

Co. Louth VEC's Peace III Project

Build the Capacity of Ethnic Minority Groups



Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Report

Building the Capacity of Ethnic Minority Group



Louth VECs PEACE III Project is supported by the European Union's PEACE III Programme and part financed by the Irish Government under the National Development Plan as awarded by Louth Peace and Reconciliation Partnership.

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1 Foreword

Over the past decade, Ireland has experienced unprecedented levels of immigration, and Co.Louth has been, per head capita, one of the leading host counties for our new community. These new groups have enriched our social and cultural lives, but the benefits of the changes are accompanied by many challenges. In response to the challenges of change, public services have strived to ensure that the needs of its new citizens are met in a responsive and sympathetic manner.

Schools are often the first port of call for many newcomers, and the lifelong learning nature of our education system ensures that the primary and sustaining point of contact of new communities is more than likely to be an educational service.

Co.Louth VEC welcomed the opportunity to work with the Co.Louth Peace and Reconciliation Partnership to explore new ways of reducing racism and sectarianism in the county, and of examining the issues that minority groups experience when they interface with statutory services such as ours.

We are very encouraged by the progress reflected in this report, and Co.Louth VEC will review its findings, and our existing policies and programmes, to see how we can continue to improve its services to ethnic minority groups. I would like to extend our deepest appreciation to our staff, and partner stakeholders who helped make this project such an outstanding success. We are truly indebted to the members of the ethnic minority groups who participated with such commitment and enthusiasm to the programme. It is primarily through their efforts that we can review and adapt our services to meeting their needs more efficiently and effectively. I want to assure them that we will do everything we can within the current challenging fiscal uncertainties to ensure that our services meet their needs.

I see this as a timely opportunity for Co.Louth VEC to commit itself to being the catalyst for creativity and innovation for multicultural education in the county.

Dr. Pdraig Kirk
CEO Co.Louth VEC

2 Project Objectives

2.1 Award Details

Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project was supported by the European Union's PEACE III Programme and part financed by the Irish Government under the National Development Plan as awarded by Louth Peace and Reconciliation Partnership.

Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project was funded under the PEACE III Programme 2007 to 2013 under Activity 1: Combating Sectarianism and Racism.

The project received an award of €155,000. The project's lifespan was initially from September 2009 to December 2010, but was subsequently extended to end of March 2011, within the existing financial framework.

Representatives from Co.Louth VEC, the North/South Exchange Consortium and Co-exist constituted membership of the Project Committee. (see Appendix 1).

2.2 Key Objectives of the CO. Louth VEC PEACE III Project

The aim of Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project was to support emerging and existing minority groups for whom sectarianism and racism could present challenges to both their development and that of their communities.

Focus

The primary focus was to build the capacity of these groups to deal with sectarianism and racism.

Outcomes

Project specific outcomes were to include increased awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding sectarianism and racism in Co. Louth.

Objective

The objective was to deliver training and mentoring programmes which ensured the capacity-building of the target groups so that they were both empowered and capable of establishing future sustainable peace building approaches in their communities.

3 Research

3.1 Background – Co.Louth VEC

Co.Louth VEC is responsible for the provision of a diverse range of education and training activities and related support services and has an annual budget of over €30m. It has a strong tradition in supporting the integration of local groups into their communities.

In order to deliver the PEACE III Project in a meaningful manner, Co.Louth VEC PEACE III Project engaged a researcher to outline a strategic framework for the delivery of Co.Louth VEC's Peace III Project while acknowledging the resource limitations and the short timeframe for implementation. The purpose of the research was twofold:

- 1 to conduct a scoping and analysis exercise with key stakeholders in the area.
- 2 to identify potential groups who would benefit from participation in Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III training programme to help shape the final strategy of strands and activities in the project.

3.2. Demographic Context

In the last decade Ireland has experienced a rapid increase in immigration on a scale previously unknown in the country's history. Over this time, Ireland has been transformed to an increasingly heterogeneous country in terms of nationality, language, ethnicity and religious affiliation. The 2006 national census showed that of the 4,172,013 people usually resident in Ireland, 420,000 (10%) were classified as non-Irish nationals, representing some 200 nationalities. Compared with the 2002 census, this was an increase of 87¹.

In the last decade Ireland has experienced a rapid increase in immigration on a scale previously unknown in the country's history.

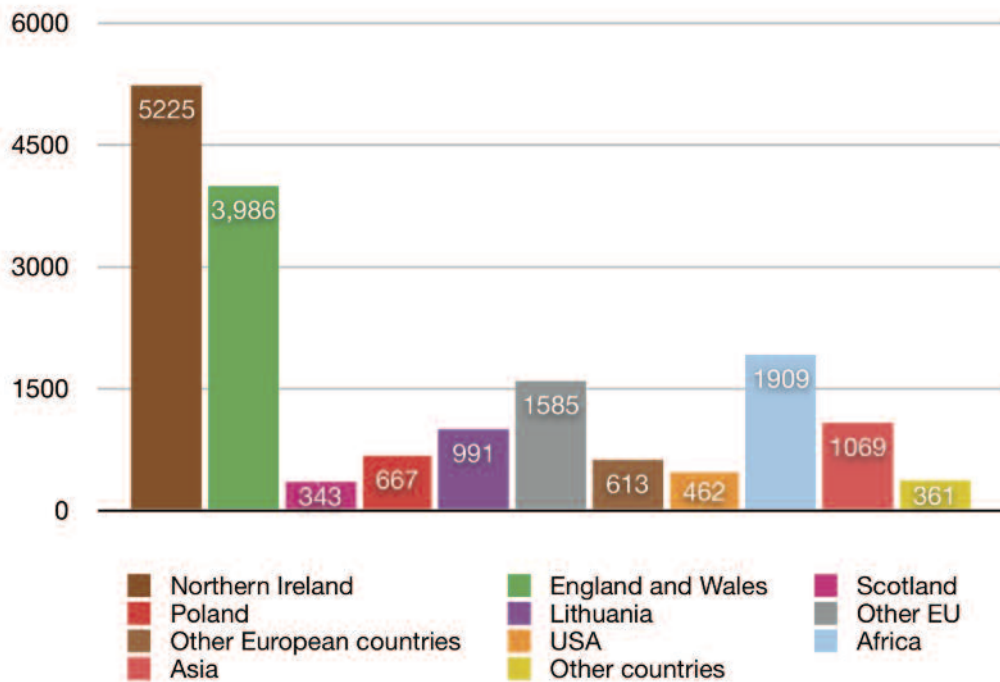
These changes have also affected the composition of Irish schools. It is now expected that immigrants will remain a definite feature of Irish society and education into the future. Figures from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) show that, over the past few years, the numbers of migrants are steadily increasing in the post- primary sector. The Department maintains a post-primary pupil database ("PPPDB") which provides a wide range of data on students enrolled in this sector. The table below provides data on students from the largest non-Irish nationalities, as well as overall migrant student numbers for 2006/2007- 2009/2010 and total student numbers in the post- primary sector.

