membership, identifying sustainability beyond pure financial (i.e. funding), identifying and assessing the strategic direction of the organisations in addressing emerging needs and undertaking new and innovative training, learning and networking activities
- All networks reported that the Network involved a much higher level of commitment and management time interfacing with members and learners than initially estimated – particularly with regard to contacting members, organising training programmes, and the logistics associated with arranging and delivering training programmes. Not only did Network Coordinators report spending more time than originally intended, but some had to involve other staff members from their organisations in order to provide administration support and financial expertise with regard to management and reporting on the Networks budget.

## **SECTION 2 – CHAPTER 7**

### **7 Training Links Programme Recommendations**

#### **7.1 Role of Members**

The ongoing success of the networks is dependent on the full and active participation of all members. To this end members need to engage in the management, direction, and decision making of the network.

Member organisations need to carry out training needs analysis (TNA) within their organisations, and where necessary should be supported to do so. Such analysis could usefully include the provision of an overview of the main developmental issues within each organisation. Support for the development of TNAs can be done through one to one support, peer mentoring, or through providing training on this issue.

Clarification about what it is that member organisations are expected to contribute, and what they can expect from the network and how contributions of member organisations will be acknowledged.

#### **7.2 Network Management**

The role of the Network Coordinator is complex and detailed one. In light of the feedback from Network Coordinators, the time allocation and role content needs to be reviewed and recognised with regard to level of time commitment, complexity of the role, and the skills, knowledge and competencies required of an experienced project manager.

The management and participation of network activities demands a significant time input and commitment from network co-ordinators, and this has been particularly reported by Network Co-ordinators at a meeting attended by the Evaluators. Co-ordinators have reported that resources and support in managing the network and its activities were underestimated at the commencement of the projects. Many of the Network Co-ordinators only operate on a part-time basis, and/or have adopted the role along side their day job.

Effective feedback mechanisms need to be developed between the steering committee and the members – e.g. agreed updates, reports, networking events, meetings.

### **7.3 Support Series Workshops**

Given the importance of the role of the Support Series Workshops and the positive impact these had on Network Coordinators, any future training networks programme would be advised to ensure that the support series of workshops continue - both within the current phase and in any future development of Training Links. Review of feedback in Network Coordinator reports of the workshop series has indicated the series to have informed Network Co-ordinators, evaluators and others regarding the structure, model and process required of managing a training network, as well as providing a support structure within a support structure: i.e. networks networking with each other, developing new relationships, learning from their peers, sharing experiences and information.

### **7.4 The Wheel – Support for Networks**

Ensure that the additional support needs expressed by the networks finds its way into The Wheel's planning for adequate administrative, project manager and support resources. As a result of the feedback the role of the Training Funds Manager needs to be reviewed to ensure that there is adequate time and opportunity to manage and oversee the networks.

### **7.5 Time to Build Networks**

The building of training networks, or any network, presents a major challenge. Networks need to develop and build a shared and central focus. The role of the network co-ordinator is a tough and challenging role. The individual may have to deal with many agendas, egos, profiles and conflicting organisational requirements. The support and advice these individuals achieve through interacting with other colleagues in similar roles cannot be underestimated. Focused network activities to support the network coordinators at specific intervals, such as the Support Series Workshops and other such events are an important and integral element of good communication, learning, cross-pollination, benchmarking and establishing best practice.

It is clear from the experiences of the Learning and Performance Network that the challenges it faced with the timeframe of the Training Links Programme, in particular the sector consultation process to identify and agree the design and rollout of the training programmes, had a major negative impact on the ability of the network to achieve its goals. Whilst those goals are, in hindsight, somewhat ambitious (i.e. the full extent of the work involved had not been apparent at the time of the application for funding) the learning for The Wheel and the Sector Skills Initiative, is that sufficient time must be awarded to the various elements of the Initiative if it is to be successful. The Skillnets Training Networks Model operates on a period of 2 years. This time period has been identified as a good timeframe in which to identify, plan, develop and roll out training interventions, and particularly training programmes that have

accreditation attached – i.e. most certified programmes operated by networks in the Skillnets Programme tend to take place over a 12 – 24 month period.

## **7.6 Role of Accreditation**

The need to build and recognise skills, knowledge and competencies through upskilling and accredited programmes is an important focus for future training. In line with the Government's recent reports on the skills strategy for Ireland and the workplace of the future, moving people up the value chain of the National Qualifications Framework, is a strategic imperative if Ireland is to remain an effective economy – both socially and economically.

## SECTION 2 – CHAPTER 8

### 8. Learningpoint.ie

#### 8.1 Programme Background

Learningpoint.ie is a central web-based sign-posting service providing a single source of accurate, up-to-date information about training opportunities throughout the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.

Learningpoint.ie was set up as a direct response to one of the recommendations in the *Training Solutions for the Community and Voluntary Sector Report* (NICVA, June 2005. p 60) to “signpost training provision... and to collate, analyse and disseminate information about training” and to develop structures for “greater networking and communication between, and links with...national training providers so as to better co-ordinate training and reduce duplication”.

#### 8.2 Programme Objectives

The overarching aim of Learningpoint.ie is to provide, in a single location, a reliable source of detailed, timely, readily accessible, freely available information on which organisations in the voluntary and community sector can base their training planning. It aims to provide organisations with a single source web-based data base of accurate, topical information about training opportunities for all community and voluntary organisations through Ireland, whether provided by third-level institutions, private or voluntary organisations or others.

The specific objectives of the Learningpoint.ie project are:

- To develop a relational database, capturing, organising and publishing data about available training opportunities, searchable by county and by topic
- To have the capacity to be used interactively by training providers to update and amend their own records
- To explore the development and experimental use of a model voluntary code of quality assurance

The expected outcomes are:

- Improved knowledge of training opportunities for the community and voluntary sector



- An increase in the community and voluntary sector's confidence in the value and effectiveness of available training opportunities

Longer term objectives, that do not fall within the remit of this evaluation phase, are:

- To provide The Wheel with baseline, user-friendly information that, over time, will provide evidence of training gaps, and therefore will support the design and delivery of future training solutions
- To use Learningpoint.ie as a vehicle to explore quality assurance models for training accessed by the community and voluntary sector

Data used in this report is from the period Oct 2006 to end June 2007

### **8.3 Activity Undertaken**

Essentially this element of the Sector Skills programme differs from the other two in that no specific training was developed or delivered. Instead, the funding was used to design, develop, populate and launch a one-stop-shop website. Work therefore centred around researching other models in Ireland and the UK, developed a technical specification and implementing the project. For an outline of the Learningpoint.ie programme activity please see the Chapter on Project Management

### **8.4 Overview of Findings**

From The Wheel's point of view, the design of Learningpoint.ie is an efficient model for provision of up to date and relevant information on training to the sector: training providers are encouraged to add their details rather than The Wheel hiring an information officer to research and up date information. The model has worked well and The Wheel intends to apply it to another website underway to provide information on funding sources in the sector. The intense phase of development for Learningpoint.ie was at the design and construction phase. While Learningpoint.ie has shown itself to be a useful and relevant resource, it requires further development and enhanced promotion to realise its potential to impact strongly and positively in the sector.

“sound idea but needs to be marketed better”

learningpoint.ie Training Provider

Plans are underway to improve the promotion of the site to the sector.

## 8.5 User Experience

### 8.5.1 User responses to survey

Users were given the opportunity to complete a simple online questionnaire to give feedback on their experience of using Learningpoint.ie. While the level of feedback was low - 29 respondents - the messages were quite consistent:

- 46% of respondents to the online survey rated the information found on the website as “very good” and 43% rated it as “good”. A further 11% had “no opinion”.
- In relation to the look and feel of the website, 31% of respondents rated it is “very good” and 66% rated it as “good”. A further 3% had no opinion.
- In relation to user-friendliness, a total of 35% of respondents rates the site as “very good” with 62% rating it as “good”. A total of 3.5% rated it as “poor”.
- In addition, six comments were made in addition to the responses listed above, two of which were criticisms:
  - The first relates to the low number of courses available in the cork area where the respondent was based. A general search of training opportunities in the Cork area shows 456 possibilities so the complaint is likely to refer to training of a particular type.
  - The other comment is a criticism of the search engine that is discussed further in the section below on usability.
- A total of 35% of the respondents said that they expected to use the site weekly. A further 33% said that they expected to use it monthly with 33% suggesting that they expect to use it “every few months”.
- 100% of respondents said that they would use the site again.

### 8.5.2. User Rate

The site has been accessed by 8,640 people a total of 13,365 times over a nine-month period between October 2006 the end of June 2007. Of these visits, 8,638 were first time visitors giving a repeat visit rate of approximately 35%. From the survey to users, a total of 58% of the respondents were on a repeat visit.

The rate of new visitors decreased slightly in the two months following the website launch (November & December 2006) but remained close to the average of 1,485 visits per month from January to the end of June 2007. There is an average of approximately 70 visits a day over the working week. Of this 94% of users are looking for information about training. The remaining 6% of users are training providers who promote their offerings via the website.

The average number of pages viewed per visit is between eight and nine with approximately five minutes on average spent on the site. The average five-minute visit suggests, either visitors look for very specific information, find it and leave happy, or else have trouble finding the information that they want and give up. However, as this figure is an average and includes users and training providers it is not appropriate to draw any solid conclusions.

### **8.5.3. Usability of the site**

In general, there are generally positive responses from the training providers that received more than three enquiries via Learningpoint.ie:

“I think it is great - just in the last few weeks I have discovered that when people google mediation or my name then I appear on learning point website. Then they see my website address and make contact. I am very appreciative of this exposure because it is not easy being self employed as a sole trader.”

Ninety-six percent of respondents to the online user survey rated the usability of the website as very good or good but only one actually commented on it.

“I found the site very user-friendly in the main; I like the design, colour, clarity and layout. It's quite an experience to go online and feel confident that my relatively limited computer skills can be supported by a well planned website!“ \*

Online Survey Respondent

This comment suggests the respondent, who has limited experience and knowledge of online computer searches, has a relatively low expectation of finding positive results. The evaluation team's view is that those users who are relatively inexperienced in web searches and the internet - find it accessible whilst those with more experience i.e. the training providers are more liable to be critical of aspects of it:

- that it takes too many key strokes to get the information wanted,
- that the search engines under topic are not sufficiently discriminating
- there could be more opportunities for interaction between training providers and those searching the site.

“As a service provider I find the learning point website very bland. From looking at the page, I do not know what Learningpoint.ie is about. It is cumbersome to navigate and I rarely, if ever am enticed to look at it. Also, if you google training, you don't come across the learning point website “ Susan Whately PSM Ltd

Training Provider

Training providers are good sources of information on how to make the site more usable and their feedback includes a number of practical suggestions such as:

“Could have a section on the home page with new courses added for the week”

Training Provider

The evaluator team's experience of the search facility on the site is that it could be frustrating to use - sometimes yielding too many results because it is too broad or not connecting with relevant information that is available on the site.

This experience is also reflected in feedback from training providers so can be assumed to be an issue rather than an isolated case.

#### **8.5.4. Accessibility**

38% of those accessing the site do so by directly typing in the address [www.learningpoint.ie](http://www.learningpoint.ie) while a further 36% access it via google or other search engines. 10% access the site via The Wheel's own website and just under 2% from other referral sources such as [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). This suggests that the target group that accessed the site are familiar with the name and the address of the website beforehand. While this is a good thing, other comments made by users and training providers indicate that more promotion and marketing are needed, therefore it can be interpreted that the site is only reaching those that it has been actively promoted to date.

Poor web visibility is an issue, currently when a person searches google - if they know the name of the resource, i.e. Learningpoint.ie, or learning point they will get the site reference on the first page. If, however, they don't have the name in their heads, and search “training Ireland”, Learningpoint.ie is not listed until page 6. As most people view pages 1 & 2 of results at most, this could mean that significant numbers of people who are unaware of the resource but who would benefit by using it are unlikely to be accessing it at this stage in its development. This issue has been identified by the training providers.

"The website doesn't return in a search for "Courses" "Training" "Community Training" "Community Courses" "Training Provider" even when the radio button for 'pages from Ireland' is dotted. Could this be rectified?"

Training Provider

"My only suggestion would be for you to increase your search engine rankings. When the words courses, learning, diploma courses etc are typed into a search engine you should be appearing on the first or second page as that is what you offer; but when I checked you're not appearing on any of the first 5 pages."

Training Provider

### **8.5.5. Geographic Spread**

Naturally enough, 95% of visits to the site are based in Europe with 4% coming from America and the remaining 1% spread between Asia, Africa and Oceania regions. 89% of the European visits were located in Ireland across 37 cities and towns. 70% of visits came from the Dublin area showing that awareness and use of the site is clearly concentrated in the Dublin area. This is not necessarily a bad thing as the population patterns for Ireland mirror a concentration in the Dublin area. Cork has 7.5% of visits, the Shannon area 7.3% and Limerick 5.6%. Galway is next with 1.7% and Tallaght with 1%. The remaining 7% of website hits are coming from a broad geographical base across most counties. Use of the site is particularly low in the midlands, southeast, northwest and southwest respectively.

