

Lot 29:1 (Mayo Islands) South West Mayo Development Company:

Making Positive Choices – Road Safety Project

SICAP Theme:

Making Positive Choices, SWMDC SICAP Islands case study is a strong example of **collaboration** and can equally be classified as a **Goal 1** project. Our collaborative partners in this project were Clare Island and Inishturk Development Offices, local community groups, Mayo County Council's Road Safety Officer and An Garda Síochána.

In a nutshell ...

The Mayo Islands (Lot 29-1) is a unique and diverse Lot, containing nine inhabited islands off the coast of county Mayo. These islands are spread across Clew Bay and along the Atlantic coast. Each island has a distinct character with associated needs and challenges.



Clare Island (Image courtesy of <http://www.clareisland.ie>)



Inishturk harbour (Image courtesy of <http://inishturkisland.com/>)

Poor physical infrastructure is a common concern on all islands. Both the Clare Island and the Inishturk Community Futures plans highlight road surfaces and road safety as a pressing concern for the communities. This particularly came to the forefront of community concerns on foot of the recent tragic accident in August 2018 where a young person from Clare Island lost his life in a road incident.

SWMDC, through SICAP, worked with our collaborative partners to put together and deliver a community wide road safety programme on both Inishturk and Clare Island, especially targeting young people as road users. The road safety programme took place on the 18th & 25th April 2019 and used a restorative justice approach in response to the aftermath of a fatal Road Traffic Collision on Clare Island in 2018. We believe that this is the first time in the country that a Garda led Community

Restorative Conference has been held on this issue and we are proud to have been central to this process through our SICAP work.

How did *Making Positive Choices* work in practice?

Caroline Healy & Catherine McCloskey from the SICAP team in SWMDC worked with Superintendent Kevin Gately from An Garda Síochána and Noel Gibbons, the Road Safety Officer in Mayo County Council to respond to the needs of the community around road safety.

Every year, SWMDC, under SICAP, delivers a dedicated youth programme during the summer months for young people on Clare Island and Inishturk called *Transitions*. In 2019, due to the factors outlined previously, we decided to have an explicit road safety focus for the programme and call it *Making Positive Choices*.



Project Partners on the way to Inishturk Island as part of the 'Making Positive Choices' Project. (Image courtesy of Mayo County Council).

Making Positive Choices saw representatives from the Community Policing Unit of An Garda Síochána, as well the Youth Officer from the Juvenile Services, a Roads Policing Garda and the Superintendent visit Clare Island and Inishturk for a daylong event of talks, hands on demonstrations, information sharing, fun and games. The Mayo Road Safety Officer attended with simulated computer programmes focussed on stopping distances and speed limits.

The young people experienced simulated road safety games illustrating stopping distances and driving under the influence of alcohol. They also got to hear first-hand from Traffic Corps Gardaí about safety on the roads. The young people were shown how to align the concept of making positive choices in their life with positive outcomes for themselves and for society in general. The project allowed people to ask questions and converse with members of An Garda Síochána as well as the Road Safety Officer with Mayo County Council.

Two of the local Gardaí play football for the Mayo Football team and are sporting heroes to many Mayo young people. Their talk to Islander young people about what it means to make good decisions and the repercussions of poor decision making had a powerful impact on the young audience. The day culminated in a session on the GAA pitch with the children and young people and a chance for the community to come together. The young people got a chance to learn valuable ball skills at the end of the day, a memorable experience that they will surely treasure.



Making Positive Choices – Road Safety Project (Image courtesy of Mayo County Council)

What was SICAP's role?

SICAP staff were the catalyst for the development and delivery of *Making Positive Choices*. The annual *Transitions* programme provided an ideal opportunity to look at the issue of road safety. It was agreed, in the collaborative process led by SICAP staff, to work with the young people around the theme of 'Making Positive Choices'. It was planned that parents and others within the island communities would take part in the project as well as the young people.

SICAP contributed financially towards the events, and SWMDC staff used their connections on the islands to secure venues, catering and to encourage participation. The on the ground network established within both communities encouraged participation from islanders, across all age groups. Superintendent Kevin Gately praised SWMDC's community engagement approach saying:

We [An Garda Síochána] were very warmly welcomed on both occasions by the local communities as a direct result of prior community engagement undertaken, in particular, by South West Mayo Development Company.

What was the outcome and impact of *Making Positive Choices*?

The day on both islands was very successful with a healthy attendance from the community. As Catherine McCloskey, SWMDC SICAP commented:

This innovative event achieved the right balance of sensitivity towards the Island communities after such a dreadful tragedy and managed to share some very important road safety messages to these communities. The variety of workshops provided and the emphasis on fun ensured successful engagement from the Islanders

Mary Helena O'Toole from Inishturk Development Office added that there was:

... a great turn out in April for the road safety project. It was certainly very informative and extremely well delivered capturing the attention of all the children. We are grateful and excited about the positive impact it has in raising road safety awareness for the children and more broadly in the community.

Mary Helena's testimonial about the impact of the day on young people was validated by young people, with one girl commenting:

I think the day was great. I got to steer a car for the first time and see what it was like to drive fast. It takes ages to stop. I think that everyone should have a go, so they know about staying safe on the roads.

Kate, age 11, Mayo Islands.

Noel Gibbons, Road Safety Officer with Mayo County Council was similarly enthusiastic saying:

Giving young people a chance to experience road safety situations in a simulated environment can be the trigger to enable them to make the right decisions when the time really counts.



'Making Positive Choices' Project Inishturk (Image courtesy of Mayo County Council.)

The collaborative partners hope to run another project in the future and have built a solid model for the future. As Superintendent Gately put it:

[An Garda Síochána] collaboration with the County Council and South West Mayo Development Company is ongoing and hopefully this event can be a template for similar situations where it is deemed appropriate, as it was in this case given the particular circumstances.

There has been a long-term impact to *Making Positive Choices* on both Clare Island and Inishturk. On foot of the project, members of the Clare Island community decided that a Clare Island Safety Plan was needed. Two initiatives were spearheaded from this Clare Island Safety Plan; the wearing of seatbelts by everyone, as well as adhering to a road safe speed of maximum 40 kilometres per hour. A Community Garda now comes to the island once a quarter, allowing continued conversations between the community members and the Gardaí.

This **Goal 1** case study with an emphasis on **collaboration** showcases SWMDC's SICAP approach, one which is based on a grassroots, community development approach. Our work in *Making Positive Changes* is a strong example of how SWMDC's bespoke supports, tailored to communities' needs can have meaningful and tangible impacts within communities.