

Activation Workshop Report

Organised by EAPN Employment Working Group
11th January 2007, Cassidy's Hotel, Cavendish Row, Dublin



Attendance: Philip O'Connor (Dublin Employment Pact), Paul Ginnell, Janice Ransom, Alex McMahon and Robin Hanan (EAPN Ireland), Edel McGinley (Migrant Rights Centre Ireland), Candy Murphy (One Family), Camille Loftus (OPEN) and Brid O'Brien (INOUE) David Stratton (Age Action), Michael Corrigan and Kathleen McCann (Congress Centres Network), John Murphy (PARTAS/Age Action Ireland, Tallaght), Eileen Dillard (Lucan Disability Action Group), Peter Kearns (Forum for People with Disabilities), Mary Murphy, Siobhan Madden and Lorne Patterson (Longford Women's Link), Eileen Carroll (DESSA), Hilary Ryan (National Traveller MABS), Conor Farrell (ICTU), Liam Breen (Mountwood CDP, Dun Laoghaire) and Mary Sheehan (Flexibility Training Unit, Tallaght Partnership)

1. Introduction to set the context

Paul Ginnell (EAPN Ireland) welcomed everyone on behalf of the Employment Working Group and Philip O'Connor (Dublin Employment Pact) briefly outlined the context for the workshop.

2. Presentations

There were three presentations the aim of which were to inspire the discussion which followed:

- **Activation-What is it and how do we make it positive? (Candy Murphy- One Family)**
 - ❑ What is Activation-
 - ❑ Irish Experience of Activation
 - ❑ EU context-Active inclusion
 - ❑ Influencing decision makers-Positive ActivationFull Copy of powerpoint available on website and on request from EAPN Ireland.

- **National Employment Action Plan (Eric Conroy – Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed)**
 - ❑ The expansion and extension of the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) is welcomed, provided the NEAP is "operated in a supportive and positive manner working in an inclusive way with the customer" (wording from Towards 2016).

- **Participation of those affected (Paul Ginnell- EAPN Ireland)**
 - ❑ Those affected by activation measures should be involved in a comprehensive and meaningful way in the design, implementation and monitoring of these measures and their engagement should be reflected at all these stages.

3. Group discussions

Participants broke up into three groups to discuss the following questions:

- i. What is the relevance of the topic of Activation for you /your community?
- ii. What would ensure that activation is a positive process for your community?
- iii. What actions need to be taken to progress these positions, who should be involved etc?

Feedback from Group Discussion

i. What is the relevance of the topic of Activation for you /your community?

- The issue is **relevant to everyone**
 - **Barriers and solutions are different to different group/sectors**
 - 70% of **people with a disability** are unemployed
 - **Older workers – face many barriers** including age discrimination direct and indirect,
 - Need to training in the workplace
 - Access to FAS
 - Age friendly approaches needed
 - Pension issue
 - FAS – need to expand free services for older people and those in low paid jobs
 - Concerns at to **how special initiatives are supported and positively mainstreamed** e.g. Travellers, etc
 - **Parents of Irish born Children**, compulsory nature of their activation in order to remain in the country despite barriers to finding employment.
- Activation to what**
 - **Quality** of jobs
 - **Appropriateness/flexibility** – skills
 - Shouldn't be about **numbers**
- A barrier of activation is that it is **market driven**. Are people just economic units?
- State agencies don't have capacity and flexibility** to deliver supportive activation, integration
- Concerns** at compulsory nature
- Terminology hijack (Inclusion)
- Migrant workers** – while activation as such does not apply migrant workers do not have access to supports such as training or employment supports in their first two years in Ireland which are barriers to their progression.

ii. What would ensure that activation is a positive process for your community?

- Real jobs and real choices/** needs a holistic approach
 - **Not necessarily always a job** i.e. personal development, community engagement etc.
 - Jobs need to be **local**
 - Flexibility around **people's needs** including but not only gender differences
 - Better **public awareness** of supports which exist
 - it needs to include **capacity building and access to sustainable and progressive employment.**
- Need for **choice/ Consultation** with those whom it impacts on.
- Activation should include **inclusion in the wider social sphere**
- Issues related to **poverty traps and access to services** need to be addressed to ensure good quality of life and that people are positively supported to access employment e.g. income, medical cards and rent supplements, childcare and social care generally, training and employment supports, etc.
- Need to look at **examples in other countries** and learn from good and bad practice.