## **8.6 Training Providers**

The number of training providers registered on the database has increased from 315 when the website went live in October 2006 to the current total of 410 at the end of June 2007. The consistent trend being an increase of somewhere between seven and nine new training providers registering every month since the site went live. The steady growth of training providers registering on the site suggests that the website is positively endorsed and supported by training providers. This view is backed up by the comments of the 128 training providers who responded to the online survey. It is difficult to interpret whether the 410 providers represent close to saturation point of existing Irish based trainers or whether some providers are still not registering.

### **8.6.1 Training Provider Experiences**

In general training providers are very happy to use the site as a free resource for promoting their businesses and courses. They acknowledge that a limited level of business appears to

come to them via the Learningpoint.ie route. Approximately a quarter are unable to track the routes their customers come to them by but of the 75% that can, less than 25% of respondents indicate they have received business through the Learningpoint.ie route.

“it’s a great website but to date we haven’t received any business as a result of advertising through your website”

In general training providers get the majority of their business from word of mouth.

“As a trainer and a training organisation for many years - I have never found advertising to be useful as 95% of business comes from word of mouth and reputation.”

Those training providers that are closely linked to the community and voluntary sector while grateful for the exposure echo this view.

“I am delighted to be listed on Learning Point and think that the site is very comprehensive. I have been contacted by new clients but I think that the recommendations are coming by word of mouth through community and voluntary sector and/or from the Carmichael Centre rather than through the website. “

Even those who strongly expected new business to come as a result of the site have not had results.

“I thought that it would have attracted some interest/queries, as I promoted a few courses through your web-site which should of being of interest to the greater community sector. I work as a Tourism Training/Development officer and I believe a tool like this could be used by Fáilte Ireland to communicate their training offerings to the wider public. There are a large number of border-based organisations offering all sorts of training which could also be targeted to use this facility.”

The consistent feedback from the training providers is that the site is not sufficiently known or marketed and that in general it is a passive resource liable to be under-used until a proactive marketing and advertising strategy is put in place.

“Advertise more. I’ve met no one who’s heard of it”

“The site at the moment is very passive”

“Raise awareness of its existence”

“Not enough people are aware this facility exists”

“Its not known enough for people to automatically go to it. More publicity. Otherwise it’s a good website and very user-friendly”

Many practical suggestions were made such as:

- Promote to HR managers
- Copy the Activelink model with regular email listings of upcoming training.
- Showcase events
- Advertising on search engines
- Hosting some networking sessions with relevant organisations to promote the site where participants on the site could go along

In addition providers are looking for some way of knowing who may have even looked at their web pages so they can target them with marketing information more directly in the future.

## **8.7 Learningpoint – Key Strengths**

Learningpoint.ie key strengths are:

- A positive platform from which to access up to date information about training opportunities for the community and voluntary sector
- A user-friendly and straight forward interface
- Training providers see it as a positive space to promote and advertise their courses
- A cost-effective and potentially sustainable model of information delivery to the sector

## **8.8 Learningpoint.ie - Weaknesses**

- Lack of awareness of resource amongst target group. Many people in community and voluntary sector are more familiar with other longer established resources
- The website is relatively passive. The monthly email promotion 'learning digest' and marketing promotion to date needs to be augmented to keep it in its target audiences awareness
- Poor web-visibility from standard search-engines.
- The search facility within Learningpoint.ie isn't sufficiently discerning
- Lack of engagement or feedback from target group users

## **8.9 Performance against Objectives**

### **8.9.1 Objective 1: Develop a relational database, capturing, organising and publishing data about available training opportunities, searchable by county and by topic.**

This objective has been achieved. The website database holds an average of 1000 active training courses in any month and had over 1675 courses in total listed at the end of June. Every month since its launch an average of 70 courses have been added.

The site is searchable by county (though for some counties there ought to be a distinction between the city and the county e.g. courses offered in Cork city are still a 3 hour journey away from people living on the Beara peninsula so more could be done by providing additional categories such as West Cork.) Also, 'Great Britain' would benefit from being broken down into 'Northern Ireland', England, Scotland and Wales and Dublin into North City, South City, Tallaght Blanchardstown and Clondalkin for example.

As mentioned in the section on usability, while the site is searchable by topic, much of the feedback is critical of this aspect as the headings are considered too narrow by those who have explored the site. Many of the training providers suggest reviewing the classification system and providing a better and more detailed breakdown.

“The search engine is not very friendly, when I input words such as Montessori and Grant-aid I get unhelpful information or no results. “

Specific areas mentioned that should be included are:

- Development education
- Arts/ community arts
- Media

### **8.9.2 Objective 2: Have the capacity to be used interactively by training providers to update and amend their own records**

This objective has been achieved. There is evidence in feedback from the online survey that training providers are updating and amending their own records. There is also a call from training providers to provide more opportunities for them to interact with potential clients e.g. to log requests for brochures to know who is using the site and to allow them to comment.

“allocating more space, for additional information for providers of training”



### **8.9.3 Objective 3: Explore the development and experimental use of a model voluntary code of quality assurance**

No actions were taken to realise this objective during the timeframe of this evaluation. The Wheel's management indicate they are still strongly committed to this objective but did not have the capacity to realise it during this phase of Sector Skills Initiative implementation

### **8.10 Performance against intended outcomes**

The desired outcomes of the Learningpoint.ie were to provide the community and voluntary sector with:

- improved knowledge of training opportunities
- increased confidence in the value and effectiveness of available training opportunities.

While the site's very existence has led to some improved knowledge of training opportunities available, the lack of investment in promoting the site suggests that it could have more impact on the sector's knowledge of training opportunities in the future than it has had to date.

There is also a question about the extent to which improved knowledge is leading to or will, in the future, lead to increased confidence in the value and effectiveness of the available training opportunities. None of the data collection set up by The Wheel covered this area so it is not possible to be conclusive. However, with approximately 60% of those training providers that responded to the survey stating that they have not received any enquiries via Learningpoint, what is clear is that information and promotion are only one part of the picture when it comes to accessing training issues. Lack of information about quality or suitability of the courses to the sector's specific needs is likely deterrents as are limited training budgets. Training providers themselves identified some of these issues, and while not directly saying it, reading between the lines of their feedback, there is a strong suggestion that many realise they are not offering tailored training products to the community and voluntary sector. A learning from the Stronger Leaders programme is that training that directly addresses the needs and interests of the community and voluntary sector will be taken up and is in demand.

“the lack of queries to us may be because we offer a limited range of training”

“I don't really know - it might be the lack of promotion or it might be the limited amount of training monies out there”

It is possible to say that at a minimum, the impact of Learningpoint.ie has resulted in 74 enquiries about training courses and 20 enquiries about tailored training programmes.

## SECTION 2 – CHAPTER 9

### 9. Learningpoint.ie - Recommendations

Overall, the evaluation team's view is that Learningpoint.ie is an important development but so far it has under-performed relative to its potential to effect positive change. More attention and resources are required to make Learningpoint.ie an important, relevant and sustainable tool within the community and voluntary sector. The site is dependent on the active involvement of training providers in order to maintain it and keep it up to date. If training providers do not see evidence of a return for their efforts, they may begin to leave inaccurate information thus undermining the value of the site over time. The Wheel needs to address the issues pertaining to the development of Learningpoint.ie as a priority within the next 6 months otherwise this decline may begin to occur.

- Improve Learningpoint.ie's web visibility as an immediate priority.
- Refine the search engine to improve the quality of searches and more ably meet specific needs of training providers and those looking for training.
  - Review the usability or functionality of the search facility and make necessary improvements.
  - Add new categories.
  - Expand topic and region classification to include Northern Ireland.
  - If a further difficulty lies in how people use the search facility, provide pointers on the site about how to search effectively.
- Promote greater participation in the online Learningpoint.ie survey.

Only 29 individuals completed the online survey at the time of writing this evaluation (less than .03%) so, while the results contain some useful data they do not provide a comprehensive overview. The Wheel needs to find more effective strategies for promoting the survey to members and others in order to increase the response rate.
- Promote learningpoint.ie better.

Learningpoint.ie needs to be more actively developed and promoted in order to realise its objectives more fully and, in turn, to maximise its impact on the community and voluntary sector. Greater investment of financial and human resources is required e.g. an advertising budget, a staff member (or contracted worker) with responsibility for the promotion of Learningpoint.ie within the sector, technical input to revise search engine and other issues and evaluation/ monitoring informed by external consultants with expertise in this area such as was advised by the evaluators at the beginning of this implementation

phase. Lack of resources to cover these additional costs were the impediment to taking this route at the time. The evaluation team believes paying for expertise in website promotion and monitoring could be cost-effective as ways might be found, through selling advertising on a limited basis, to generate some resources from the website itself.

- Define performance targets for Learningpoint.ie

There is insufficient data to evaluate whether the website is as successful as it could be as no benchmark targets were set at the outset so it is not possible to comment conclusively on the website's performance. The Wheel might consider setting realistic targets based on performance trends and set these against expectation and estimates of demand from within the sector. These could focus on increases over a particular timeframe during which a promotion campaign is put in place so that it may be possible to assess the impact of promotional and other efforts on performance.

- Learningpoint.ie needs a development plan that will address key issues of relevance to maximising its impact. The plan should incorporate the views of
  - those with expertise in training in the community and voluntary sector
  - training providers
  - those with expertise in website development in the not-for-profit sector

The strategy or plan should cover a minimum of two years and should include the following areas:

- Site promotion and marketing
- Monitoring and evaluation of site use, trends and impact
- Ensuring relevance and quality for the sector
- Bigger picture and broader connections - website as information source for The Wheel and other agencies

If no significant improvement in Learningpoint.ie's impact on the sector were to follow following this strategy, then alternative routes to achieving The Wheel's objectives in this area would need to be assessed.

- The site also has potential as a useful source for gathering information about training and trends within the community and voluntary sector but this dimension needs to be promoted. The Wheel should consider building relationships with training providers and

co-operating with them to help track level of enquiries and bookings made via Learningpoint.ie as well as in capturing feedback about the customers experiences - particularly addressing the issue of the suitability or relevance of the training received to the specific needs of the community and voluntary sector.

- Contact training providers to get qualitative data on the link between accessing Learningpoint.ie and actual training bookings made. Explore ways in which quantitative data of this nature could be gathered.

Training providers are an important resource for the development of the site as they have embraced it positively and proved generous in providing comments and feedback. Regular contact with training providers would be positive. Email contact would remind training providers to update their course listings, promote the brand and might provide them with opportunities to give ideas for improvements or find ways to engage more with the community and voluntary client base.

- Learningpoint.ie needs a regular presence and profile with the sector it is targeting. Email alerts, updates, special offers, competitions as well as consistent branding will all help to achieve this and would incur very low, if any, real costs.
- Learningpoint.ie has proved itself a valuable tool for training providers to ascertain their competition. Information on who is using Learningpoint.ie and how they are using it should be tracked differently as the survey format used during this evaluation phase was not sufficiently comprehensive yielding as it did a less than .03% response rate amongst users.
- Continue to develop the website links page to be more comprehensive and to broaden the geographic appeal of the site.

Specific strategies need to be considered in order to tackle the Dublin centric nature of the site usage. Some of this is likely to relate to the digital divide between Dublin and more rural areas. Linking Learningpoint.ie better with existing resources and other websites would help e.g. advertise it in The Wheel's newsletter, promote it through Wheel member organisations, promote it through public libraries, Activelink, and public sector organisations networked with the community and voluntary sector.

- A strategy for realising the objective of exploring the development and experimental use of a model voluntary code of quality assurance for Learningpoint.ie should be put in place or the objective dropped.

## **SECTION 2: CHAPTER 10**

### **10. Project Management and Delivery**

#### **10.1 Development Work for the Sector Skills Initiative**

The process employed for each of the individual programme strands is outlined below:

##### **10.1.1 Stronger Leaders**

###### November 2005

- Project plan was developed
- Research was carried out on project information; C&V sector training offers; and similar information in the private sector & in other countries
- Project scope was defined, considering objectives and users' needs
- The delivery of Stronger Leaders was outsourced: a tender document was drawn up, including reference to the Future Leaders programme. Potential service deliverers were encouraged to consider this programme when making their application

###### December 2005

- 13 applications were received
- A three member selection panel comprising The Wheel CEO, The Wheel Training Funds Manager, and an Independent panel member considered all applications
- Four applicants were invited to interview and following a rigorous and detailed selection process, The Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups were chosen as the successful service deliverer for the programme

###### January to March 2006

- The programme content, the application process and the advertising and marketing process was developed and finalised, in conjunction with the Carmichael Centre

###### April to June 2006

- The programme was advertised widely to the sector – 4 nationwide information seminars; newsletter to 8,000 organisations, e-bulletin and website; Activelink; community radio and local newspapers
- the application forms and programme guidelines were completed and printed
- selection process and criteria were finalised and the selection panel was put in place (two member selection panel – The Wheel Training Funds Manager and the Carmichael Centre's Stronger Leaders' programme manager)

#### July to September 2006

- Application forms were processed
- The selection panel selected 32 applicants for 2 programmes, based on the selection criteria
- All 32 candidates took up the offer of a place on the programme

#### October 2006 to May 2007

- Two 12 day Stronger Leaders programme took place, with regular attendance by The Wheel at various elements of the programme, and regular meetings between The Wheel Training Funds Manager and the Carmichael Centre's Stronger Leaders' programme manager
- The Carmichael Centre was responsible for all direct financial management of the programme, with regular reporting to The Wheel and regular payments by The Wheel

### **10.1.2 Training Links**

#### October to December 2005

- Research and adaptation of Skillnets model
- A training networks model, suited to the community and voluntary sector, was devised.