¹ It is worth noting that demographic and economic circumstances in Ireland have changed since 2006

Table 2.3 from the Department's Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015

| | 2006/7 | 2007/8 | 2008/9 | 2009/10 |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total no. of migrant students | 17,632 | 21,213 | 24,659 | 28,422 |
| Total no. of students | 303,954 | 305,481 | 308,212 | 312,148 |

Co.Louth has an increasingly diverse population, with sizable numbers from Africa, Asia, Lithuania and Poland living in the county. There is a particular clustering of immigrants in the urban areas of Dundalk and Drogheda. Figures from the 2006 Census highlight the increasing diversity of the population in Co. Louth.

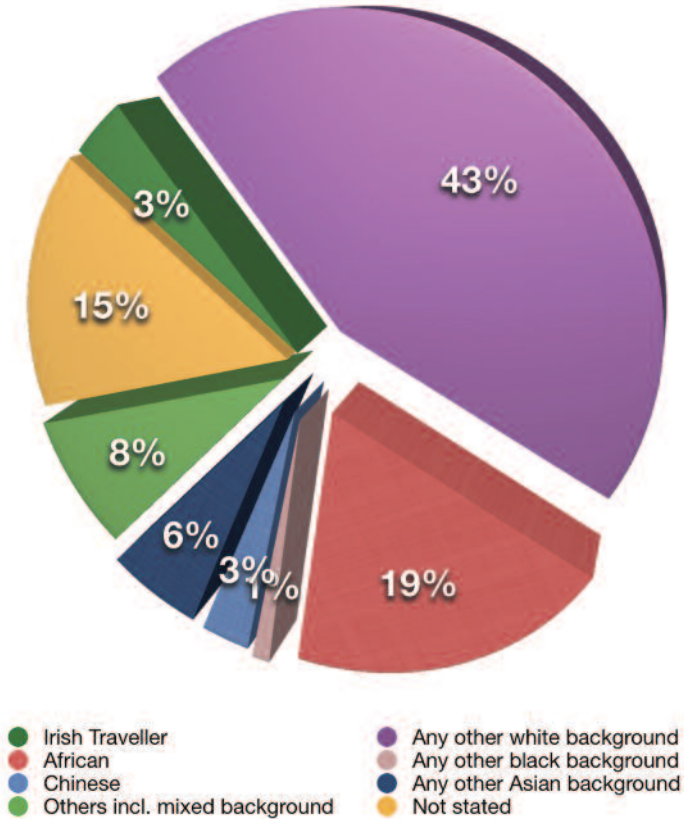


Persons in Louth not born in Republic of Ireland classified by country of birth 2006

Louth has the highest proportion of black and/or black Irish ethnicity in Ireland, with 2.2% of its population in this category compared with national figures of 1.1%. Almost 2,500 people in the county described themselves in 2006 as African, or other black backgrounds (Census figures, 2006). Over 1,000 people are of Asian background. The county also has sizable Lithuanian and Polish communities with 991 people from Lithuania and 667 people from Poland. Figures from the 2006 census highlight the increasing diversity of the population in Co.Louth.

According to a recent ERSI Report *Immigration and School Composition in Ireland* (Byrne et al, 2010) recent migrants to Ireland including refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers are likely to experience racism and there are concerns that the economic downturn and increases in unemployment will exacerbate this problem.

There has been a substantial increase in the levels of unemployment in Louth as a result of the economic crises. Figures from the Central Statistics Office indicate that the number of unemployed has increased by 10,000 from 6,317 in October 2006 to 16,269 in October 2009.



Persons usually resident in Co. Louth (classified by ethnicity) excluding 89% Irish

4 Strategic Context

4.1 Strategy and Delivery

Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project's research outlined the context and recommended a strategy for delivery of the training programme.

Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project was delivered in a complex environment and was designed on the basis of five key factors:

- The project was delivered in partnership with the communities, groups and schools directly involved in the initiative
- A focus on empowering and enabling members of the groups and community
- Prioritising the overarching aims and objectives of the EU Peace III Programme and the Louth PEACE III Partnership
- Complimenting the range of programmes being delivered in Co.Louth under Peace III and other initiatives
- The project work was informed by best practice regarding working with diversity and dealing with sectarianism and racism.

The research specified delivery of the training in two strands:

Strand One : Strategies to address racism and sectarianism in schools

Strand Two : Strategies to build capacity of Ethnic Minority Groups.

Both strands were adopted and are described in detail in the next section of the report.

4.2 Methodology

The recruitment process was undertaken by the Project Co-ordinator in a number of phases as follows:

Phase 1

Desk research and liaison with stakeholders: statutory, voluntary and community sector and members of the religious communities in Louth.

Phase 2

To ensure participant buy in, the Project Co-ordinator undertook face to face individual meetings, attended events and group meetings as well as religious ceremonies and social gatherings.

Phase 3

In consultation with stakeholders, an assessment of the different groups was undertaken, concerning their ability to engage and their current needs.

Phase 4

Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Committee selected the target groups most likely to benefit from engagement in the training programme.

5 Strand One:

Strategies to address racism and sectarianism in Co. Louth VEC Schools

5.1 Background

It was recognised by Co.Louth VEC that the school is a microcosm of the broader community and was therefore an ideal community in which to target the activities of the project.

Schools have a key role for young people to develop values of respect, accommodation and appreciation for diversity. For many heads of households, the school will be one of the first “official” arms of the state with which they become engaged.

There is a need for a range of strategies to ensure that the education system is not only free from sectarianism and racism, but that the system, and schools in particular, can become a key driver in the promotion of a more tolerant and inclusive society.

Co.Louth VEC schools cater for a high percentage of designated disadvantaged communities in the county, and also have a high proportion of students from new communities. This presents challenges for all concerned; the children from these new communities, their parents, the school management, staff and the other students.

5.2 Department of Education and Skills Intercultural Guidelines

The project utilised the Department of Education and Skills' *Guidelines on Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School* as a blueprint for implementation.

The guidelines provide support for those who aim to make school a more inclusive environment by celebrating the diversity of its pupils and staff. The guidelines state that the most effective manner to implement anti-racism and peace building measures in schools is to adopt a whole school approach, to develop a more integrated and cohesive school.

Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project identified a number of key characteristics in the Intercultural Education guidelines which are relevant to this project, including:

- Intercultural education is for all children.
- Intercultural education is embedded in knowledge and understanding, skills and capacities, attitudes and values.
- Intercultural education is integrated with all subjects and with the general life of schools.

- Intercultural education requires a real world focus.
- Language is central to developing intercultural abilities and capacities.
- Intercultural education takes time.
- The school as a model of good practice.

Due to resource and time constraints, the project developed a focused approach in one school St. Oliver's Community College, Drogheda, which would act as a demonstration initiative for future work. It was felt that this option would yield more easily quantifiable short term and long term impacts.

