

Comhpháirtíocht Forbairt Lárthar Chorcaí
West Cork Development Partnership



Overview : A case study which focuses on engagement of young adults who present with multiple and compounding barriers
Goal 2 Action 2.2

Target Group :
Thematic focus/area : Youth / Long Term Unemployed / Persons affected by educational disadvantage / People with Disabilities

Number of beneficiaries supported in West Cork 2024: 66
Number of beneficiaries supported in West Cork 2025 to date : 34



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach

Co-funded by the
European Union



Social Inclusion &
Community Activation
Programme



pabal
government supporting communities



The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is co-funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the European Union through the European Social Fund Plus under the Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) Programme 2021 - 2027

Synopsis

This case study will give insight into the West Cork Development Partnerships SICAP Action BOXED OUT in the West Cork Area. This narrative will share the background, rationale and outcomes that have come from this work supported by the accompanying video. It is intended that the video be viewed before proceeding to read this narrative.

The intended audience is the LCDC, funders, local stakeholders, and the Public.

This action selected was agreed with LCDC as a focus for this Goal 2 case study action to highlight the approach taken and outcome of same.

All participants freely took part in this case study. All participants agreed to taking part in the video attached to this narrative and informed consent was given. All data collected is from the IRIS system, questionnaires and interview feedback from beneficiaries both, from a monitoring perspective but also during continued support of participants.

Background and context

The West Cork Development Partnership has selected this action for a case study as it demonstrates several aspects of the programme, such as the multi-faceted approach that SICAP can take to adapt to the needs of individuals and the importance of the personnel out on the ground at the cold face. It highlights the depth of the relationship that SICAP development officers build with participants and the importance of this varied approach to engagement with hard to reach target groups.

The West Cork Development Partnership recruit staff who have a lived experience or living in a marginalised community, this strength allows them to identify with the beneficiary's world and fosters a trust and relatability from the beneficiaries to the development officers. Actions are designed by the development officers with a deep understanding of the beneficiary's world, both from a personal and professional world view, and that beneficiaries are always supported in a person-centred way.

Boxed Out is a phrase which represents a feeling that beneficiaries of the SICAP programme have often described, a feeling of being on the periphery of society, not having a stake, often not participating in social activities, education, employment or economically. Beneficiaries can be left feeling "othered" and powerless to change their circumstances. A distrust of traditional institutions frequently translates into anti-establishment beliefs and actions, due to feeling alienation from mainstream society, this can be expressed through joining or a curiosity of alternative subcultures which feel less exclusionary. Homelessness, Sofa surfing, Addiction, Mental and physical health issues, Cost of living and debt just some of the issues being presented.

Boxed Out aim is to simulate an alternative positioning to this thinking whilst encouraging and supporting them to become aware of themselves. It also aims to help

participants to avail of opportunities offered by traditional institutions. These beneficiaries often have a multitude of barriers that require a wraparound support.

For many young people, the years between 18 and 25 is a time of new opportunities and transitions: finishing school, starting college, moving into work or training and building independence. For others the reality can be overwhelming and stagnant, especially for those facing complex barriers such as mental health challenges, family difficulties, insecure housing, or a lack of opportunities close to home. These are some of the barriers that make these transitions difficult for many young people affecting their confidence and motivation, leaving them in a cycle that can be very difficult to change.

Those not in education, employment, or training (NEET) are particularly at risk. Research shows that being a NEET is linked to poverty, poor health—especially mental health—and long-term social exclusion. Young people are more likely to fall into this situation if they live with a disability, grow up in disadvantaged or rural area, or experience setbacks such as homelessness or a criminal record. Most want to work, but the weight of these barriers often makes it hard to take the next step forward. (Redmond & McFadden, 2023). Studies also highlight that transitions into adulthood are shaped strongly by social class and background, with young people from disadvantaged families more likely to face obstacles (Growing Up in Ireland, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic made this worse. ESRI research found that young adults were among the hardest hit by job losses, education disruption, and social isolation, with clear impacts on wellbeing (ESRI, 2021). For those already at a disadvantage, the gap further widened.

Housing insecurity adds another layer of difficulty. The Youth Homelessness Strategy reports that the number of young people (18–24) living in emergency accommodation more than doubled, from 640 in 2016 to over 1,400 in 2023. High rents and

unstable housing make it even harder for young adults to continue in education, keep work, or feel secure in daily life (Department of Housing, 2023). These challenges show why flexible, local supports are essential.