#### January to March 2006

- Development of programme content developed including application form & guidelines, and selection criteria & process who will benefit, how to apply, guidelines and project criteria

#### April to June 2006

- The Training Links programme was actively promoted in a similar way to Stronger Leaders (above)
- A detailed two-stage selection process was developed, comprising of an initial eligibility filter carried out by The Wheel Training Funds Manager, and a 2<sup>nd</sup> stage selection carried out by a three-person independent selection panel (Monica Manning, Director of Community Action Network; Susan Coughlan, CV sector consultant; and Bridie Corrigan Matthews, consultant and former programme manager with Skillnets)

#### July to August 2006

- The selection process took place with 11 successful training networks chosen from 37 applications

#### September 2006 to June 2007

- The implementation of Training Links took place, including:
  - submission of training plans
  - attendance at 4 Training Links seminars by the network co-ordinators
  - quarterly narrative and financial reporting to The Wheel by each training network
  - implementation of the training programmes
  - regular monitoring and evaluation of the training programmes by the network co-ordinator
  - regular support and contact with all networks by The Wheel Training Funds Manager
  - regular grant payments to the training networks by The Wheel, based on the network's reporting

#### **10.1.3. Learningpoint.ie**

##### November 2005 to January 2006

- Research was carried out into the proposed structure of a web-based database to provide accurate topical information about training opportunities for all community and voluntary organisations throughout Ireland

##### February to April 2006

- Learningpoint.ie structure and content researched, designed and compiled
- Tender process was conducted to outsource technical support element

##### May to June 2006

- Learningpoint.ie put in place and usability testing carried out with potential users
- Service delivers content collated

##### July to August 2006

- Technical aspects of the Learningpoint.ie finalised
- Training providers content finalised

##### September 2006 – June 2007

- Learningpoint.ie officially launched
- service available to the public
- training providers uploading their own content on to Learningpoint.ie
- Promotion in newsletter(Dec 06, April 07) and monthly email bulletins.

## 10.2 Project Staff

Two specific staff members were recruited to work directly on this programme, both recruited on fixed-term contracts:

- Elizabeth Bolger, Training Funds Manager, to oversee and manage the Sector Skills programme. This included managing Learningpoint.ie; direct responsibility for Training Links and Stronger Leaders; reporting to, and working with, the funders and stakeholders; and management of the programme finances, on an 18 month contract, from October 2005 to April 2007. This was extended to end August 2007 to take account of the extended lifetime of the project. Graham Whitehead was engaged on a contract basis to cover Elizabeth's maternity leave period from August 2006 to March 2007.
- Melanie Gutman, Training Information Officer, had direct responsibility for Learningpoint.ie, from November 2005 – November 2006. Following the end of her one-year contract in November 2006, responsibility for the ongoing monitoring of Learningpoint.ie was taken on by The Wheel's Information Systems Officer.

In addition, significant time from existing staff members of The Wheel was invested into the project management and coordination over the full period.

## 10.3 Monitoring Group

The Wheel sought to add value to this important project for the entire Community and Voluntary Sector through the establishment of a voluntary Monitoring Group (advisory in nature) comprising of 6 people across the spectrum of the sector. The members of the group were selected because of their personal and professional experience and expertise in the management of community and voluntary organisations, their understanding of the development needs of these organisations as well as bringing in relevant expertise from other sectors.

The Monitoring Group members are:

1. Sheila Cronin, Conference of Religious of Ireland
2. Dermot Leavy, Irish Rural Link
3. John Dolan, Disability Federation of Ireland
4. Brian Duncan, Combat Poverty
5. Maurice Devlin, National University of Ireland, Maynooth
6. Clodagh Gorman, South County Dublin Volunteer Bureau (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs representative)



The Monitoring Group met four times across the period November 2005 to May 2007. To date they have particularly informed the setting up, development and marketing of the programme and will have a further role in informing the final evaluation. In addition, further support was provided for the project team, in the form of availability to talk on the phone, review draft materials and advice on other matters.

The terms of reference for the Monitoring Group are to:

1. Review progress of the project against the project specification and advise on potential problems and solutions as they may arise
2. Advise on criteria for selection of training networks
3. Advise on criteria for selection of training delivery agents for Stronger Leaders
4. Advise on and contribute to the project evaluation

## 10.4 Finance Overview

The Sector Skills Initiative is part-funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), under the National Training Fund.

The DETE provided €80,000 towards the research stage of the programme and the remaining costs were provided by The Wheel.

The development, implementation and evaluation of the Sector Skills programme is costing €1.25 million, 80% of which (€1 million) is provided by the DETE. The remaining 20% is funded by The Wheel.

The entire programme budget (including the DETE grant and The Wheel funding) was €1.25 million, from July 2005 to August 2007.

**Table showing the % breakdown of the budget per programme**

Programme	% 2005	%2006	% 2007	% total for programme duration
Stronger Leaders	57	33	20	37
Training Links	21	47	67	45
Learningpoint.ie	22	20	13	18
Total	100	100	100	100

#### 10.4.1 Financial Management and Reporting

The Wheel followed the process in reporting on the funding received from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment:

- Quarterly reports were provided to the DETE from the start of the programme
- Each report included a detailed report on the spending for the previous quarter with receipts for each item; a short narrative report on the previous quarter on the programme progress; and a projected budget and request for this amount for the following quarter
- The reporting was done in the middle of each quarter
- Payment from the DETE was 2 weeks following their receipt of the quarterly report i.e. half of the grant was paid in arrears and half paid in advance

#### Breakdown of Funding for the Sector Skills Initiative:

##### Funding for Implementation of Sector Skills Initiative Aug 2005 – Aug 2007

<i>Date</i>	<i>DETE contribution</i>	<i>The Wheel contribution</i>	<i>Total</i>
Quarter 3 2005	20,209	7,802	28,011
Quarter 4 2005	100,894	25,224	126,118
Quarter 1 2006	55,061	13,765	68,826
Quarter 2 2006	85,670	21,418	107,088
Quarter 3 2006	155,640	39,335	194,975
Quarter 4 2006	211,423	52,855	264,278
Quarter 1 2007	141,460	35,380	176,840
Quarter 2 2007	162,480	40,620	203,100
Quarter 3 2007 *	67,200	16,800	84,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,000,037.00</b>	<b>253,199.00</b>	<b>1,253,236.00</b>

\* *Projected*

#### 10.5 Findings related to Project Management

The evaluation team interviewed the Chief Executive of The Wheel and the Sector Skills Programme Manager in order to explore the learning and the challenges that were encountered in the project management aspects of the Sector Skills Initiative. The process for this adopted by the evaluators was a series of questions focussing on specific learning and outcomes.

### **10.5.1 Sector Skills Initiative – What The Wheel Brought**

- The Wheel brought their expertise and knowledge of the community and voluntary sector. Consequently, The Wheel was able to provide an overview perspective on the training needs of the sector.
- The Wheel, as a membership organisation, reflects a diverse range of sub-sectors within the community and voluntary sector and, as such, is well placed to provide an overview perspective of the sector to stakeholders.
- The Wheel was able to draw on its established links and relationships with Government Departments and stakeholders both within and outside of the sector in order to realise the Sector Skills Initiative.
- The Wheel operates on a national level
- The Wheel provided the shortfall of 20% of the total programme cost
- Efficient and cost-effective project administration
- The Wheel did not restrict or optimise the benefits of participation in the Sector Skills Initiative to member organisations. The Wheel conducted an open and transparent approach in managing the selection and grant-aiding process for the Sector Skills Initiative.

### **10.5.2 Outcomes for The Wheel**

- Demonstrated organisational capacity to implement a national grant-aiding programme.
- Delivery on its mission to assist community and voluntary organisations as well as to improve the sector infrastructure.
- Increased confidence in project management capacity
- Proven ability to deliver on complex and time-pressurised project delivery
- Increased visibility in role within the community and voluntary sector
- Raised profile of The Wheel with members, within the sector, with Government Departments and with stakeholders

### **10.5.3 Challenges for The Wheel**

#### **10.5.3.1 Managing the implementation of the three strands under the Sector Skills programme within the available timeframe.**

The time constraints imposed by the agreement with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment regarding how much money had to be spent in any one year imposed a very pressurised atmosphere around the whole project from start to finish which was perhaps unnecessary. The Department was flexible in the sense that it allowed an “envelope” concept in relation to when funding could be drawn from one year to the next, and also in extending the length of the project by 6 months as a result, but the overall time-frame of the project was perhaps artificially short as a result of the funding timing requirements.

“One of the key learnings from the whole exercise is that the time pressure imposed upon The Wheel in relation to expenditure of funds meant that the marketing and advertising phases for Stronger Leaders and Training Links was necessarily shortened to 10 weeks. Whilst that may be enough in other sectors to spread the message widely, both more time and perhaps additional methods of marketing might need to be used the next time around to increase the awareness (and therefore impact) of the programme. In relation to the Training Links programme, the eleven months that was allotted for training plan development and implementation was obviously not enough. With a longer cycle (as per Skillnets) the impact could be improved.”

Deirdre Garvey, CEO, The Wheel

#### **10.5.3.2 Securing the matching funding to meet the 20% requirement**

The Wheel reported that it needed to secure an additional 20% of the costs in order to fund the Sector Skills Initiative. This required The Wheel to source funds from its own resources to fill the gap.

“That was understood by the CEO and Board in advance, and it was decided to go ahead with the project in the sense of treating it as a pilot. It was also hoped at the time that a funder might be found to provide the “missing 20%” of the costs. However, a specific named funder was not found and as a result The Wheel’s central core resources were used to fill the gap. “

Deirdre Garvey, CEO, The Wheel

While €54,000 of ‘the gap’ was filled by the fee income from the Stronger Leaders programme this was not sufficient and there were some knock on impacts on the programme.

#### **10.5.3.4 Increased workload on a small organisation**

The evaluation team note that The Wheel did not receive an administration fee or support charge but was actually a net contributor to the Sector Skills Initiative.

“Personal reflections are that we rose to the huge challenge of developing and implementing three brand new programmes on budget and more or less on time with a very small organisation and only two additional staff members. I think that we managed successfully in this regard, however the discontinuity of staffing resulting from the maternity leave of the main project manager posed additional challenges which would not occur were this programme to be run again.”

Deirdre Garvey, CEO, The Wheel

While the evaluation team concur with the CEO's view that the organisation successfully managed Sector Skills Initiative project implementation with the available resources, the pressure on staff did impact on the organisation's capacity to attend to the Training Links networks, in particular, at the level of detail that would have been most desirable. Specifically due to the pilot nature of the Sector Skills Initiative, and particularly the Training Links programme, organisations needed considerable support and monitoring to ensure their understanding re. data collection and evaluation procedures. It should be noted, the Training Links Support Series (See Chapter 5) was very important in providing the Training Links networks with an important touchstone or point of contact through out the process. For participants of the Stronger Leaders programme, this development and support function was successfully carried out by the Carmichael Centre, which was its agreed role. For Learningpoint.ie, while The Wheel successfully engaged personnel to oversee the research and development phase for the site, an organisational restructuring process that followed meant that responsibility for the site was shared between different staff members and, as a consequence in the evaluation team's view, did not realise its potential within the timeframe.

From the evaluation team's point of view, had The Wheel been in a position to increase its monitoring, supporting and promoting roles, during the implementation phase, this would have added to the success of the project and made it easier for the evaluation team to focus on issues of outcome and impact rather than analysis and findings which was what dominated, particularly the Training Links, aspect of the evaluation.

## **10.6 Learning for The Wheel**

- Ensure sufficient financial and administrative resources are in place to manage future initiatives.
- Need for greater emphasis on monitoring implementation and standardised data collection (particularly of Training Links)
- Greater awareness of the need for more planned and focussed marketing campaigns for each specific programme

## **10.7 Summary of Findings**

The Wheel has added value to the Sector Skills Initiative in the following ways:

- A network approach to training that helps organisations to foster alliances and economies of scale regarding training costs
- High levels of organisation participation and training that is organisation- rather than provider-led
- A high level of accountability and in-depth monitoring and evaluation of outcomes required
- Supports networking and sharing of experiences and ideas among organisations and participants to help overcome common problems
- A consistent emphasis on issues of governance and a supported connection between CEOs and voluntary board members
- An emphasis on making training information as accessible as possible

## **SECTION 2 - CHAPTER 11**

### **11. Project Management Recommendations**

#### **11.1 Finance**

Structure the finance model differently to better manage the 'missing 20% issue'. Do this by slightly increasing the fees for the Stronger Leaders programme, restructuring the funding relationship with the networks so that the networks are taking on some of this cost and exploring ways to generate income through Learningpoint.ie

#### **11.2 Timeframe**

Re-organise the time-lines so that there is more time for the marketing/advertising phase as well as the training plan implementation phase i.e. a longer cycle of 3 full years.

#### **11.3 Support**

Step up the different types of support to the training networks – e.g. both project management support as well as capacity-building support.

Ensure that the support series of events is even more closely tied in with the project management elements.

Ensure that the guidelines be written so that the potential network coordinators are fully aware of the amount of time and support that this role requires.