5.3 St. Oliver's Community College

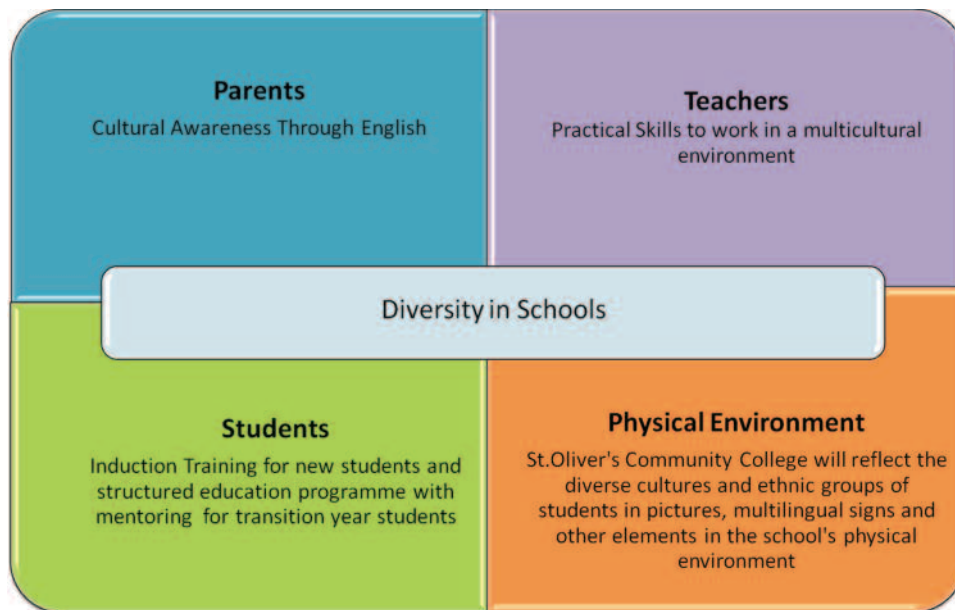
St. Oliver's Community College currently has 1123 pupils and 90 teachers. It is one of the biggest secondary schools in Ireland, with a significant population of students from minority backgrounds, including 122 international students from 41 countries². During the time of project implementation, 62 students were receiving English Language Support, while 41 new students from ethnic minority backgrounds arrived in St. Oliver's Community College in September 2010.

St. Oliver's Community College, Drogheda currently has 1123 pupils and 90 teachers. It is one of the biggest secondary schools in Ireland, with a significant population of students from minority backgrounds, including 122 international students from 41 countries.

The school has experienced a number of issues around racism and the school management was keen to develop a whole school approach to enhance the development of a more integrated and cohesive school.

The Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project used the following matrix as a holistic delivery model to implement a comprehensive programme for students, teachers and parents, along with a programme to make small changes to the school's physical environment.

1. Brazil 2. Latvia 3. Lithuania 4. Malaysia 5. Nigeria 6. Poland 7. Ukraine 8. Russia 9. Congo 10. Turkey 11. Iraq 12. Pakistan 13. Croatia 14. France 15. Germany 16. Kenya 17. Romania 18. Belarus 19. Cameroon 20. Moldavia 21. South Africa 22. Spain 23. Slovakia 24. China 25. Philippines 26. Ukraine, 27. Israel 28. Mauritius 29. Saudi Arabia 30. Portugal 31. Czech Republic 32. Cuba 33. Italy 34. Kuwait 35. Sudan 36. Switzerland 37. Former USSR 38. Zimbabwe 39. Belgium 41. Russia



5.4 Students

An Induction programme on diversity, interculturalism and racism to over 100 first year students was delivered in September 2010.

The theme of *Living in a Diverse Society* was explored by the students. Interesting aspects about Ireland and individual cultures were discussed from the perspectives of food, music, language and dress.

The intention was to celebrate the diverse nature of the school population, to make all newcomers feel welcome in the school and to introduce the concept of multicultural education in a fun and user friendly manner for young pupils.

Students worked in pairs to find out about each other with a set list of questions. They engaged in various learning activities which encouraged students from all backgrounds to consider the similarities and celebrate the difference in cultural heritage and ethnicity.

5.5 Teachers

A workshop to introduce the project on diversity, racism, interculturalism and teaching methodologies was provided to all teachers at a staff development day in April 2010. A follow up practical training session was also provided as part of their staff development day in May 2010. In all 97 teachers and Special Needs Assistants participated.

Topics covered in the training included

- challenging assumptions
- stereotyping
- the hidden curriculum
- the Iceberg concept of culture
- perceptions
- interculturalism
- cultural intelligence and competence
- prejudice

5.6 Parents

Parental involvement was seen as a key factor to successfully welcoming and including students from diverse backgrounds. For that reason, the project delivered an on-going language training and cultural diversity programme for parents of specific ethnic minority groupings on interculturalism, cultural identity, diversity and race.



Parents from St.Oliver's Community College who took part in the training

Parents were invited to take part in a short Beginner Language & Cultural Studies course in St. Oliver's Community College in May 2010. The objective was to define culture and raise awareness of a diverse range of cultures attending the school. A follow up course took place in September 2010.

The purpose of this course was to improve the English language skills of ethnic minorities. This was an integrated programme which included listening comprehension, fluency practice, vocabulary acquisition, use of basic grammar patterns and practical reading and writing applications. More importantly, from a school perspective the course focused on cultural awareness and social-cultural competence for learners living and working in Ireland and interacting with the Irish school systems. The course facilitated an explanation of issues which may be pertinent to parents who are engaging for the first time with the Irish school system.



Certificate Presentation for Parents in St.Oliver's Community College

The course focused on cultural awareness and social-cultural competence for learners living and working in Ireland and interacting with the Irish school systems. The course facilitated an explanation of issues which may be pertinent to parents who are engaging for the first time with the Irish school system.



Parents from St.Oliver's Community College who took part in the training

5.7 School Environment

Although the Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project had limited resources, it aimed to reflect the diverse cultures and ethnic groups in St. Oliver's Community College using the student's diversity mural in pictures, multilingual signs, and other elements in the school's physical environment.



Diversity mural in St.Oliver's Community College

6 Strand Two:

Building Capacity of Ethnic Minority Groups

Background

The Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project adopted a multifaceted approach to capacity building of ethnic minority groups by the provision and facilitation of:

- Capacity building training, tailored to each groups individual needs.
- An accredited FETAC course *Living in a Diverse Society*, to increase cultural awareness.
- An innovative approach to problem solving using Edward De Bono's *Six Thinking Hats Training* as a means of developing creative thinking within minority groups.

Building Capacity of Ethnic Minority Groups in Louth

Building capacity of ethnic minority communities was a core element of the Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project. The Project targeted the communities most likely to experience racism and discrimination, and initiated contact with the Louth African Women's Group, Dundalk Polish Community, Eastern Europeans in Louth, the Dundalk Muslim Group and Louth Travellers³. The Project Co-ordinator spent a considerable amount of time familiarising himself with the number of ethnic minority groups, their stages of current development, their common areas of socialisation and also their needs. This phase of the project allowed the Project Coordinator to determine how to best meet the needs of the groups in an education context in Co.Louth. This entailed organising training and facilitation sessions at times and venues suitable to the groups' needs and also pitching the sessions at levels appropriate to each group. Consequently, the Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project sought to initially provide specific and separate support to these target groups. Therefore the focus of the training was on building capacity and leadership skills to enable these communities to support their own wider constituencies and to engage more actively and effectively with the wider community and various agencies.