- FAS needs to meet its own national guidelines there are **disparities** across the country.
- Needs to be **skills assessment** available to identify best routes available
- People need to know their **options** and how to translate their current skills to new job titles
- The development of a **High Supports Process** for individuals is essential.
- Need **better pay** for low paid jobs to forward an equality agenda and not make the assumption that all want to progress up the career ladder.
- Training** should be part of an employers remit to up skill staff. Currently training in the labour market is very low and employers need to take responsibility – they strive to get away with the least cost to themselves i.e. pensions.

iii. Identifying actions to be taken to progress these positions

- Gather better **information from ground** to see how effected and **provide information**
- Implementation of Activation needs to be **monitored**
 - Link between nat. strategy and delivery
- Public opinion/** challenge language etc
- Ensure compulsory element is not part of it** but that supports are put in place
- Training for **frontline service providers**
- Rights based approach**
- Engage with key policy areas** e.g. NDP, National Reform Programme, NAP Inclusion etc. Committees in place through **social partnership** which need to be **strongly engaged with**. This includes the Social Partnership Group on Labour Market Issues, and also the National Employment Services Employment Committee in FÁS. Also pensions, carers and **other strategies** need to be **influenced**.
- Need to **move** from cost/benefit economic model **to social/economic model**.
- Look for funding line for **after school care** in next budget.
- Changing attitudinal barriers**
- Family friendly supports**
- Developing alliances**, community and voluntary sector, trade unions etc.

4. Plenary Discussion – Developing a Strategy to move forward

i. Participation and raising level of awareness of people in local communities

- Need to **move focus of action back to local level** and develop involvement. In order to do this we also need to examine our own structures to make sure they are inclusive
- Engagement with local communities with the main aim of **building their capacity to engage** with issues around activation. It needs to be two way:
 - to **inform** local communities of issues related to activation
 - to **listen** to people at local level to inform our approach and create clarity.
 - The issue of **language** was raised in relation to this both looking at the language we use but also as part of building capacity to support people to understand with the language that it being used.

ii. Consultation

- There is a need for more and **real consultation** in relation to ‘Activation’ and other major policy developments such as the National Reform Programme
- Consultation needs to be in the form of a **dialogue**
- The Community sector needs to develop a **clearer strategy**. Look at **engagement with political structures** and not just civil servants

iii. Delivery of policies

- **Interaction between national and local** is essential and ensuring delivery of policies on the ground.

iv. Development of policy strategy

- Developing a **clear message**
 - a **person centred** approach which is rights based (not market dependent)
 - **addresses direct barriers** for groups/people – naming specific issues and what needs to happen. –
 - **‘trade off strategy’**- areas we want to see addressed before conditionality is put in place i.e. jobs are not always the solution but if all barriers are addressed then it can support broader inclusion/poverty.
- Have to develop ways of **capturing progress** made by people
- **Social Partnership** agreement as a **tool** to be used

v. Impacting on implementation

- Have to highlight the importance of ‘**activating employers**’ (recognising the need for carrot/stick approach)
- **Impacting on FÁS** – locally and nationally. **Monitoring/evaluation.**
 - FÁS have an equality strategy and are identifying/monitoring how they are engaging with different groups. Demystifying existing structures.
- Questions over the **capacity of FÁS to deliver** positive supported activation. Move Activation out of FAS? **Other possibilities** include the Department of Social and Family Affairs who have pushed agenda to date. (Role of Jobs Facilitators could be expanded).

Where to from here?

- EAPN Employment Working Group to progress the issues discussed and arrange another workshop to follow up.
- Those interested can link in to Employment Working Group
- Send/feed relevant information to Paul Ginnell at paul@eapn.ie info. Information can be made available on the EAPN website www.eapn.ie and also Paul can circulate it.

Members of EAPN Ireland Employment Working Group: David Stratton (Age Action), Philip O’Connor (Dublin Employment Pact), Paul Ginnell and Robin Hanan (EAPN Ireland), Edel McGinley (Migrant Rights Centre Ireland), Orla O’Connor (National Women’s Council of Ireland), Candy Murphy (One Family), Camille Loftus (OPEN) and Brid O’Brien (INOUE) Until recently Eric Conroy represented the INOUE