#### **11.4 Branding**

Improve the branding for the Sector Skills Initiative overall

Promote The Wheel's identify and role in it and ensure that community and voluntary sector is fully aware that Wheel is the originator and developer of the Sector Skills Initiative

#### **11.5 Reporting**

Design the reports required from the networks up front so that all networks know what is expected of them at every stage of the process. Streamline the report forms based on the data required by the stakeholders to prove impact in their terms but also to align issues of impact in the community and voluntary sector

## **11.6 Monitoring**

The monitoring of network performance against time and targets is an important element of a successfully managed training network programme. The Training Links Programme was a pilot initiative and a number of learning points have resulted; in particular, the need to ensure that network coordinators had the time and resources to effectively manage the projects. Likewise, The Wheel to ensure that it has adequate financial and human resources available to adequately monitor, interact with and review at regular intervals the performance of the networks. This enable The Wheel to identify early networks that run into issues such as those experienced by Learning and Performance Network (i.e. sector consultation and time to conduct) and Community Transport Training Network (use of UK copyright materials).

## **11.7 Evaluation**

Ensure that any evaluation mechanisms used for the next cycle are in place sooner if intended to include aspects of design and selection as well as implementation.

Increase emphasis on data monitoring for Training Links Programme to support more a more effective evaluation process.



## SECTION 3 – CHAPTER 12

### 12. Conclusions

#### 12.1 Introduction

The community and voluntary sector in Ireland is large, growing and dynamic comprising over 19,000 organisations, employing over 63,000 people, benefiting from the voluntary contribution of over 50,000 people<sup>1</sup> and with an estimated annual turnover of €3bn<sup>2</sup>. More than half of the organisations in existence in 2007 have been formed since 1988, a dynamic which has created a sector comprised of thousands of small, young organisations in need of support for their growth and development. The community and voluntary sector is now a significant player in Irish social and economic life. It is extremely diverse - from small local 'social groups' like retirement associations to large national umbrellas for organisations involved in providing services in the areas of disability, poverty, and homelessness. In the middle is a vast array of small, medium and large groups.

In its role as an agent of change and development for the community and voluntary sector The Wheel identified key gaps in relation to training needs of the sector. The Sector Skills Initiative was the solution designed and developed by The Wheel to address these gaps. This evaluation has shown that the Sector Skills Initiative is highly relevant and appropriate to the needs of the sector at this particular time in its development.

#### 12.2 Sector Skills Initiative Strengths

The aspects of the Sector Skills Initiative that have worked particularly well are:

- Relevant job or skills related training provided to large numbers of people through a community and voluntary sector-based and organisation-led approach
- Building recognition of the need for a collective and focused approach to skills and training needs in the community and voluntary sector
- Providing a platform for networking opportunities for organisations, board members, and individuals

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<sup>1</sup> The Hidden Landscape: First Forays into Mapping Nonprofit Organisations in Ireland, Centre for Nonprofit Management, Trinity College Dublin. 2006

<sup>2</sup> The community and voluntary sector in Ireland: An overview' Equal at Work project (2007)

- Flexible and tailored training, based on a detailed analysis of sector needs complemented by sector specific expertise from The Wheel staff, board, and Monitoring Group, and the Carmichael Centre.
- Creating a catalyst for change, focus, and a new dynamic to the up killing and professionalism of the voluntary and community sector
- Creating recognition and need to deliver accredited and appropriate quality training to build the diverse skills base of the sector
- Creating a customised website to access relevant training opportunities

### **12.3 Sector Skills Initiative Areas for Improvement**

- Timeframe for optimal implementation was too short
- Improved support and monitoring process for the Training Links programme
- The model does not suit a short project timeframe. Skillnet Limited’s model is based on a four year cycle with a two year review of network and programme performance. This enables networks to work through a typical project lifecycle of forming, storming, norming and performing.
- Need for more proactive approach to the Learningpoint.ie website
- Marketing and promotion of the specific elements of the Sector Skills Initiative
- Geographic spread – the Sector Skills Initiative had a large Dublin based focus. Future initiatives could embrace a more diverse range of regions, cultural diversity and, ethnic minorities.

### **12.4 Concluding Observations**

The points below reflect what can be identified as the key themes from the Sector Skills Initiative

#### **12.4.1 Addressing Changing Needs**

The community and voluntary sector needs to address the deficit in training opportunities for many reasons that are similar to private enterprise and the public sector, such as:<sup>1</sup>

- The convergence of business processes, information technologies and communication technologies
- New production systems and new forms of work organisation

- The drive for cost efficiencies
- The demands of leaner organisational structures and new operational systems
- Increased flexibility including the organisation of working time and managing change
- The shift from “qualifications” to “skills”, and from training to the learning organisation
- The evolution from the “softer” focus of community and voluntary work methods and patterns, to supporting and aligning to the private and public sector groups in order to build best practice in delivery of services; improve quality of service and outputs; develop and drive sustainability; provide responsive services and advice that meet the needs of a growing and diverse society and changing economy.

In this context, the Sector Skills initiative proved to be a popular and innovative initiative for those community and voluntary sector organisations that are involved.

It will take some time before the extent to which the Sector Skills initiative has or is likely to impact on the wider sector can be studied or before the impact of the initiative on the sector can be seen but, given the lack of other similar opportunities, it is likely that its impact will prove to be significant. It is possible that its most profound impact may prove to be the stimulation of the latent demand within the sector for coherent training policy and leadership, training funds, training opportunities and accreditation.

#### **12.4.2 Emerging Models and Innovation**

The Sector Skills Initiative represented a new programme based on established models, revised and remodelled to suit the specific needs of the community and voluntary sector and as such were piloted in two specific ways - the programmes themselves were new and the Sector Skills Initiative was a pilot project.

The Wheel created parallel models comparable to Skillnets and the Future Leaders models in recognition of the fact that many of the challenges facing both the voluntary and community sector and the private sector are fundamentally the same i.e. facing business management and people performance issues.

#### **12.4.3 Stronger Leaders Programme and Innovation**

The **Stronger Leaders Programme** is innovative in that it was based on a proven model (the Future Leaders Programme) with new elements, particular to the needs of the community and

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<sup>1</sup> Forfas. Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. 2007. Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills

voluntary sector added. The board seminars were a particularly innovative feature (see Section 3.14). The involvement of two lead agencies - The Wheel and the Carmichael Centre - both with remits to support the professional development of the community and voluntary sector was another innovative feature as the Stronger Leaders programme was developed and stewarded into existence with the utmost attention, care and concern. Both organisations having a very real understanding of the potential impact a programme such as Stronger Leaders could make on the sector if mainstreamed. Other elements of the programme such as peer learning, mentoring and e-learning are also - by and large - innovations for the community and voluntary sector.

#### **12.4.4 Training Links and Innovation**

The **Training Links Programme** has provided an opportunity for existing and new networks to realise a new dimension to networking, networking relationships and the access, design and delivery of training to a wide range of groups and people. The model, based on the enterprise-led model developed by Skillnets Limited, has been easily transferred to the community and voluntary sector. Like the enterprise sector, the community and voluntary sector the experiences under the Sector Skills Initiative has identified that adequate time, planning and resources are needed to ensure that the efforts, investment and learning experiences of all involved are adequately supported and captured in order to add long term and sustainable value to both the social and economic fabric of the economy and country per se.

#### **12.4.5 Successful Training Models**

Both the Stronger Leader and Training Links Programme were developed from existing opportunity private sector enterprise training models. In applying those models to the community and voluntary sector, there is clear evidence that a number of synergies and similarities exist in the sector such as:

Board Members, Chief Executives and Senior Managers facing the same compliance, governance and management issues and challenges as private sector organisations

Organisations having the same challenges in understanding and conducting a focused training needs analysis, and being able to design and deliver training specific to the organisation's needs.

The need to evaluate and analyse the impact of learning and training immediately, and understanding how valuable this exercise is in order to ensure training is effective and aligned to people and organisational needs.

#### **12.4.6 Value of Networking**

There is evidence that shared strategies and collaborative actions are the outputs of the organisations working together and participating in networking events. Participants ranging from CEOs to managers to trainees in both the **Stronger Leaders** and the **Training Links** programme are linking up and working together. Relationships are forming and developing, not just within the sector but are moving outside and across the diverse range of the organisations involved in both programmes.

#### **12.4.7 Awareness Raising**

Important awareness raising activity and conversations are beginning to emerge across the **Stronger Leaders** and **Training Links** programme respectively. This is largely focussed on the central importance of training and development opportunities within the community and voluntary sector and why this is such an underdeveloped area. It is almost as if, having had the opportunity to access training, a light bulb has switched on for the organisations involved and questions are being asked about why these opportunities have not been available before and, more importantly, how these opportunities will be made more widely available in the future

#### **12.4.8 Accreditation & Certification**

Some participants in both **Stronger Leaders** and **Training Links** programmes report the desire for work-based training and learning to be accredited – i.e. recognised on the national qualifications framework. This will promote the transferability of skills in and across the respective sectors. The impact of certification is seen to have an intrinsic positive impact – on participant motivation and application of learning as well as facilitating greater transfer of personnel and roles between the business and the community and voluntary sectors.

#### **12.4.9 Role of Marketing**

There is evidence of a mismatch between level of general demand for training within the sector and the 'actual' demand represented by the number of applicants to the **Stronger**

**Leaders** programme and the number of 'actual' versus 'intended' trainees on the **Training Links** programme. This suggests that careful attention must be paid to the marketing strategy for any future development of the Sector Skills Initiative. Feedback suggests that the 'right' or best message was not always the one selected (e.g. board members reported that they would have been more persuaded to attend board seminars by the message that it would support their own professional development rather than the message they felt they got which was that it was primarily to support their CEO) or that there was a discrepancy between the 'intention' to attend a training course and 'committing' to attend. Timing is important and marketing drives should be done at the optimum time for those in the sector to be in a position to respond. The input of past participants (as already offered by both board and CEO participants on the Stronger Leaders programme) could be incorporated into whatever message is selected to invaluable effect.

#### **12.4.10 Future Need and Demand**

Within the **Stronger Leaders** programme the opportunity for CEOs to network together in a context of shared learning has been a unique experience and one that current participants are reluctant to let go of as the programme ends. Some participant CEOs reported that Stronger Leaders was the first relevant and attractive professional development opportunity they have identified and therefore availed of in the past ten years! Such a dearth of opportunity raises critical questions about what happens next for the Sector Skills Initiative as expectation of a repeat of the **Stronger Leaders** programme is likely to be high. In addition the Stronger Leaders participants have committed to organising as a network in the future and to look for support from either or both The Wheel and The Carmichael Centre.

It is also clear that the Training Links Programme and model has been an effective mechanism for bringing together numerous organisations within the sector, to provide a focus at a strategic level of the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to address the social and economic challenges faced by the sector. Networks report of their intentions to continue supporting the initiative even though training for most will not be possible because no further funding for training is available within their own budgets or through other agencies. There is a clear demand for the Training Links Programme to support and grow training and learning networks into the future in order to address the ongoing challenges of a growing and changing social and economic environment.

The demand for Learningpoint.ie will only increase if the service is proactively promoted to potential users in a targeted way. If this is done, there is no reason why the demand for the service won't increase steadily over time

## 12.5 Summary and Conclusion

It is possible at this stage in the evaluation process to make a number of general recommendations arising from the evidence gathered in this report:

- Continue to work with the Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment, and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to keep them informed of the value of the Sector Skills Initiative and the emerging trends relating to need and demand for the initiative to develop and broaden its impact on the sector.
- Develop a strategy, possibly together with other partners/stakeholders, to secure the Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment's commitment towards supporting the professional training needs of the community and voluntary sector in a comprehensive, planned and strategic way.
- Continue growing the skills base of the community and voluntary sector – particularly that of CEOs managers and emerging leaders - this area needs further attention and focus in the future.
- Commit to securing adequate funding for a follow-on evaluation phase that will explore the outcome and impact of the Sector Skills Initiative and inform any future development of the Initiative.
- Continue to work closely with organisations within the community and voluntary sector - to identify and address specific organisational and network training needs.
- Continue to work with CEO's, managers and staff on building sustainability within the sector by way of certified programmes,
- Anticipate off-shoot demands and needs that are likely to be articulated as a direct result of participation in the Sector Skills Initiative and communicate a Wheel response to such needs, independent of the future roll out or development of the Sector Skills Initiative to another phase or level. Possible examples of such needs requests are support for a Stronger Leaders programme alumni network of CEOs and support for individual Training Links networks to become sustainable.
- Focus on organisations working in the area of multiculturalism and diversity. While some of the partnerships participating in Training Links included travellers, none of the participating organisations had a specific focus on this area of need. The Wheel's strategic plan identifies the 'New Irish' as a significant area of social change and should consider targeting organisations working with these groups in future rounds of the Sector Skills Initiative.
- Increase the integration between Sector Skills Initiative and The Wheel's other training projects and promotion strategies

## APPENDICES

### A1. Stronger Leaders Trainers

**Mike Hudson** is the Director of Compass Partnership. He was the Administrative Director of Friends of the Earth during its formative years. Following this, Mike worked in the UK and USA for a business strategy consultancy. He has worked as a consultant to not-for-profit organisations for 20 years, leading teams that bring about major change in complex organisations. His clients include the Chairs and Chief Executives of a wide range of national and international organisations in the voluntary, housing, education, and international aid and arts sectors.