It is worth noting that while different minority ethnic communities and Irish travellers can experience similar problems with regard to racism and discrimination and have similar needs, the reality is very complex. For example, there are also fears and concerns among minority groups, including Irish travellers, about the approach of "lumping minority groups together" and attempting to provide a single response to their needs. The Traveller community has particular concerns in this regard.

The training programme for each group encompassed the needs of the respective group comprising training, organizational development, planning and mentoring support. This programme can now be adapted and delivered to other minority groups in the county.

³ Irish travellers experience significant and ongoing racism in different areas of their lives which have been well documented. Louth has a significant Traveller population with 419 resident in the county in 2006. Co.Louth VEC provides a range of ongoing programmes and support for members of the Travelling community including the Tara Education Centre. However this centre is to close by June 2012.

The training programme for each group encompassed the needs of the respective group comprising training, organizational development, planning and mentoring support. This programme can now be adapted and delivered to other minority groups in the county.

Furthermore, Co.Louth VEC provided additional provision to the groups such as making rooms available for group meetings, English as a second level classes to increase communication with the indigenous Irish and other stakeholders, photocopying and other administrative services along with access to mainstream Co.Louth VEC classes.

It is also important that the Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project had a cross-border element. Therefore, the Project worked with a cross-border Traveller group in Bessbrook, Co. Armagh.

6.1 Capacity Building with Ethnic Minority Groups

The Co.Louth VEC's Peace III Project worked to support a number of ethnic minority groups across Co.Louth to help with their specific needs. The groups were as follows:

- Louth African Women's Support Group (LAWSG)
- Polish Young Adult Support Group (Simul Polonia)
- Dundalk Muslim Group (DMG)
- Eastern European Group (EEG)
- Tara Education Centre Group (TECG)

Coexist Ltd was awarded the tender to develop and deliver the capacity building training programme to five ethnic minority groups in Co.Louth: the Louth African Women's Support group, Dundalk Muslim group Sisters, Tara Education Centre Group, Polish Young Adult Support group and the Eastern European Group, from May to June 2010.

In total 62 participants from ethnic minority groups were trained in capacity building skills in Co.Louth. The aim of the capacity building training was to provide activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their own communities.

The Capacity Building Trinity encompassed three main types of activity:

1. Developing Skills

Learning and training opportunities for individuals and groups, and sharing through networks and mutual support, to develop skills, knowledge and confidence for the group to develop as a whole.

2 Developing Structures

Developing the organisational structures and strengths of the community groups. Developing and understanding roles within an organisation or group.

3 Developing Support

Developing the availability of practical support to enable the development of skills and structures.

The overall purpose of this community development work was to collectively bring about change and to empower community groups.

In conclusion, one of the outcomes of the capacity building training and facilitation is that the groups now realise the wide range of staff, progression opportunities and facilities available to them from Co.Louth VEC. This should make a significant contribution to the ongoing and sustained work of the overall Co. Louth PEACE III Programme.

Finally, it is hoped that one of the outcomes of the training and facilitation will have created stronger relationships and a greater willingness among minority groups to work together.

6.1.1 Louth African Women's Support Group (LAWSG)

This group was formed from 1990 and was predominantly made up of women from Dundalk and surrounding areas. The age of the women ranged from the late twenties to late forties.

There was a core group of 5-8 women who attended class over the six week period. A number of the Louth African Women's Support Group (LAWSG) members are actively involved in local and national initiatives ranging from integration initiatives to social entrepreneurship.

LAWSG was at a stage where they found it extremely hard to attract new women into the group and also that only a certain number of people were carrying out the work of the group. This is very common in the community and voluntary sector, and groups can become static.



Members of Louth African Women's Group at one of their training sessions

After direct conversations with the LAWSG it was very clear that they needed new direction, expressed an interest in developing a strategic plan. Co-exist worked with the group over a six week period to develop strategic aims and a strategic plan. The group engaged very well and developed a new energy to support other ethnic minority groups and to campaign and work on their behalf.

“ The Women's group has benefited from the opportunity availed of through this Peace Programme and wishes to acknowledge Co. Louth VEC and the funders Louth Peace and Reconciliation Partnership, for this opportunity to help the group grow, through participating in this capacity building training programme, whilst looking forward to continuous support ”

Titilola Ossai

6.1.2 Polish Young Adult Support Group (Simul Polonia)

Within this group there was a core of 10 young Polish adults who had been living in Dundalk for a number of years. The engagement with the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III project was the first time this adult group had come together and jointly stated their desire to start a support group for the Polish people in Co. Louth

This group were very enthusiastic and eager to develop programmes to combat racist and discriminatory ways of life in Co.Louth. After conversations with the Polish young adults it was clear that their primary need was in team-building, defining their roles within the team, improving the group's communication skills and developing a strategic plan.



Members of Polish Young Adult Support Group (Simul) at one of their training sessions

The training programme worked very well with the group as it laid a strong foundation to develop future projects and bring them to fruition. They were extremely keen to meet other ethnic minority groups and to listen to their stories and acknowledged the strong support available through the Co. Louth VEC's Peace III project. Simul has derived enormous benefit from its involvement with the Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project. During the capacity building training, Simul formally constituted itself as a group after engagement with the project. Simul has now progressed to working with other service providers such as Challenge for Change, Louth Leader, An Táin Festival to producing their own newsletter and organising cultural and social events in the county.

“ I think this training provided me with the opportunity to do something together, to form and association, to show it was possible for a group of people, to create an association in foreign country and thus help ourselves and others. This training gave me the confidence to do something and showed me how important it is to work as part of a group, as united as a group we can do more than one person on their own. This training is the first step for the Polish community here. ”

Malgorzata Kozłowska, Simul Polonia

6.1.3 Dundalk Muslim Group

This group included women who have been living in Ireland and Dundalk for some time. They ranged in age from their early twenties to early fifties. Most of them were married with families and attend the mosque daily. It is evident that their religion is extremely important to them. For many, due to work and family commitments, this was the first opportunity the women had the opportunity to come work together outside of the mosque.



Members of the Muslim Community in Dundalk at one of their training sessions

Their capacity building training consisted of looking at themselves and their identity, building confidence, increasing communications within the group and finally looking at the theme of diversity and exploring the diversity within the group. This was an extremely successful group who are very keen to develop links and further their education through different courses within the Peace III Programme.

“ On behalf of the dundalk women muslin community i am happy to say that we have really enjoyed the course especially as this is the first time of getting together outside the mosque and it doesn't have to do with any religious issue. we really appreciate the opportunity and we hope to benefit from any more of this type of offer if given the chance.thank you and God bless.

