

## Case Study: Community Consultation/Engagement

Melvin Gaels GAA Club, Leitrim

### 1. BACKGROUND

Melvin Gaels was selected as Leitrim's only participant in Phase 2 of the GAA's Healthy Club Project which ran from March 2016-October 2017). It was one of 60 clubs – at least one from each county – selected from 100 expressions of interest received by the Community & Health department in Croke Park from clubs nationally.

Melvin Gaels is a small club in rural north Leitrim formed in 1954 that serves a socio-demographically disadvantaged area that spreads over a considerable geographical location that border Sligo, Donegal, and Fermanagh. As of 2016, it had a full membership of 575 (55 male only playing members, and 195 youth and child, plus 325 non-playing adult members.) It's pitch and changing facilities are community owned.

As with any rural club it acts as a hub of activity for the local community and runs many events on behalf of the community (such as the annual Fair Day on the August Bank Holiday). However, there also exists a perception that the club can dominate over all other activities in the locale and the 'Grab All Association' stereotype has been thrown at it from time to time. It can also sometimes be perceived as a closed shop to those not traditionally involved in the GAA.

### 2. ACTION PLAN

One of the principle aims of their Healthy Club action plan was to address some of the negative perceptions of the club. The project team wanted to start their journey on a positive footing and decided to host a Town Hall type meeting to which every possible voluntary/community group, local business and charity in the community was invited. They wanted to involve as many local partner and leaders as possible.

### 3. THE PROCESS

A small meeting of interested people (club members and non) took place in Kinlough Community Centre on Saturday February 27, at which almost 30 local community groups, individuals, and statutory agencies were identified that are already playing their part in supporting the health of the local area and population.

Representatives of all those entities were invited to the Town Hall meeting the subsequent week. It was also extensively advertised on the club social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Website) and in the local media, and church newsletters. (See poster and press release below.)

25 people attended the Town Hall meeting. It was a great learning experience for the club but also for the other groups in attendance. It became evident that there was a lot happening in the community that people didn't know about and that getting the information to the majority of the population remains a challenge.

It was also clear that in many cases responsibility was falling on a small number of volunteers whose numbers were dwindling in some entities particularly the Tidy Towns Committee and the ICA while the Active Age Group had already been forced to disband.

Identified gaps included activities for older members of the community, exercise opportunities for non-sport playing men, and suitable activities for younger girls.

#### 4. THE OUTCOMES

The Melvin Gaels club offered to help all local community groups by making available on the new club website a comprehensive list and calendar of events of all activities in the community and that they would carry any related info in their weekly club notes if supplied to the PRO.

The club also invited any of those present at the meeting to host a stand on the club's La na gClubanna community day to attract more participants and volunteers and this has been facilitated each year since. The club also made a lasting connection with the local Samaritans group which has been subsequently available to provide emotional support to any members in need.

Finally, by hosting a community consultation evening, it identified gaps to inform the club Action Plan areas, with the club running a physical activity event for all community members and all abilities for 6 weeks at the start of the New Year called 'Million Minutes Challenge'. The club arranged special walking and running groups and fitness classes (plus talks on health eating, the benefits of walking, emotional wellbeing) in an attempt to get the community to log 1,000,000 minutes of collective physical activity. They reached their target in week 6 but the social aspect of the undertaking proved just as important on the long winter nights as the community came out together.

The effort really helped to improve the club's image in the community to those not usually involved and showed they were interested in more than just winning titles and collecting lotto money every weekend.



# GAA Healthy Clubs



**A special meeting about the  
HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF OUR PARISH  
will take place in  
Kinlough Community Centre  
on Friday, March 18  
From 8-9pm sharp**

**All community groups/interested persons asked to attend**

**Discussion topics to include:**

- **The important issues for our community – healthy eating, physical exercise, mental health, meaningful opportunities to socialise together??**
- **How to best communicate about what our community has to offer already?**
- **What additional services could be provided?**
- **What are the needs of our schools, young people older members, and other specialist groups?**
- **The next steps.....**



# GAA Healthy Clubs



## Press release

### **Community invited to have say in Melvin Gaels healthy club project**

There is good interest ahead of the special meeting in Kinlough Community Centre on Friday (March 18) from 8pm-9pm about health and wellbeing activities in the area.

The meeting is being hosted by Melvin Gaels as part of their selection for the award winning Healthy Clubs project. The project aims to support the health of club members and their wider community, whether that is physical, emotional, or social health. The Melvin Gaels club wants to use the opportunity to bring together all the groups in the parish that are interested or active in the health space to put Leitrim's northern outpost on the map as a community that really cares.

A small meeting of interested people took place in Kinlough Community Centre on Saturday February 27, at which almost 30 local community groups, individuals, and statutory agencies were identified that are already playing their part in supporting the health of the local population. Representatives of all these entities have been invited to the meeting this Friday. However, anyone who feels that they would like to have an input is very welcome to attend.

Colin Regan, GAA Community & Health manager, will help facilitate the meeting. "We want to use this meeting to identify what is already happening in the area. From there we can identify where gaps exist – be that opportunities for older members of our communities to socialise together due to a lack of transport, or exercise opportunities catered specifically for middle aged men or teenage girls, for example.

"It will also give us an idea how we can link up services in each of the areas, promote them collectively, and, perhaps, down the line, even promote joint funding applications to grow services in the area. We will, of course, look to draw on the local knowledge and expertise of those working in primary care, schools, and the Leitrim Sports Partnership," Regan continued.

**For more details visit the Melvin Gaels club website [www.melvingaels.com](http://www.melvingaels.com) , or its Facebook, and Twitter accounts or go to [www.gaa.ie/community](http://www.gaa.ie/community) to find out more about the Healthy Clubs project in general.**