He has written two books, the first of which *Managing Without Profit* (Directory of Social Change, 2002) is in its second edition and has sold over 16,000 copies and been translated into two other languages. His second book is *Managing at the Leading Edge* (Directory of Social Change, 2003).

**Mark Butcher** is the Director of Mark Butcher Associates, one of the UK's leading providers of training and consultancy to voluntary and community sector organisations. He has been a manager, fundraiser and consultant in the not for profit sector for 20 years, during which time he has worked with many national and international agencies. His past customers have included Victim Support, Mencap, the National Trust, the Probation Service and Age Concern, as well as local authorities from Dorset to Northumberland.

He is the author of two books that focus on getting the best out of yourself and your team, *Achieve!* (2003) and *Create!* (2005), both published by the Directory of Social Change.

**Yvonne Nolan** has ten years experience in the area of human resources and training. Since 2001 she has worked as an independent consultant, developing and delivering programmes for organisations in the private, community and public sectors. Areas of speciality include: Management and Leadership Development; Introduction of Performance Management Systems; Recruitment and Selection; Employment Legislation; Group Facilitation; Strategy Evaluation with Committees/Boards/Management Teams; and Interim HR Management.

**Sheila Cahill** is the Director of training and support services at the Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups. She has worked in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland and the UK for the last 20 years, focusing on organisational capacity building since 1995. Her role in the Carmichael Centre brings her into regular contact with small and medium sized voluntary and community groups through customised training, organisational consultancy and HR support.



**Sinéad Barrins** is a Training Consultant at the Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Organisations. She has eight years experience working in the community & voluntary sector in Ireland including project management, strategic planning, policy development and management training development & delivery.

**Wally Young**, MPRII, is the head of Young Communications and a PR consultant and communications trainer. As well as dealing with many high-profile issues, he works extensively with individuals in the commercial and political sectors on improving their media interview skills. He is currently Special Adviser to President Mary McAleese.

**Jean Cullinane** is an experienced HR consultant with specialist skills in Change Management, Facilitation, Training and Development and Recruitment. She is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, a Member of the Marketing Institute of Ireland and holds a Diploma in Business Strategy. Her unique blend of Marketing, Business Strategy and Human Resource Management experience and qualifications ensures that she is ideally placed to identify opportunities for change. She is passionate about the development of people and committed to the value of straight communication in teams and in organisations.

## A2 Stronger Leaders programme outline:

<b>Module</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Board Seminars</b>	<b>Board Seminars</b>
<b>Programme 1</b>				
<b>Module 1</b>	10, 11, 12 Oct 2006			
<b>Module 2</b>	15, 16 Nov 2006	14 Dec 2006	Mark Butcher <i>External Environment &amp; Strategy Development</i> 14 Nov 2006	Wally Young <i>External Relations</i> 13 Dec 2006
<b>Module 3</b>	25 Jan 2007	28 Feb, 1 Mar 2007	Sheila Cahill <i>Exercising Governance</i> 23 Jan 2007	Mike Hudson <i>Organisational Development</i> 27 Feb 07
<b>Module 4</b>	17, 18, 19 Apr 2007			
<b>Programme 2</b>				
<b>Module 1</b>	21, 22, 23 Nov 2006			
<b>Module 2</b>	10, 11 Jan 2007	7 Feb 2007	Mark Butcher <i>External Environment &amp; Strategy Development</i> 9 Jan 2007	Wally Young <i>External Relations</i> 6 Feb 2007
<b>Module 3</b>	7 Mar 2007	25,26Apr 2007	Sheila Cahill <i>Exercising Governance</i> 8 Mar 2007	Mike Hudson <i>Organisational Development</i> 24 Apr 2007
<b>Module 4</b>	29, 30, 31 May 2007			

### **A3. Stronger Leaders Programme Guest Speakers**

- Seamus Boland, Chief Executive Officer, Irish Rural Link
- Brian Harvey, Social Researcher
- Stuart Garland, Chief Executive Officer, Mountaineering Council of Ireland
- Maeve Cahill, IR/HR Executive, IBEC
- Michael Gillen, IR/HR Executive, IBEC

## A4. Stronger Leaders – quantitative data relating to the modules of the programme

The following tables provide a summary of the statistics as taken from the evaluation forms completed by each participant immediately after each of the four modules.

### Module 1: Leadership and Self Development

Area of evaluation	Group	Excellent	Good	Below Expectations
Were objectives met?	Group A	58%	42%	
	Group B	84%	15%	
Quality and relevance of course materials	Group A	94%	6%	
	Group B	88%	12%	
Presenters	Group A	100%	-	
	Group B	91%	9%	

#### Areas that were particularly liked:

- Myers Briggs exercise and analysis
- Self reflection
- Case studies
- Role plays
- Content of the presentations
- Group work

#### Areas that were least liked:

- Too much / too fast
- Not enough time
- Too much time on basics
- Need to take a different approach to the 'Mapping exercise'

Module 2: External Environment and Strategy Development

Area of evaluation	Group	Excellent	Good	Below Expectations
Were objectives met?	Group A	74%	26%	
	Group B	87%	13%	
Quality and relevance of course materials	Group A	80%	20%	
	Group B	100%	-	
Presenters	Group A	93%	7%	
	Group B	100%	-	

**Areas that were particularly liked:**

- Creative thinking
- Visioning
- Strategic planning
- Inspiring and illustrative presentation
- Lobbying
- Practical exercises
- Tips on handling politicians and the media
- Clear, concise presentation

**Areas that were least liked:**

- The 'trends in fundraising' slot
- Some of the content was a repeat of content in day 3
- Advocacy not relevant for one person

Module 3: Organisation Development

Area of evaluation	Group	Excellent	Good	Below Expectations
Were objectives met?	Group A	88%	12%	
	Group B	95%	5%	
Quality and relevance of course materials	Group A	97%	3%	
	Group B	93%	7%	
Presenters	Group A	100%	-	
	Group B	97%	3%	

**Areas that were particularly liked:**

- The 'strategic dashboard' tool
- The exercises
- Material on setting agendas for Board meetings
- Reflection on Board roles and effective relationships
- Practical, clear and pitched appropriately
- Practical application of theory and tools
- Small groups, more stimulating
- Learning from peers
- Organisation diagnostic tool

**Areas that were least liked:**

- Familiar with Board responsibilities already
- More time
- Guest speaker too much to absorb
- The video
- Change management

Module 4: Team Development

Area of evaluation	Group	Excellent	Good	Below Expectations
Were objectives met?	Group A	71%	29%	
	Group B	86%	14%	
Quality and relevance of course materials	Group A	86%	14%	
	Group B	90%	10%	
Presenters	Group A	90%	10%	
	Group B	86%	14%	

**Areas that were particularly liked:**

- Goal setting
- Motivation
- Performance Management
- Appraisal
- IBEC presentation and the Q&A
- Case Studies
- Delegation
- Group exercises; role plays; activities; group sharing
- Egg rocket

**Areas that were least liked:**

- Mentoring
- Coaching
- More interaction
- Too basic
- Team roles

## A5 Training Links Programme Case Studies

### A5.1 Community Television Training Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Community Television Training Network (CTTN)</b>
Network Description	The network comprises of groups providing community television services in Ireland and Northern Ireland. These groups have been involved in community media for many years. The network consists of 13 community based television services.
Network Objectives	To provide training in Community Television Production, technical requirements for broadcasting, organisational frameworks and management structures that will enable groups to establish Community Television.

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	13
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	578
Trainee Types	Board of Management CEO/Senior Manager Administration Professional/Counsellors

#### **NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

The network is about people and communities collectively running their own television station, with access to training, equipment and facilities to make programmes, from full-scale productions to live, self-operated, studio phone-ins.

Community Television is an opening up of the airwaves to the community at large to both produce and broadcast alternative programming which celebrates diversity and in which all can participate.

Communities which are involved in developing community television are usually of a geographic nature (e.g. Cork city or county - e.g. Mayfield, Mallow), or have a common interest (i.e. they share a common characteristic or interest - e.g. the travelling community, asylum seekers, young people, people with disabilities, etc). Community Television serves all communities but in particular engages with marginalised and socially excluded groups. It is recognised that the ability to participate fully in society is open more to some groups and individuals than others; therefore the priority for most Community Television members is to engage with the most marginalised and socially excluded groups and communities

#### **FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

“Fantastic. Italy, CAN TV, it was great to get this international dimension. I have been in contact with all of them by e-mail since”

Network Member

Five key areas emerged as training needs were analysed and that were common to Network members.



- Community Television Programme Formats
- Technology
- Legal, Regulatory and Policy Issues for Community Television
- Management and Organisational Development
- Interacting with Communities

These key areas were developed into a Training Programme consisting of four modules, and two case study visits to Community Television stations.

#### Challenges

- No training providers with subject matter expertise could be identified or sourced nationally to design and deliver the training
- As the Network worked through this exercise it became clear that there was considerable existing expertise among members
- A decision needed to be made as to how to design and delivery the training programmes
- In designing the training programme it became evident that some of the need areas identified would have to be researched further

#### Actions/Solutions

- It was decided to outsource trainers both nationally and internationally to complete the training programme
- This research, like the training, was conducted by both internal and external trainers
- The resulting training materials are available to members to download in document form from the Network website
- The Training Programme brought together presenters and trainers from around the world to demonstrate, illustrate and discuss a wide range of issues that relate to setting up and running Community Television stations.
- It is the first time some of the training has been presented in Ireland. Consequently while most Network members already have third level qualifications, it is the first time that members have engaged in training that has been specifically designed to meet the needs of the sector.

### **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

“For many of our members the training is having a direct impact as they are able to put into practice what they are learning at the seminars/workshops immediately. For other members, it is helping to inform the future direction of their projects”.

Emma Bowell, Network Coordinator

Members report that there is increased exchange of information and support, in particular, amongst members who are currently involved in establishing Community Television services. The following were the high level outputs of this extremely cost-effective (relative to final output) training programme:

- Building Strong Network Links
- Documentation of Training Sessions (DVDs) available for future training use
- Fostering Sector Development
- Building a community amongst those involved in community television in Ireland and internationally
- Case Studies and On-site Visits

Documenting the training through video recording has assisted in the training being available to far more than those who originally attended each of the sessions (i.e. members have been able to use it for their own training sessions within their own organisations and are planning further training using this material) and will result in higher levels of trainees for the same investment over time i.e. the cascade effect. All the material generated as outputs from the training seminars has been compiled for use on the Community TV Training Network website (currently under construction). This too will prove to be a further resource for the sector. This has greatly impacted on the initial trainee and participant figures from an original 97 trainees to reach 578 participants within the timeframe of this evaluation and many more as the community television movement progresses its plans in Ireland.

### **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

The CTTN provides a very important role in offering a myriad of development opportunities for communities and the people who live in those communities, as follows:

- Minority and marginalised groups to have their voice heard and to build bridges among themselves and with others particularly amongst the most marginalised
- Provision of more informed and active approaches to all media
- Development of new and innovative community affairs and news programmes; working directly with communities on their successes and problems
- Transparency and participation in local government, for example through televising Council deliberations and interacting directly through community debates
- Broadcasting challenging, innovative and non-mainstream views and ideas, produced locally but also selected from non-commercial productions all over the world
- Identifying new ways to deliver education, especially in the home which can best suit the needs of some marginalised groups.
- Learning: ranging from literacy to advanced third level qualifications

All of these elements of the CTTN contribute to a more inclusive and exciting Ireland, through making television part of the solution and not just the problem.

The Community Television Training Network will continue under a new name, the Community Television Association.

Its main challenge going forward is to secure further funding to meet the ongoing costs of developing staff to support its programme of work and involving communities in the design and delivery of Community Television services.

## A5.2 Lobbying for Adult and Community Education Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Lobbying for Adult and Community Education Network</b>
Network Description	The network has 12 member groups. The lead organisation is AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation, having over 600 members throughout Ireland. All network members operate in the adult learning sector.
Network Objectives	To develop a political lobbying training course aimed at campaigning for better resources for adult and community education

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	12
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	131
Trainee Types	CEO, Senior Manager equivalent, Support officers, Administration staff, Funding raising and marketing staff

### **NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

The Lobbying for Adult and Community Education Network is a new network formed under the Training Links Programme. The aim of the network is very specific: to provide training in media and lobbying skills to Network member groups in advance of the general election 2007.

Training has been delivered on a regional basis, rather than on a local basis, as originally intended and the Network was divided into four groups for the purposes of regional training delivery:

- North-West region
- South-West region
- Dublin North region
- Dublin South region

### **FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

The Lobbying for Adult and Community Education Network was focused on the 2007 general election, which took place in May. The Training Needs Analysis undertaken by the network during its start up phase identified that while nearly all of the Network member groups had previous experience in lobbying *activities*, very few had participated in any type of lobbying *training*.