”

Shakira

6.1.4 Eastern European Group

This group was made up of people from a number of Eastern European countries, specifically Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Russia and the Ukraine. The group ranged in age from people in their early twenties through to their late fifties. It was a mixed gender group with equal participation from both women and men.

There were two major challenges that this group faced with the capacity building programme. The first was the language barrier, this was addressed through the provision of additional English language classes delivered as part of the programme.

The English language classes were provided through Russian interpretation as Russian was the common language for the group. In a similar format, the capacity building sessions were delivered in English with Russian interpretation where needed.



Members of the East European Group Dundalk at one of their training sessions.

The second challenge for the group was creating a group identity, given the unique ethnic backgrounds of the participants, and the cultural differences between the countries. After initial discussion it was apparent that the group did share similar characteristics. Additionally, there was an openness to the group process and an interest in meeting with the other groups who were part of the overall Co. Louth VEC's Peace III Projects Capacity Building Program.

“

I feel more confident about participating more fully in my community now as a result of attending this course

”

Ainars Ozal

6.1.5 Tara Education Centre Group

This group was made up of Irish traveller women from Dundalk and its immediate environs who were participating in education programmes through the Tara Education Centre. The age ranges of the women were from late teens to late fifties. A core group of 10 –12 women consistently participated in the workshops.



Members of the Irish traveller's group from the Tara Education Centre pictured at one of their training sessions

The biggest challenge for the facilitation of this group was holding their attention and keeping the activities relevant to their life experiences. Also, there was a vital trust building process that needed to be undertaken in order for the group to begin engaging with the capacity building aspects of the programme. This was established by the end of the fourth session. It was clear that the group would have liked to participate in additional training and facilitation sessions in the future.

“ The videos were good. They showed us about change and how change happens to society. The training shows us that minority groups are made to suffer by the majority group. It also showed that if people take the trouble of educating themselves about other people's cultures, respect and understanding can happen and different groups can mix together well ”

6.2 Living in a Diverse Society

The Louth VEC PEACE III Project offered a Further Education and Training Award Council (FETAC) Course *Living in a Diverse Society (Level 3 Single Module)*, a nationally accredited course which aims to allow course participants to deal positively with cultural differences and diversity in their daily lives. It aims to promote the development of the personal qualities of mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance.

Successful candidates in this module practiced a range of core skills which provided a basis for active, positive participation in a rapidly changing society.

The objectives of the course were as follows:

- Facilitate participants to develop a basic awareness of their own culture heritage
- Explore some manifestations and effects of prejudice and discrimination
- Demonstrate interactive skills, such as listening, empathy, consideration, engaging in dialogue
- Appreciate positive aspects of cultural diversity
- Respond in a constructive manner to differing views, backgrounds, practices and cultures.

Over a 7-week period, 10 people from different ethnic backgrounds took part in the FETAC Level 3 course *Living in a Diverse Society*. The course was delivered by Co-exist. The participants lived in Dundalk and came from a number of different cultures and countries including: the Irish Travelling Community, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Nigeria, Estonia and Latvia. Many have been living in Ireland for two to eight years, a number of the participants were asylum seekers.

Given the diversity of the group and the different cultural and religious backgrounds (members of the group were predominantly Christian or Muslim), many different opinions and ideas were expressed on the topics discussed within the workshops. These topics included identity, interculturalism and racism.

The overall experience of working with this group was a very positive one. The core group of ten participants regularly attended the course and actively engaged with the materials. They spoke freely and openly on the different topics and the issues that arose and benefited from being part of the learning process.

One significant aspect of the programme was the shared experience of the participants, all of whom had been victims of prejudice and discrimination in some form during their time in Ireland. Examples ranged from experiencing discrimination in the workplace to random racist attacks, such as having things thrown at them while walking in the street. The class discussions demonstrated that the group had a clear understanding and unfortunately practical experience of racism.



Participants on the FETAC Course Living in a Diverse Society

Conversely, it became very clear that some of the course content was not suitable for this group. For the asylum seekers, they were clearly traumatised from their ordeal of escaping their countries. The uncertainty regarding their legal status and the lengthy delays in dealing with individual cases in the Irish legal system added to their anxiety.

The process of telling their stories about their experience of being discriminated against in Ireland was a painful and frustrating one requiring a dedicated, skilled response, which was beyond the resources of the programme. Even the terms "refugee", "asylum seeker", "displaced person" which were key terminology in the FETAC course, at times drew heightened responses from members of the group. Furthermore, the participants felt strongly that it was very important that there were indigenous Irish participants in the group so that they could learn about racism in Ireland from people who were experiencing it firsthand.

Clearly the *Living in a Diverse Society* course was designed for members of the majority indigenous Irish community to learn and understand more about racism and to help them not to become involved as the unconscious instigators of racism. There is a definite need for a new course to be designed that incorporates learning outcomes that are more sensitive to the experiences of minority ethnic groups in Ireland.

Similarly, one of the biggest challenges for the participants was the issue of communicating through English as a second language as the level of English varied. For example, a number of course assessments required participants to record their experiences. For those whose English was weak, this proved challenging and perhaps off putting.

“ I have done the FETAC Course Living Diverse Society. I found the course was very interesting and useful to me, now and in future. I like to take up another course but another level ”

Lenna Karu, Course Participant

6.3 Creative Thinking Skills - Six Hats Training

Background

The barriers for marginalised groups to full participation in the educational system are such that the organisers of the Co. Louth VEC's Peace III Project decided to provide groups with an introduction to creative thinking skills that can be easily learned, practiced, developed and improved. The Edward de Bono *Six Thinking Hats* provides powerful thinking tools which can be used to good effect to help address challenges and difficulties groups may have. It has been used successfully with governmental, educational, private sector and community sector groups throughout the world to great effect. The training was provided by Tommy Fegan and Ann McCracken, an accredited Edward De Bono trainer.

Two groups were identified that could possibly benefit from such support; ethnic minorities and Irish travellers.



Appropriate Training for Ethnic Minorities

Families who have arrived in Dundalk from overseas very often face a number of barriers to their full participation in the local community. One such challenge is understanding the structure, processes and culture of public sector institutions charged with provision of services. In addition, for many newcomers, English as a new or second language is a further complication.

In introducing the de Bono *Six Thinking Hats*, the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project aimed to enable members of these groups to gain the confidence and capacity to apply structured, creative and critical thinking to any given situation.

With that in mind, an initial training session was provided, to demonstrate in simple, easy-to-use terms, and in a non-threatening, enjoyable environment, the basic tools of constructive, creative and critical thinking.

There were 7 participants on the course. Attendees could be classified into two separate groups. One made up of asylum seekers from Africa, who were living in the Carroll's Village in Dundalk, a designated area for asylum seekers. The second group consisted of representatives from Latvia and Estonia.