In order to measure the real impact of learning in the workplace, evaluations were conducted after the training programme whereby a trainee's peer or supervisor commented on the impact of the training on the trainee's performance at work. These evaluations showed that:

- Respondents strongly agreed that trainees' skills and knowledge increased as a result of the training programme (an average rating of 4.5 out of 5)
- Respondents strongly agreed that the skills and knowledge acquired by the trainees had been used in their roles within their organisation (an average rating of 4.66 out of 5)
- Respondents strongly agreed that trainees' job performances had improved as a result of the training (4.5 out of 5)

At the final Steering Group meeting, the point was also made that the training delivered by the Network was made especially relevant to members because of its focus on the community education sector and the 2007 general election. This point was reiterated by the managers of some of the participating organisations

## **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

As a result of the Training Links Programme, the training programmes developed specifically to address lobbying activities in the run-up to the general election had a number of positive results, including:

- *Online Mailing List and Discussion Forum*  
Facilitated effective communications between geographically dispersed members
- *Support signatures*  
The collection of over 1500 signatures relating to demands for improvements to the adult learning sector
- *Parliamentary Questions*  
In excess of 20 parliamentary questions raised in Dáil Éireann before the election, on the topic of adult learning
- *Government Commitments*  
Stated commitments in the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour election manifestoes to abolish fees for part-time courses at higher level. The Progressive Democrats, the Green Party and Sinn Féin also promised AONTAS they would address this issue if in government after the election

Resource packs have been produced as a result of the training and development programmes. These packs contain posters, information and advice on how to lobby and how to organise lobbying events, templates for press release and letters to election candidates, and cards to hand out to any canvassers outlining the most important issues for those working in adult and community education. The packs also contained petitions that could be displayed in the premises of organisations so that visitors could sign and show their support for the 'Demand Your Right To Learn' campaign. These packs were very well received by the AONTAS membership and a number of the groups involved in the Training Network used the resource packs when conducting their own lobbying activities.

## **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

One of the key outcomes of the Lobbying for Adult and Community Education Network was a strengthening of relationships between AONTAS and its member groups. AONTAS is a membership organisation and as such has always had very good relations with its members throughout Ireland. However, this project allowed the organisation to further strengthen these links and to gain a very in-depth insight into the work of the member organisations that participated in the Network.

The network plans to continue in a slightly different format:

- Establish a Community Education Network to continue the work and success of the Lobbying for Community & Adult Education network
- Individuals involved in community education will act as a conduit for ongoing lobbying and media work
- Build on the work of the Training Links Programme by encouraging the participant groups to stay involved

The purpose of the Community Education Network will be to:

- Act as a representative body for community education
- Strengthen the influence of community education groups within AONTAS
- Work on lobbying initiatives locally and – through AONTAS – nationally
- Engage in media and publicity work to promote the meaning and value of community education
- Strengthen the capacity of AONTAS' community education members
- Act as an identifiable space for smaller community education groups to feed into
- Act as a space for exchanging information and for networking
- Act as a space for dialogue on community education
- Initiate a broader debate on the definition of adult and community education
- Serve as a means of linking in with external agencies such as The Wheel, the various trade unions, Pobal, the EAPN, etc.

### A5.3 Medical Research Charities Group Training Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Medical Research Charities Group Training Network</b>
Network Description	The Medical Research Charities Group (MRCG) was formed in 1998 to inform and support charities in Ireland in the development of their medical research. Members of the network are involved in patient support and medical research.
Network Objectives	Delivery of cost effective training to members – particularly those located in regional areas. To provide networking opportunities so that members can meet with each other, develop helpful contacts and share learning.

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	10
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	125
Trainee Types	CEO/Senior Managers, Support officers, Administration staff, Professional/Specialists, Fundraising/Marketing staff

“For many small organisations it is extremely difficult to achieve the necessary numbers to facilitate arranging specialist courses for staff. These courses can also prove prohibitively expensive, particularly where a set fee is charged regardless of the number attending. The training network, in some cases, provided training locally for regional members.”

**Denise Cremins, Network Coordinator**

#### **NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

The Medical Research Charities Group (MRCG) operates on an all Ireland basis. Its members are involved in funding medical research in hospitals, universities and other locations of research in Ireland. The network members are small organisations, with small groups of staff, and lack the budgets and structures available in larger organisations.

#### **FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

##### Challenges

- To stimulate interest in further medical research among members
- To provide ongoing advice and support to network members
- To utilise the synergy of being part of a collective group of organisations
- To inform the public about medical research and to increase public interest
- To promote greater understanding that medical research leads to better treatments and the alleviation of suffering
- To promote a positive culture of medical research in Ireland
- To encourage more organisations to become involved in medical research

#### Actions/Solutions

- Coverage of networking activities in 2 high profile newspaper articles
- Provision of local and accessible training for a number of network members
- Ability to negotiate with trainers on provision of courses
- Cost efficiencies and savings on many of the expensive training programmes
- Achievement of high turnout of trainees at training

Other courses provided by the network were devised specifically for this group and so would not have been available elsewhere. These three specific workshop sessions were on Science for non-scientists; Patient registries; and Intellectual property rights.

#### **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

“Excellent course, thoroughly enjoyed it”

“Wonderful, practical”

“All objectives clearly set out and covered during the course”

**MRCG Network, 2007**

New and specific training programmes have been developed by the network as follows:

#### **Science for Non-Scientists**

This training programme was developed by the network in conjunction with some of the leading genetic scientists in Trinity College. The training sessions provides non-science employees who do not hold a formal science qualification, an insight into the research projects that their respective organisations manage.

#### **Patient Registries**

This training programme provides fundamental information for members on the theory, practicality and importance of setting up patient registries.

#### **Intellectual Property**

This workshop addressed the issues members need to consider when funding research that may derive an intellectual property benefit.

#### **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

The training links programme has added tremendous value to the small organisations involved in the MRCG network, and particularly to their staff. The development of specialised and specific training programmes will be available to other members in the future. These programmes have helped to develop the knowledge and competencies of non-science workers in the sector, and helped to improve the manner in which training needs are assessed.

#### A5.4 Neurological Training Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Neurological Training Network</b>
Network Description	The members of the network work with people with neurological conditions. Members are already active participants of the wider Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI) umbrella group. The training Network consists of 12 out of the total NAI membership of 20. It was established to address the training needs of over 150 workers in a broad range of skills and knowledge areas including policy development, supervision and management, funding submissions, and lobbying and marketing skills
Network Objectives	Development of a structured training programme to address a variety of gaps and to develop the network as an ongoing resource and link to other members

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	12
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	163
Trainee Types	CEO/Manager equivalent, Supervisors, Support officers, Fundraising and marketing staff, Specialist staff

“The Network has performed very well to date with all the training courses provided as scheduled and targets of the number of trainees reached. The Network has been extremely important in bringing together members of the existing NAI umbrella group in a very real and practical way and has done a lot to improve links and build trust and co-operation among members. Staff have benefited enormously from the opportunity to meet colleagues in similar positions in other organisations and share problems and solutions.”

**Mags Rogers, Network Coordinator**

#### **NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

Members of the Neurological Alliance of Ireland Network are mostly small organisations with limited resources and small numbers of staff. Members meet monthly to discuss ideas and work on policy and other submissions. As a result of this consultation process various gaps in skills and knowledge have been identified. The value of coming together as a network means that members are in a better position to source training programmes and to design those programmes to suit specific organisation needs.

#### **FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

Challenges:



- Micro nature of member organisations
- Dispersed geographic locations
- Identifying priority areas for training and development
- Raising the profile and value of training - training for many of the smaller groups has been a low priority
- Gaining commitment of members – some organisations had not previously participated in a training network
- Promoting and fundraising for indigenous, micro and less well known groups often with “stigmatised” conditions, against other well known and high profile organisations
- Funding resources for training and up-skilling of staff

#### Actions/Solutions

- Development of a 5 day intensive management training programme
- Best practice solutions - Telephone Helplines Association - a specialised organisation in the UK - provided input and advice into the design of two one day programmes to meet the needs of two diverse member groups, addressing both experienced and inexperienced workers in the sector

### **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

“As the network has progressed, they (the members) have learned that it is a co-operative progress and that they must be willing to give as well as receive. Also, they have had to learn that their expectations were in many cases very unrealistic and not all their training needs could be met with the small resources in staff and time on the network.”

**Mags Rogers, Network Coordinator**

Given that membership of the network is made up of very small organisations, the need and demand for training of staff in the sector, particularly in the complex area of neurological conditions and management, is highlighted by the high number of trainees the network was able to support, i.e. 163 trainees in the short 6 month training period of the network.

The network has developed a number of new and innovative training interventions specific to its sector, as follows:

- 5 day management programme
- Managing volunteers - working with volunteers, retaining volunteers, motivation and recruitment
- Neurological training – programme designed with input from a qualified clinical psychologist and experienced trainer; this is the only programme in the country available to staff working with complex neurological conditions with no formal medical training.

### **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

The impact, experiences and value-added of the Training Links Programme is such that the network has identified a number of steps it will take in the future:

- Members will continue to network to combine resources to avail of training at a better rate
- Rolling out the specialised training designed specifically for staff working with neurological conditions that are not accessible on the open market
- Seminars and events to support networking and sharing of experiences with staff in a similar position in other organisations
- Promoting the ethos and design of the Training Links Programme which has had a very positive impact on members

- Supporting future opportunities to run a similar programme in future years would allow members to maximise the learning from the first programme and to move more quickly to address ongoing needs of the sector
- Network members will explore ways of grouping with other members to re-run training programmes designed for the neurological training network. For example, a number of members are interested in running the 5 day management programme in partnership with other groups
- The current network co-ordinator will continue to act as a conduit to pass on information about the courses, names of trainers etc. This is an important resource developed during the lifecycle of the project and must be maintained

#### A5.5 One Parent Exchange Network Southwest Regional Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN) Southwest Regional Network</b>
Network Description	Building capacity amongst lone parent support groups in Cork, Kerry, and Limerick
Network Objectives	To organise and support committee structures, programmes of activities and networking to help grow and develop self-help capacity

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	26
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	124
Trainee Types	Professional specialists – support workers

"The key to getting a decent job, that offers the chance of promotion, a career and financial independence, is education and training. This is of particular concern to lone parents – 47% of whom have no formal education qualifications."

**Frances Byrne, Director of OPEN, 27th of April 2006**

#### **NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

OPEN (One Parent Exchange and Network) represents 80 lone parent groups nationwide. Based in the South West region of Ireland, the OPEN South West Training Links Network commenced its training project with 12 groups of lone parents based in 4 counties covering a large isolated and vulnerable region of south-west Ireland.

The programme has been developed by lone parents for lone parents. It uses unique and innovative intervention tools to support local lone parent groups to work in collaboration in addressing their individual and collective training needs.

The 2006 Census clearly outlines the changes in recent years in Household Composition and Family Units. Published on 31 May 2006, the Census notes as follows:

- 189,213 one parent families – representing 18% of all families in Ireland
- 86% of one parent families are lone mothers
- 14% of one parent families are lone fathers
- 58% of one parent families have one child
- 26% have 2 children
- 10% have 3 children
- 169,761 lone parent households – representing 12% of all households in Ireland

These rising figures pose a significant challenge to Government and society. The main challenges facing lone parents are in 3 key areas: childcare provision; education & training; and flexible work options.

## **FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

The following are key features and challenges of the training network:

- Geographical distance and logistics
- The need to revitalise and reenergise existing groups
- To grow the groups to include others so that there is wide impact

As a result of networking activity and the development and delivery of urgent training needs, the network has been able to offer the following to its members:

- Taster courses offered to revitalise groups and promote training programmes
- Customised training designed to meet group needs
- Training programmes developed to meet immediate needs/challenges experienced by participating groups.
- Updating of key contacts and database
- Increased interest in participating in training
- Requests for OPENS "Group Kit" – a standalone resource tool to enable groups to think and plan strategically and to become more effective
- Sharing of information, learning and experiences among groups and members

## **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

"The skills-based training provided by FÁS that provides an excellent route to a meaningful, well-paid employment is often only provided on a full-time basis, starting at 8.30am. While the proposals recognise that quality training options will have to be made more flexible and accessible to lone parents trying to combine work and family life, there's no detail within the Government Paper as to how or when this will happen".

**Frances Byrne, Director of OPEN, 27th of April 2006**

The main impacts of the training programme as identified by the members are:

- Access to tailor made, appropriate and accredited training
- Enhanced capacity of participants to engage effectively within their own communities
- Participants have developed skills to advocate for policy change at local, regional and national levels
- Enhanced leadership capacity to support sustainability of local lone parent groups
- Opportunities to build alliances with other groups in addressing the needs of lone parents at local, county and regional levels.
- Increased active citizenship levels within communities
- Increased capacity to address group development issues more effectively and strategically

## **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

- Establishment of regional forums across the country
- Network developing into South East and Northern areas
- Additional training programme will be delivered in September 2007
- Members being trained through the Network to deliver programmes for the first time at local level
- Accredited training programme developed - Leadership training programme – Advocating for Policy Change - developed in partnership with the NCI - National College of Ireland - to

meet the specific needs of OPEN member groups. This leadership programme can be delivered to build the capacity of other similar groups in Ireland.

## A5.6 Rape Crisis Centre Organisational Development Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Rape Crisis Centre Organisational Development Network</b>
Network Description	Rape Crisis Centers (RCCs) are located throughout Ireland. The Rape Crisis Network Ireland provides support, information and training for all centers that in turn provide support services for survivors of rape, abuse, and sexual violent acts
Network Objectives	Increasing the organisational skills capacity of member RCCs – staff, boards of management, senior managers and specialists to organise centers to deal with the increasing rate of sexual violence and the complex needs of survivors of violence.