6.3.1 First Training Seminar: Tara Education Centre Dundalk

Values and Benefits

The structure and nature of the seminar insured full participation, high levels of enthusiasm and an obvious desire to learn the tools of creative thinking; participants seemed to enjoy the relaxed, but disciplined atmosphere. Participants were confident, despite their obvious language difficulties. The use of humour worked very well. Regular breaks were appreciated, which encouraged participants to become more relaxed in the subsequent working sessions.

Possible Problems and Difficulties

Language was the main issue, rendering it difficult to complete the programme of learning. This resulted in comments, an essential element of the process, being limited. Inability to participate with comments had a direct affect on levels of self-confidence.



Participants on the Six Hats Course, Tara Centre Louth VEC

Alternatives, Possibilities, Creative Ideas

More follow-up sessions would be needed to learn the *Six Thinking Hats* more thoroughly, to better understand the application of the techniques, and to fully realise the value of using such tools in their everyday lives.

Participants Need to Gain Confidence in Using the Tools

Participants need time and support after each session, to ensure that the training is used in every day situations and to address any problems/difficulties.

“ It was amazing when we debated some issues. Everyone participated. ”

Samy Dizolele Foko, Carroll's Village Dundalk

6.3.2 Second Training Seminar: Mullaghbawn Co. Armagh

The second training session was provided for members of Irish traveller communities in counties Louth, Down and Armagh. The programme took place in the Mullaghbawn Community Centre, and 15 members of the Travelling communities were in attendance.



Values and Benefits

Participants obviously enjoyed the opportunity to demonstrate their thinking skills. The lack of inhibition allowed them to demonstrate their skills under the *Green Hat* (alternative thinking), where thinking is nonjudgemental, and purely creative. There were some excellent examples of lateral thinking (i.e. the ability to think outside the box). Participants unanimously agreed that they could easily identify the everyday situations in their lives in which the *Six Thinking Hats* would be useful. The participants were very enthusiastic about the opportunity for the two groups to meet up again, and use the *Six Thinking Hats* to address shared challenges and issues. The participation of one of the group leaders from Dundalk had a positive influence in the group, and helped participants gain confidence much more quickly in the process.

Possible Problems and Difficulties

Literacy issues restricted the use of written feedback, rendering it difficult for participants to record the proceedings for future use. The inability to concentrate for sustained periods created the need for more regular breaks.

Alternatives, Possibilities, Creative Ideas

More follow-up sessions would be needed to learn the *Six Thinking Hats* more thoroughly, to better understand the application of the techniques, and to fully realise the value of using such tools in their everyday lives.

“ The *Six Thinking Hats* moved us out of our regular thinking habits and showed us new ways to think . . . to get results. We had great energy when we used the *Six Hats* ”

Tara Education Centre Learners

7 Forum for Co. Louth VEC's Project for Ethnic Minorities

One of the objectives of the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project was to establish a Forum for Ethnic Minorities in County Louth. The objective of the Forum was to create a structure and process to encourage participants to continue to meet and work together beyond the funding of the programme.

The Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project issued invitations to all the ethnic minority communities to participate. A number of meetings were held with participants in 2010. Among the suggestions proposed, the most important to forum members were:

- the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project to extend its programme to the asylum seekers and refugees based in Carroll's Village
- Co. Louth VEC to offer additional training to ethnic minorities.

In response, Co. Louth VEC staff met with the residents in Carroll's Village to discuss their needs and to outline the contents and schedule of forthcoming courses. A number of residents then decided to participate in the FETAC *Living in a Diverse Society* and *Six Hats Seminars*.

Also, forum members were informed about existing Louth VEC mainstream courses that were available to them and members of their own groups. A number of forum members have progressed to participating in mainstream Louth VEC courses.

A new development occurred in late 2010 with the formation of the Louth Minority Ethnic Consortium funded under PEACE III. In order to develop and increase awareness and understanding in the county of the issues surrounding sectarianism and racism in the county, the Louth Minority Ethnic Consortium (LMEC) has been established to focus on the needs of minority ethnic communities in Co. Louth.

The LMEC aims to develop a partnership approach which will address issues of difference, ethnicity, culture and religion; explore issues of racism and sectarianism; and support conflict resolution and mediation, at the local community level in Co. Louth and on a North/South basis.

All of the ethnic minority groups who had participated in the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project namely Irish travellers, Dundalk Muslim Community, Simul and Louth African Women's Group were encouraged to join the Louth Minority Ethnic Consortium .

The Louth VEC PEACE III Project Co-ordinator and the Consortium's coordinator have met and agreed that the synergies and strategies of both organisations could provide a powerful dynamic in addressing racism in Co. Louth.

8 Mentoring

Mentoring was viewed by the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Committee as an effective support for ethnic minority students to allow them to integrate, learn and access additional resources within the community. As the ethnic minority participants are not a homogenous grouping and considering the time frame along with the fact that the Project Coordinator had already established a rapport with the students, the Committee felt that that the Project Coordinator should best mentor the students by providing ongoing support and advice on a formal and informal basis throughout the project's lifespan.

Mentoring was therefore provided on a one-to-one and group basis with the Project Coordinator assuming the role of mentor for the ethnic minority students.

At an operational level, the Project Coordinator's actions included:

- 1 Being easily accessible, including by e-mail and/or telephone.
- 2 Building rapport (e.g. meeting the students informally).
- 3 Facilitating student work, assessment completion and explaining local cultural differences.
- 4 Encouraging students to participate in additional Co.Louth VEC training.
- 5 Discussing other local multicultural events such as the annual *All of Us* Diversity Day Celebrations jointly organised by Co.Louth VEC and Dundalk Institute of Technology.

In St.Oliver's Community College a peer mentoring programme was developed under the supervision of Gretta Bohan, the school's Home School Liaison Officer to ensure the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project would have a lasting impact on the school community.

Student consultations resulted in three main suggestions:

- that cultural diversity topics need to be referred to regularly in classes
- that physical reminders have the potential to reinforce key diversity messages
- the diversity logo developed by students should be integrated into school signage, noticeboards and homework boards for each classroom and as locker signs.

9. Conclusions -Impacts and Results

The Co.Louth VEC’s PEACE III Project was a relatively short term pilot initiative which had both short term and longer term impacts. It made a significant contribution to building capacity within the schools, among ethnic minority groups and in Co.Louth VEC itself.

It has provided a unique opportunity for Co.Louth VEC to develop a more coherent approach to the complex issues of diversity in the county and to pilot a number of new methods and approaches.

Overall Participant Numbers in the Longer Training Courses

| Training | Capacity Building Course | FETAC Course | Teacher Training | Parents Training | Six Hats Seminars | Total no. of Participants |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Numbers | 66 | 11 | 7 | 28 | 15 | 127 |

The work in St. Oliver’s Community College for example provided a useful model for future work in schools, ensuring that the learning emerging from the project has the potential to be integrated into ongoing programmes of work and mainstream Co.Louth VEC activities.

This initiative provides an opportunity for Co.Louth VEC to develop more medium to long term strategies in three key areas:

- Integrating diversity initiatives across all its programme areas and playing a lead role in the promotion of diversity in the county
- Developing integration initiatives and celebrating the diverse nature of its schools
- Developing more strategic cross border links.