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	16
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	50
Trainee Types	Board of Management CEO/Senior Manager Administration Professional/Counsellors

“As a worker in an RCC, the Network provides a much stronger basis from which to operate. It has given me and the centre a much stronger identity.”

**Mayo Rape Crisis Centre**

“Staff working in RCCs want to make a difference in the lives of survivors of sexual violence.”

**Susan Minor, Network Coordinator**

### NETWORK OVERVIEW:

- Sexual abuse is endemic in our society. No one agency has all the answers towards ending sexual violence and supporting survivors to recovery. However, various agencies and individuals have expertise and resources. The RCNI is committed to an inter-agency response to finding and enacting services and solutions. Its goal is to develop meaningful contact with other national networks, governments departments, community based agencies, university departments, semi-statutory and medical projects, European and international projects in order support the recovery of survivors of sexual violence.

There are 16 Rape Crisis Centres with a total of 60 staff. The training needs analysis (TNA) identified a number of urgent training areas, including board development, policy development, and building organisational capacity in order to respond to changing roles and demands.

### FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:

“As with all new organisations starting we experienced many difficulties and without the Network’s support we would not have survived.”

#### **Dundalk Rape Crisis Centre**

##### Challenges

- Providing the knowledge, skills and competencies required of new centres to respond to crisis environments and survivor needs
- Traditional roles within centres are becoming increasingly more specialised
- As a result, centres are becoming more complex organisations
- In the past staff performed a variety of functions and filled a variety of roles; this is no longer possible
- There is an urgent need for clearer organisation development and strategy
- Centres need to be able to respond to various situations and to deal with local agencies, gardai, government departments, national bodies, etc when working in a crisis environment.

##### Actions/Solutions

- Revised TNA to meet urgent management needs identified
- Prioritisation of training needs to address those RCCs which had less access to organisational development and support
- Training for newly RCC elected Board members
- Subject matter training expert identified to work with specific RCCs
- Development of strategic plans for vulnerable RCCs
- Collaboration and joint training initiatives
- Development of management structures
- Development of support structures for staff

Initial training plan was to provide individualised training for five member centres and joint training for RCC Board of Management members, on the topics of policy development and partnership working. However, it soon became apparent that the Board of Management training, including the relationship between centre coordinators and the Boards of Management, was highest priority. Thus, two joint trainings were organised, resulting in more Board of Management members being training and fewer Specialist Counsellors been trained.

## **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

The following training interventions resulted directly from members working together to share and cascade learning at strategic/senior management level:

- Boards of Management
- Partnership Working
- The How of Policy Development

As a result of the learning from the networking experience the following has occurred:

- 15 RCC staff now working with training participants so that their special skills and knowledge can be shared and passed on to others in similar roles.
- 5 Board Members have worked closely with their own staff in order to share the knowledge gained
- 5 centres have develop plans to meet identified gaps
- Training for individual centres has been “customised” to suit specific centre needs
- The training programmes have focused on building capacity in skills and knowledge and have included new Board of Management Members
- The impact such training has had on centres and staff has been extremely beneficial
- The flexibility of the Training Networks Programme funding to deliver training locally and on member organisation premises has increased the ability of staff to attend training.

- Sourcing training centrally has allowed RCCs to utilise their minimal local resources for other purposes and ultimately benefits survivors of crisis. Providing for training through a focused training programme is more efficient and cost effective.
- For the RCC Network the project has enabled members to centralise training, minimise time and costs involved in centres contracting individually with trainers, arranging training, conducting evaluations and other administrative duties required of the process, by each member centre.

## **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

The Training Links Programme funding has provided a tremendous opportunity for staff to engage in training specifically geared to their own organisational needs which explored issues of governance, strategic planning, job roles and responsibilities. As a result, the following strategies will continue:

- Strategic planning has become a priority for many of the member centres
- Longer term organisational development skills need to be addressed
- Funding will be a key issue in terms of accessing the required training activities
- Leadership and board of management skills training will be key elements
- New partnerships formed between individual centres will be utilised to progress future training strategies and projects; e.g. children's rights and civil liberties organisations

## **Building Capacity in Vulnerable and Isolated Centres**

As a result of the training and widening of the original objectives of the initial project, the following crisis centres have been identified as having the least opportunity for funding and training, and need to receive assistance in strategic organisational development:

- Carlow & South Leinster Rape Crisis Centre
- Donegal Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre
- Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
- Galway Rape Crisis Centre
- Kilkenny Rape Crisis and Counselling Centre
- Mayo Rape Crisis Centre
- Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre North East
- Sligo Rape Crisis Centre.



## A5.7 Senior Help Line Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Senior Help Line Network</b>
Network Description	Network of 13 members to train help line staff in counseling skills, elder abuse, and dealing with aftermath of distressing calls
Network Objectives	To build confidence in the delivery of listening skills for all staff. To address the issues of isolation and exclusion experienced by many people, and in so doing to improve confidence and self esteem

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	13
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	382
Trainee Types	Call operatives; Team Leaders; Centre Coordinators

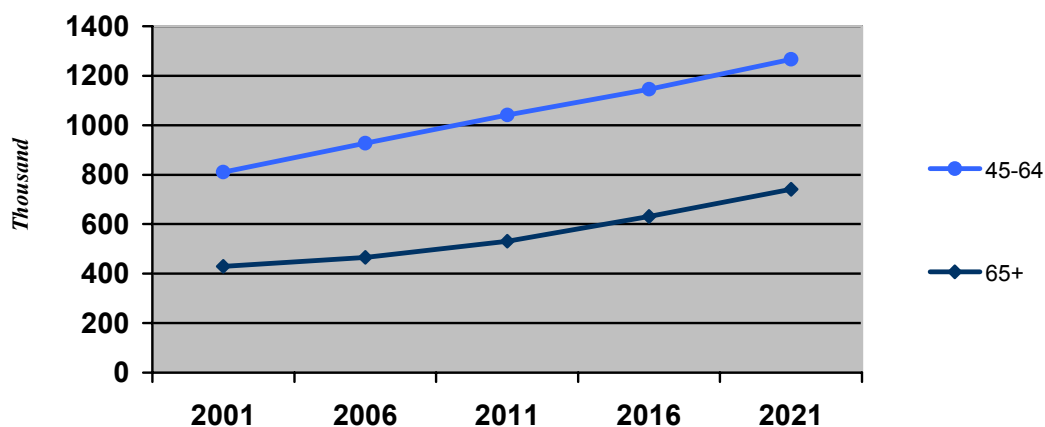
### **NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

The Senior Help Line was established in Summerhill Co. Meath in 1998 when it was launched by Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, who is now Patron of the service. It has grown from a part-time telephone listening service operated by 30 people on limited hours on Fridays and Mondays, into a national service with over 350 people operating the service 365 days a year, from 13 centres across the country.

The Senior Help Line provides the only national peer to peer listening service for older people in Ireland. It has developed with the support of the Department of Health & Children and the Health Service Executive (HSE), and is modelled on a very successful Italian project. Senior Help Line is a nondirective, confidential, national, listening service for older people, and provides opportunities for older people to talk to someone of their own age group, for the price of a local call from anywhere in Ireland.

- Over a quarter (26%) of people over 65 are living alone
- 11% of the population is over 65 (approximately 466,000 people), and by 2016 that figure is expected to be almost 15% (approximately 631,000 people). By 2050, a quarter of the population will be over 65.
- Since its establishment, the Senior Help Line has received more than 12,000 calls from older people.
- The volume of calls has grown by more than 50% in each of the last three years (this increase in calls has occurred with very limited marketing and promotion of the Senior Help Line service).
- The number of older people working as trainees, taking the calls, has increased to more than 300, with 13 centres located around the country from 2006.
- Senior Help Line is made up of member groups of trainees. Each member of the network has, on average, 20 trainees.

## Older population in Ireland (2001-2021)



Source: CSO Regional population projections - Projected population and dependency ratios 2001-2021

The Senior Help Line is in demand by callers across all regions of the country and the levels of growth are likely to continue into the future.

“...this growth can only be accommodated through the training of new staff and the up-skilling of existing trainees. The Wheel Training Links Programme has taught us much of value in how we deliver this training, its content and the real value of the network approach. The experience allowed us to modify our methods of collecting and collating information and provided us with a much closer understanding of the needs of our trainees and co-ordinators.”

**Mary Nally, CEO, Senior Help Line**

### FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:

#### Challenges

- Senior Help Line trainees participating in the Training Links Programme are older people - the average age being between 65 and 70
- There is concern amongst co-ordinators about the rising level of repeat callers, and the increase in abusive and inappropriate calls
- Transport is the single biggest barrier to participation in all events and training

#### Actions/Solutions

- Training needs analysis identified a number of common training areas to be addressed by the network
- Geographical groups were formed resulting in regional sub-groups for training
- Regional training events were the first phase of the training programme

“We always need training, training and more training”

“I cannot get enough training. I find that training helps me a great deal.”

**Network Member**

The Senior Help Line trainees are drawn from across Irish society and varied skill levels/background. The table below indicates the broad educational attainment of 110 trainees who completed the trainee participation form:

#### Educational attainment of trainees\*

Primary Education	Inter / Junior Certificate	Leaving Certificate	Primary Degree**	Post Graduate
40	16	27	14	4

\* Not all trainees indicated their educational attainment. \*\* Also includes registered nurses.

#### PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE

“One of the most appealing aspects of the process was the opportunity to benefit from the “unplanned” outcomes, by having the resources to constantly revise the training programmes - the only drawback was that the timeframe was too short to allow a complete and natural cycle of training to develop”

**Damian Leneghan, Network Coordinator**

The main impacts of the training programme as identified by the members are:

- Significant changes and improved processes in leadership, roster management and call logging have resulted from the training
- A specialised 6 module programme has been refined for delivery to all Network members and staff, setting a minimum training standard for all
- Senior Help Line has worked strategically with HSE staff for specialist subject delivery e.g. Elder Abuse and Suicide Prevention
- Maximising the use of internal resources and staff, and reducing costs
- Increased professional approach to evaluating both trainees’ needs and in identifying and delivering expert training solutions
- Up-grade in knowledge and skills gained by trainees is having a profound effect on confidence and commitment
- Increased awareness of value of the training
- New sub-network groups of co-ordinators have been formed in order to improve communications and networking around the skills needs

#### NETWORK FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY

As the population ages, this group of workers is being now recognised as a significant resource in Irish society, with much to contribute, high levels of emotional intelligence combined with a lifetime of experiences and learning that the community and the country can ill-afford to ignore in times of dramatic social change.

Clear lessons have been drawn from the experience in participating in the network training experience. The Senior Help Line is determined to build on the progress which the Training Links Programme has presented. A new series of training products for staff is being considered and will hopefully be realised in the context of the extension of the service to Northern Ireland. Staff training will have to be a vital part of this development.

The Training Links Programme has added real value to staff and callers to the service. It has helped to improve the professionalism of the training programmes, improve the manner in which training needs are assessed and develop and enhance the service for those who most need to access the service: its callers.

Involvement in the process of planning training has been an important element of the network function. Members have been able to discuss and share ideas with other member groups; coordinators have been able to support and encourage each other; and stakeholder organisations, such as the Health Services Executive will directly benefit from the improved

process – a direct result of the log sheet roll out training - which allows more relevant information to be available from the Senior Help Line service.

## A5.8 Southside Community Training Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Southside Community Training Network</b>
Network Description	The Southside Partnership operates in 20 geographical communities within the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown areas: from Shankill to Blackrock to Whitechurch.
Network Objectives	To improve co-ordination of resources amongst groups operating in the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown area. Specifically in networking, community development, by building capacity for management committees and agencies, and to address socio-economic disadvantage and social exclusion by up-skilling staff

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	34
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	720
Trainee Types	CEO/Manager equivalent, Administration, Professional/specialists, Financial and Board members

### **NETWORK OVERVIEW**

Southside Community Training Network (SCTN) is an initiative of the Southside Partnership (SSP). The network is concerned with building capacity skills and knowledge for staff operating in a variety of community groups and agencies in the Dun Laoghaire and Rathdown areas.

The perception of Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown as a rich and affluent area has remained an ongoing challenge for the Southside Partnership as it has tried to attract supports and resources to tackle social exclusion and socio-economic disadvantage within the Partnership area. Whilst the overall profile of the county is affluent (e.g. lowest levels of unemployment, highest percentage of people in management classes), there remains a number of communities and target groups within the county which are experiencing significant degrees of poverty and social exclusion (a number of the District Electoral Divisions with the highest deprivation ratings in Ireland are located in the Southside Partnership area).

The work of SCTN is divided into four broad categories: 1) Promoting Participation, 2) Building on Success, 3) Enhancing Skills and 4) Technical Support.

### **NETWORK FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

Challenges

- Diversity of participant groups - including community leaders, people with disabilities, travellers
- Range of roles involved in network - the pool of participants includes members of management committees, staff employed on Community Employment schemes as well as senior executives of the County Council and professionals in the community development field
- Ensuring an appropriate range of courses has been an essential requirement to the success of the programme
- encouraging new staff to step forward and take on leadership positions in their community groups,

#### Solutions/Actions

- The network has developed a programme that was delivered in a number of locations that provided an opportunity for new staff to take their first steps into community development & community leadership roles
- Members' comments on specific training needs was gained through end of course evaluation forms
- Other specific training needs were noted in response to postal survey questions.
- The expressed training areas needed fall into six thematic areas. These are management, administration, information technology, health and safety, childcare, and capacity building

### **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

The network has achieved the following during its implementation phase:

- 25 training events
- 410 participant days

The number of planned training days has almost doubled.