Co.Louth VEC is involved in the delivery of a number of initiatives aimed at supporting ethnic minority communities in the county. This project provides scope for Co.Louth VEC to expand and develop this work and to pilot new approaches as the Co. Louth VEC’s PEACE III Project has consistently promoted innovation and best practice in the delivery of all training and supports.

The Project also highlights areas where Co.Louth VEC could develop long term and strategic responses which would facilitate the development of a more cohesive and multicultural society in Louth.

There have been ongoing cross border programmes in Louth over the last two decades with strong links developing in some sectors. However, there are gaps regarding the education sector and there would be significant benefits in developing more strategic links.

9.1 St.Oliver's Community College

While the intended outcomes of the current pilot project were achieved, it is important to recognise that the PEACE III Project was a pilot project with limited time duration and resources.

“ It is important to recognise that staff, pupils and parents benefitted enormously from the Louth VEC PEACE III Project. It is our hope that this project will become a permanent part of our education provision. ”

*John Halpin, Deputy Principal
St. Oliver's Community College, Drogheda*

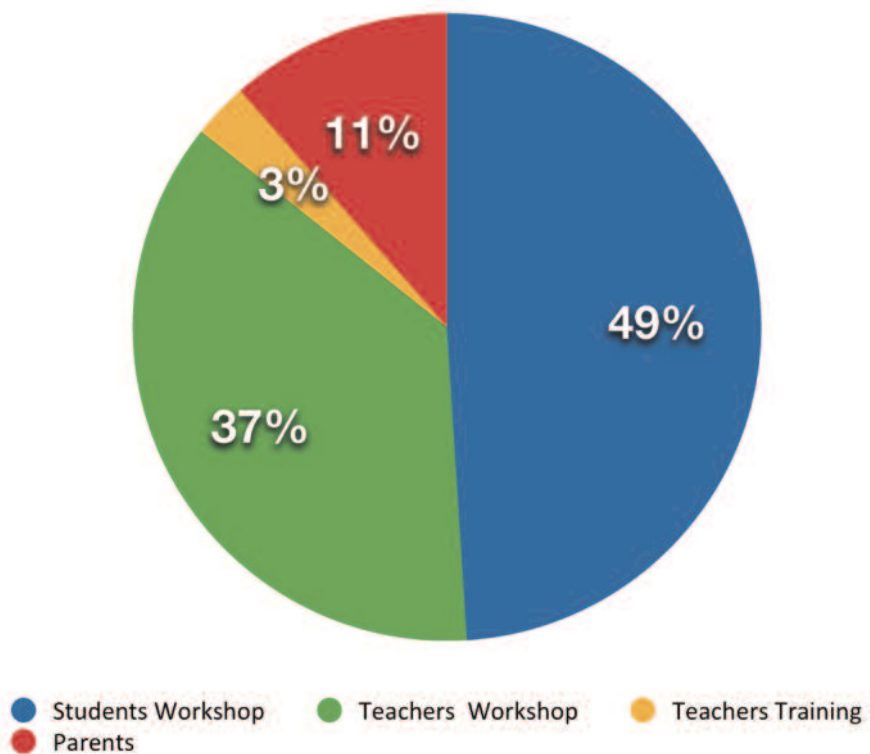
However, the model developed in St.Oliver's Community College under the auspices of the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project is currently being rolled out to an additional three Co.Louth VEC schools under the EU PEACE III funded Diversity in Schools Project.

| Workshops to Introduce the Project | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Teachers | 90 |
| Students | 120 |

9.1.2 Parents

The parents classes were organised through Co. Louth VEC's Adult Literacy Service in Drogheda and the Home School Liaison Officer in St. Oliver's Community College Drogheda. The parents enjoyed the classes immensely. For a number of parents, this was their first engagement with the school community. They were disappointed when the classes finished and expressed an interest in continuing. When asked initially what could help them integrate better with the local community, they all expressed the need to improve their English language skills. Additionally, the participants felt classes over a longer period would allow for better integration.

It is worth noting that a number of the parents have progressed to mainstream Co.Louth VEC courses in Drogheda thus ensuring a sustainability of the project's aims and objectives.



Breakdown of Project Participants, St. Oliver's College Drogheda

9.1.3 Teachers

The impact of the presentation and training was very favourable and resulted in positive comments from both school management and individual teachers. Some staff continue to study intercultural education. Teacher response suggests that this programme needs to be built upon, to include other teachers and students throughout the school.

9.1.4 Students

There is a heightened awareness of racism and sectarianism in the school community. Anecdotal evidence suggests there are fewer incidents of inappropriate comments and behaviour among first years. Students are generally more aware of boundaries. During the current school year, there have been fewer racially motivated incidents.

9.2 Capacity Building Training

The Louth VEC PEACE III Project delivered a number of capacity building events for ethnic minority groups in Co. Louth. The capacity building training was extremely successful in enlisting five ethnic minority groups, involving a total of 66 individuals. The training gave the participants a safe space to come together and discuss issues, build confidence, increase communication and explore diversity and culture within Co.Louth. The capacity building of the ethnic minority groups made an invaluable contribution to the overall strategy of the Louth Peace Partnership.

The Polish Group Simul has been one of the most visible beneficiaries of involvement in the Louth VEC PEACE III Project. As a result of participating in this project, a number of Polish people formally constituted themselves as a group, progressed to working with other PEACE III funded organisations such as Challenge for Change, issuing a monthly newsletter, organising art exhibitions and writing a regular column in the Dundalk Democrat. All of the aforementioned developments are significant outcomes of the Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project.

“ Simul Polonia is currently focused on organising cultural events and various other activities on a local scale which allows people to come together and break down barriers. The group was established with supports provided by Louth VEC, including training, a venue, English classes, resources to support the printing of a newsletter which provides a means to communicate with the wider community and present our ideas and goals. Peace funding needs to be continued to enable this kind of support work to continue. ”

Krzysztof Nowacki of Simul Polonia

9.3 Six Hats Seminars

The *Six Hats Seminars* were unique training events empowering participants to look at common problems in a creative manner. The seminars were genuinely engaging for participants and fun. The seminars enabled participants to communicate better and also to resolve problems more effectively. Among the many participants comments were the following:

- 'Confidence to cope with their current situation.'
- 'able to hold alternative opinions.'
- 'assess differing ideas.'
- 'identify the risks/ dangers of differing ideas.'

9.4 Incidental Advantages and Successes.

Although the overall objective of the project was to support emerging and existing minority groups and their communities against sectarianism and racism, the approach that was adopted had a number of other positive impacts:

- The training events created networking opportunities between the new communities with groups working to address racism and sectarianism on both sides of the border.
- Co. Louth VEC as an existing training and education provider also provided ongoing sustainable opportunities for participants beyond the scope of this project, thus ensuring that the actions of the project have had long term positive impacts.
- The Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project deepened the understanding of the needs of ethnic minority communities, building institutional capacity within Co.Louth VEC's structure and providing opportunities for Co.Louth VEC to develop further projects and possibly mainstream peace building and diversity initiatives in ongoing work.