The increased training days fall primarily under the “promoting participation” category of SCTN training. SCTN had also originally planned to run a summer school, but it was realised early on that such an event was too ambitious given the time and resources available to the network. In place of the residential school SCTN held three locally based residential training events

### **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

Five trends are emerging in terms of future training requirements.

- Ensure wider dissemination and participation in training for other staff
- Increase the sharing of skills and knowledge in order to continue to build capacity within organisations.
- Widen the group of existing trainers and identify others who are also offering best practice in relation to training and/or subject matter experts
- Networking has become an important component of the programme. This needs to be sustained and further explored with members and future opportunities highlighted
- Accreditation of programmes where that is possible and feasible. Participants have identified a requirement to have learning and training recognised at national level.

Collaboration is a central theme in the work of SCTN. Networking has enabled participants and members to exchange experiences and to act as mentors to each other. Since the commencement of the Training Links Programme, SCTN has tripled its membership.

## A5.9 Community Transport Training Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Community Transport Training Network (CTTN)</b>
Network Description	The network consists of small voluntary organisations operating urban or rural transport services for people who have difficulty accessing mainstream public transport, including disabled people, older people and people who are socially excluded
Network Objectives	To deliver specific training programmes to address the needs of the sector. To identify and deliver accredited programmes – which are important to trainees in the sector by virtue of the work performed. To enable small member organisations to directly access training in a cost effective manner and locally.

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	28
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	658
Trainee Types	Managers, Administration staff, Transport drivers and assistants

“The Programme has enabled the Community Transport Associations of Ireland (CTAI) and Northern Ireland (part of CTAUK) and their member organisations to establish a training network to develop and deliver a targeted training programme over a very short space of time, at very affordable rates. The training has been focussed on the practical skills required to improve the performance of the staff engaged in managing and operating transport services and to consider the skills and knowledge required to plan for the transition to a post carbon world.”

**Graham Lightfoot, Network Coordinator**

### **NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

Of the network members, the co-ordinator is a national association, 2 are national disability organisations, 14 are rural community transport groups, 2 are urban community transport groups, 2 are local care groups and 7 are Rural Community Transport Partnerships in Northern Ireland.

All member organisations target their services at people who have difficulty accessing mainstream public transport, either by virtue of geographic location, social exclusion, age, disability, etc. Member organisations primarily serve communities where there is little or no public transport enabling access to facilities and services in their locality or in neighbouring towns and cities.

### **FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

#### Challenges

- Dealing with varied and complex voluntary transport set ups in Ireland

- Being particularly focused on rural and peripheral areas brings its own challenges in terms of communication and engagement
- The lack of recognition of training and networking needs within official policy planning
- Securing accreditation for new training programmes in Ireland
- Resulting in considerable delays in providing the “cascade” training by those trainers to staff in their own organisations
- Most of the initial “cascade” training will actually take place after the programme has been completed - no actual costs involved in this part of the process
- Some training events were poorly attended – lessons learnt is that attendance is much better when training is more focused on specialist skills needed to manage and operate community transport

#### Actions/Solutions

- Train the trainer courses had a positive knock-on effect
- Four training days were involved in the Training Plan, one of which was a joint network event – blending in as part of national annual week long event
- Another networking event was held to coincide with an annual event held over two days in Dublin
- Development of a social auditing approach to enable the development, monitoring and management of community transport delivery

## PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE

The network’s training programme has been designed to build up the capacity of member organisations to enable them to improve and maintain the delivery of their services. This has been undertaken through the training of trainers, the training of staff in social auditing, equipping drivers with enhanced qualifications to enable them to operate cross border services where appropriate.

This has in turn enabled and will enable the trainers trained in the CTTNs programme to provide training to their own staff and volunteers and those of neighbouring organisations.

The Training Programme also involved social auditing. Social auditing enables organisations to:

- monitor and evaluate their performance
- assist in the forward planning process
- driver and passenger assistant training
- associated training of trainers
- driver training to acquire the PCV D1 licence
- enable operators in Northern Ireland to operate minibus services into the Republic of Ireland and to provide the skills/knowledge to enable organisations and communities to plan for the transition to a post carbon world.

## FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY

“The programme that we delivered was ambitious and for the MiDAS and PATS courses involved the “localisation” of training materials developed by the CTAUK and Hampshire County Council in England. There were considerable delays with this process with most of them being outside the control of the CTTN. These were due in part to licensing issues between Hampshire County Council and CTAUK to enable the material be “localised” for use in Ireland and for the training to be delivered in Ireland.”

**Graham Lightfoot, Network Coordinator**

Certification and accreditation of training is essential for members of the Network as it displays clearly the skills of the staff engaged in managing and providing the transport services. Certified and accredited training delivered during the project was directly related and relevant



to the duties and responsibilities of staff and was designed to improve the capacity of their organisations to manage and deliver their services more effectively.

“It would be very useful for the development of certified training under FETAC for example that any future Training Links Programme be of a longer duration such as 3 years as it takes considerable time to have new programmes accredited by FETAC.”

**Network Member**

#### A5.10 Cork Community Music Network

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Cork Community Music Network (CCMN)</b>
Network Description	This is a network of community music service providers incorporating music training and performance in the community
Network Objectives	To address socially excluded and disadvantaged groups through education of music to promote, teach, perform, appreciate and enjoy music

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	12
Number of Trainees	153
Trainee Types	CEO/Manager, Supervisors, Music Practitioners, Experts, Support officers

#### **NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

Members of the Cork Community Music Network provide a number of services such as:

- Outreach programmes to schools
- Music appreciation courses for older person groups
- Public performances
- Accredited training for community members with a focus on those who are economically and socially disadvantaged

Community music education organisations in the Cork area provide key services in two main areas:

- Instrumental and vocal music education services outside of school hours
- Complementary music curriculum support services in the classroom

#### **FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

Challenges

- Share learning, experience and the skills of providers on music and its opportunities
- Introduce and develop music within the community as a part of a wider appreciation of the arts
- Identify and promote best practice in the delivery of music to community and socially disadvantaged groups
- Encourage take up of accredited training for community members
- Target vulnerable groups, including new immigrants, older adults, children, and those who have no access to music services

#### Actions/Solutions

- The opportunity to take part in the programme has raised awareness of the need to address skills associated with running a viable local community music service, and provided the opportunity to begin to meet that need
- All candidates completing a training course received a CCMN certificate of completion. These certificates served as an indicator of efforts at capacity and skills building taken by the individuals concerned

#### **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

Training has involved recognised experts from inside and outside the network. Music is performance focused and experts within the sector have been involved in developing and delivering some of the programme content. Some of these local experts are internationally recognised for their knowledge, skill and expertise.

**Robert Seward, Network Coordinator**

- Network members have a strong community ethos in the provision of music education.
- Each of the groups involved is active in performing at community events
- There is recognised social capital value in providing the services for community members such as youth and adult groups, and particularly providing services in disadvantaged, vulnerable and isolated areas
- At the level of the individual there are benefits in terms of building self-confidence, personal development, growth and recognition of achievement through music presentations and accreditation of learning

#### **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

We are aware now that the network is sustainable and we have held a seminar to give information as to what we are about. All the courses we have run have been successful and we can see a good opportunity to expand on these. Also the courses that we didn't manage to run as per our application we would still hope to run in the future. We have learned that the timing courses is important and how we should circulate information to members.

**Robert Seward, Network Coordinator**

**A5.11 Learning and Performance Network**

<b>NETWORK NAME</b>	<b>Learning and Performance Network</b>
Network Description	Working within the community and voluntary sector dealing with persons who are experiencing homelessness throughout Dublin
Network Objectives	To provide cost effective and specialised training and development opportunities for the homeless sector. To develop a skilled workforce who are competent and confident to meeting ongoing changes and challenges of the homeless services sector

<b>KEY NETWORK DATA</b>	
Number of network members	10
Number of Actual Trainees/participants	351
Trainee Types	Homeless service workers and managers

**NETWORK OVERVIEW:**

In 2005, the Homeless Agency conducted a survey of homelessness in Dublin. It counted **2015** people homeless in the city, of whom 185 were sleeping rough. Members of the Learning & Performance network are focused on reducing the number of homeless people in Ireland, raising awareness of alternatives, and educating the sector. However, this can only be achieved through ongoing awareness and training of staff employed to work with homelessness who face many challenges and issues daily.

The Learning and Performance network has been in operation since 2005 and is involved in the development, review, assessment and design of programmes relating to Learning and Performance throughout the Homeless Sector. In 2005 a paper was written outlining the need for both a sectoral induction programme and a managers' programme

**FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT:**

The sector is large and has many stakeholders. One of the greatest challenges for the network has been identifying the specific job categories and then identifying subject matter experts to develop and delivery training programmes.

**Challenges**

- Engaging diverse participant groups – there are 140 homeless services throughout Ireland, operated by 57 organisations
- A 2005 national review highlighted 6 defined roles within the sector: Project Manager, Project Leader, Project Worker, Assistant Project Worker, Night worker and Child Care Worker
- Ensuring an appropriate range of courses to meet all employee categories has been an essential requirement to the success of the programme

- The need for sectoral agreement regarding the competencies and associated levels that workers within the sector need to demonstrate at recruitment and selection stage of the worker cycle
- Identifying training providers and subject matter experts to develop and deliver training programmes

#### Actions/Solutions

- The network has developed 2 sector specific programmes to address learning and training requirements
- Consultation with a number of organisations resulting in the hosting of 38 jobholder sessions
- Consultation with members resulting in the development of 120 documents for posting to the induction website.

## **PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE**

### ***Sectoral Induction Programme***

The programme aims to provide information at a finger touch to assist and guide workers in ways to reduce homelessness across the country and specifically in their own areas. The Sectoral Induction provides easy to access, concise, clear and standard information & learning in the following areas:

- Pathways in and out of homelessness
- Causes of homelessness
- Health and homelessness
- Current services and provisions for persons experiencing homelessness
- Contacts and details for each area
- Future strategies: action plans, legislation, research and reports

### ***Managers Development Programme***

Sector wide consultation on the Managers Development Programme involved the following:

- A total of 38 jobholder sessions were hosted by the network involving member organisations
- 200 job holders were interviewed and skills and competencies mapped
- Further enhancement of the existing Learning and Performance Programme
- Suite of additional modules developed to address skills gaps

This consultation process has enabled the identification and development of skills and competencies that have formed the basis of the development of a new managers programme specifically designed for the sector.

Three primary elements of the programme are:

- Effective Professional Practice
- Client Centredness
- Working Together

## **FUTURE & SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Long-term vision for the Sectoral Induction Programme: Beyond 2007**

Mapping of homeless services.

As a result of the network activity and consultation process under the Training Links Programme, it has been identified that a further enhancement on the Sectoral Induction Programme would be GIS mapping of locations based on geographical location co-ordinates. Once developed this will be used as a learning resource and will link to the Sectoral Induction web site.

#### **Long-term vision for the Managers Development Programme: Beyond 2007**

As part of the long term sustainability of the programme, work will be ongoing to address the possibility of incorporating accreditation of the initial modules. The network has consulted with both the National College of Ireland (NCI) and The University of Ulster. Indications are that accreditation routes can be incorporated as part of the training programme.

#### **A5.11.1 Observations from the Evaluator team for the Sector Skills Initiative**

This network faced a number of challenges in the design, delivery and achievement of its training programmes and individual trainee targets, as outlined below:

##### **Sectoral Induction Programme:**

The network set about to develop an online web-based sectoral induction programme – as a means of achieving (a) value and impact for money invested in the training programme, and (b) provide a learning and training facility that was innovative and could be accessed by many people throughout the country. The network underestimated the time required for what resulted in being an extensive consultation process, as follows:

- Documentation and content of the sector induction programme
- The design and delivery approach for the programme
- E-learning as a means of delivery and the longer term implications of resources and support of an e-learning environment
- Sufficient time to source subject matter experts with regard to proofing and approving final training and learning documentation
- Changes required of the sectoral induction programme as a result of consultation and its development – i.e. the initial informative induction needed to become more “intuitive” and dynamic in order to provide a real learning opportunity
- The time to revise, redesign and consult with the sector’s consultative forum working on the sector induction programme.

##### **Managers Programme:**

- Again this programme was ambitious and involved considerable consultation with members and stakeholders. The network underestimated the time required for the following primary elements of the programme:
  - Competency Framework – the alignment of competencies as pre-determined by the sector prior to The Training Links Programme, and the rollout of the framework to new and existing managers throughout the sector

- Delivery of the training programme – the time required to identify, source and/or tender for training providers

It is the evaluation team's view that:

- The timescale of the Training Links programme did not lend itself to the ambitious challenges set by this network in the time period and the complex and detailed process required of establishing sectoral standards for a wide geographically dispersed group of member organisations
- The consultation process required of the two programmes proved a much bigger challenge for the network than originally considered
- Web based learning activities can be very complex and have longer term implications of resources and support (both human and financial) and these were not identified by the network initially.