9.5 Decrease in Racism

It is difficult to determine if the Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Project has led to a decrease in racism, but it is safe to state that it has made a positive contribution to racism awareness of the issues.

The Co Louth Peace and Reconciliation Partnership, Strategy and Action Plan (2011 – 2013) Phase Two Peace III points out that:

“There is no national system for the monitoring of racist incidents. Data has however begun to be collected by the Gardaí in relation to whether there was a racial dimension to the crime. These statistics have yet to be made public. Until these figures are made public there is no way of assessing a) the comprehensiveness and b) the use to which this data can be put.”

Monitoring racism/racist incidents while critical in terms of enforcing individual's rights, does not measure the extent to which ethnic minorities and others are participating and integrating into wider community activities.

As we move towards a more stable and peaceful society, projects that aid, support and bring diverse groups together undoubtedly increase integration. Co.Louth VEC's PEACE III Project has increased the participants' self confidence, allowed for a sharing of experiences, a safe place to discuss contentious issues and enabling the groups to then engage with the wider community.

As one of the course participants said:

“

I was happy to learn about other countries cultures.

We have to accept, tolerate and respect each other

”

Samy Dizolele Foko, Carroll's Village Group.

Recommendations

- 1 Co.Louth VEC to adopt a long term, strategic approach to the role of education in a multi cultural society in Co.Louth.

One of the legacies of the EU's peace programmes should be the provision of a long-term strategic plan detailing the role of education in the contribution to a peaceful and stable society in Co.Louth.

- 2 Extend the pilot programme developed at St Oliver's to all primary and post primary schools in Co.Louth.

Based on the work that Co. Louth VEC has under taken in its PEACE III Programme and the Diversity in Schools, a more comprehensive programme should be developed for all schools throughout the county. Such a programme should be developed in cooperation with other agencies, including The Department of Education and Skills and the Inclusion and Diversity Unit, Northern Ireland.

- 3 Expand the capacity building programme for ethnic minority groups.

An additional capacity building programme that encompasses communication and civic leadership should be developed and delivered by Co.Louth VEC to enable potential and emerging leaders to participate more fully in local society. This training will allow for increased engagement and enhanced working relationships.

- 4 Expand and deepen the provision of innovative training for all ethnic minority groups.

Members of ethnic minority groups who participated in the Edward de Bono *Six Thinking Hats* programmes all recorded high levels of interest in applying these methods to the groups' ongoing programs. These techniques are seen as non-threatening and enjoyable methods of problem-solving and group work. Its ease of use and flexibility is ideally suited to the work of ethnic minority groups. Training such as creative thinking skills should become a key component in future Co.Louth VEC education programmes for ethnic minority groups.

- 5 Develop small development grants for ethnic minority groups

Co. Louth VEC to administer a small development grant programme for ethnic minority groups to enhance their peace building activity and participate fully in a peaceful society in Co.Louth.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Co.Louth VEC PEACE III Committee

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Dr.Padraig Kirk | Co.Louth VEC |
| Sadie Ward McDermott | Co.Louth VEC |
| Sorcha Tormey | Co-exist |
| Mairead Hearty | Co-exist |
| Tommy Fegan | North South Exchange Consortium |
| Eamonn Quinn | Project Co-ordinator |

Appendix 2

Activities at a glance

1 Celebrating Diversity in St Oliver's Community College

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Name of Programme | Celebrating Diversity within the school community |
| Date and Venue | April, May and Sept 2010 The Barbican Drogheda and St. Oliver's Community College, Drogheda. |
| Programme Facilitator(s) | Mary Connolly, Svetlana O'Carroll, and Mary Toft |
| Accreditation | N/A |
| Subjects | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 An Induction Programme for first year students on diversity and multiculturalism (Mary Connolly Co-ordinator).2 Cultural awareness through English for parents. (Maria Morgan and Gretta Bohan, Co-ordinators)3 Teaching in a multicultural environment. (Mary Connolly Co-ordinator) |
| Target Groups | First year students: Irish nationals and foreign nationals: Latvian, Polish, Lithuanian, Nigerian, Parents and Teachers. |

2 Building Capacity of Minority Groups

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Name of Programme | Capacity Building |
| Date and Venue | April to July 2010 Co. Louth VEC Chapel St Dundalk |
| Programme Facilitator(s) | Mairead Hearty, Sorcha Tormey |
| Accreditation | N/A |

Subjects

The training programme met the needs of the respective group and compromised a mixture of training, organisational development, planning and mentoring support including building capacity and leadership skills, group formation and constitution, roles and membership

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Target Groups | Polish, Latvian/Lithuanian/Russian, Louth African Women's Group, Dundalk Muslim Community, Irish Travellers. |
|----------------------|--|

3 FETAC Course

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Name of Programme | FETAC <i>Living in a Diverse Society</i> |
| Date and Venue | Oct to Jan 2011 Co. Louth VEC Chapel St Dundalk |
| Programme Facilitator(s) | Mairead Hearty, Sorcha Tormey |
| Accreditation | FETAC Level III Single Module |

Subjects

The Co. Louth VEC PEACE III Project offered a FETAC Course *Living in a Diverse Society*, as it is a nationally accredited course aiming to allow course participants to deal positively with cultural differences and diversity in their daily lives. It aims to promote the development of the personal qualities of mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Target Groups | Latvian /Estonian, Dundalk Muslim Community, African, Irish travellers |
|----------------------|---|

4 The Six Thinking Hats

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | The White Hat Information available and needed |  | The Red Hat Intuition, feelings, and hunches |
|  | The Black Hat Cautions and difficulties Where things might go wrong |  | The Yellow Hat Values and benefits Why something might work |
|  | The Green Hat Alternatives and creative ideas |  | The Blue Hat Managing the thinking process |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Name of Programme | Six Hat's Creative Thinking Seminars |
| Date and Venue | Nov and Dec Louth VEC and Mullaghbawn Community Centre |
| Programme Facilitator(s) | Tommy Fegan and Ann McCracken |
| Accreditation | N/A |
| Subjects | The Louth VEC Peace III Project decided to provide groups with an introduction to creative thinking skills that can be learned, practiced, developed and improved. The Edward de Bono Six Thinking Hats provides powerful thinking tools which can be used to good effect to help address challenges and difficulties groups may have. It has been used successfully in governmental, educational, private sector and community sector groups throughout the world to great effect. |
| Target Groups | Latvian /Estonian, Dundalk Muslim Community, African, Irish travellers. |

Co. Louth VEC's PEACE III Report Impacts

Building positive relationships: increased confidence among participants, more positive attitudes, better understanding, trust and tolerance, cohesion and community, appreciating and valuing diversity, support local communities in appreciating and valuing other cultures, significant cultural and attitudinal change, increased integration, celebration of diverse cultures.



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