Project Description

Boxed Out was created as a response to minimise these challenges. It is a practical, relationship-based project that works one-to-one with young adults, focusing on small, achievable steps. Whether that means supporting someone to complete forms, linking them with training or work, or simply meeting them in a place where they feel comfortable, and listened to.

A key strength of Boxed Out is how it engages a hard-to-reach cohort. Trust is built slowly, often through word of mouth, outreach street work, or meeting young people in their own community spaces. This approach opens the door for those who might not otherwise connect with services. In West Cork, this action supported 34 beneficiaries in 2025 to date and 66 in 2024. We have this action also in our Bandon Kinsale lot with 27 beneficiaries supported in 2024 and 13 in 2025 to date. Primarily, it focused on young adults, but included those who by way of background, are marginalised, such as members of the travelling community.

Activities include workshops and courses in CV writing, career direction, city and guilds certification, such as chainsaw, manual handling and safe pass certification. The action focused on building strong foundations for beneficiarys through small but important supportive actions that achieved quick wins, such as one-to-one support for applications for HAP, driver theory test application, LEAP cards, medical cards etc. This very quickly achieves small but significant outcomes for the individual, the beneficiary learns that if they need assistance with something formal, the SICAP development officer is a person to turn to.

These interactions build trust but also allow the development officer to get to know, mentor and explore gently with the beneficiary other possibilities in life. Creating this personal relationship where Boxed Out clients have someone they can talk to about a myriad of personal issues is the essence of the action, especially in the circumstances when many beneficiaries would have no-one they could talk to about these personal issues. An individual may talk of wanting to get out of home and away from parents while the development officer is helping with HAP application, the officer will stimulate a conversation around work opportunities in the area, painting a fantasy with enthusiasm of what they can see the young person doing in five years; living in their own place, working, driving a car, really bringing a potential future reality close to mind for the individual, inspiring them to dream and envision a future version of themselves. This is done in a very authentic way by development officers who truly believe in the person in front of them. They share the lens which they see the individual through, laying out how SICAP can help to create stepping stones towards that future destination, in a grounded inviting way, ensuring an open-door policy, when the beneficiary is ready to engage. Empowerment is both a process and an outcome: it is about people gaining control over their lives, (Zimmerman, 1995, p.583), and choice is important to this end. Sometimes the beneficiary may just call in to the development officer for a chat, an update of their life and so the officer always offers time and encouragement while building social support and network. This may involve a very informal invitation for them to accompany the development officer, while chatting to a local event/community group as an informal introduction to more social engagement for the individual.

Through this flexible and person-centred support, young people who have been part of Boxed Out have gained trust, confidence, motivation, and practical skills. Some have gone on to re-engage with education or employment, placing themselves in a stronger position to plan, or move toward securing housing. Boxed Out was designed not to be solely specific for

the u25's, but for younger adults in general, its aim is to target those under 40yrs as these beneficiaries need one-to-one support in a variety different type of interventions, from activation to inclusion.

These beneficiaries often lack motivation and feel disenfranchised. Work with this group takes time and the pace is always beneficiary led giving participants space to engage meaningfully with staff rather than pushing for quick results.

Staff adjust and adapt plans accordingly recognising that hard outcomes can take longer than expected, honouring commitment to ethical practice and upholding SICAPs horizontal principles of human rights and collaboration all whilst ensuring inclusivity and respect of participants.

The beneficiaries who took part in this action and achieved hard outcomes have been working with development officers for different lengths of time and depth. It is only when the individual felt ready and when all the foundations and supports were in place that they put themselves forward for a course or training, ensuring that the beneficiary doesn't feel rushed or pushed forward and that their chance of success is high. Boxed Out is a bridge between isolation and participation, showing how small, steady steps can open the way back into a fulfilling and active participation in community life.

Our video focuses a small stream of the Boxed Out action with beneficiaries of the chain saw course. The course and this action were fully SICAP-funded, for a group of eight young people, each facing complex personal and social challenges. Some of the 8 beneficiaries who took part were happy to be filmed for this case study. They had a strong interest in outdoor work, others had previous experience but no formal training and this was a chance to open a door to employment that had always felt closed. For all the participants, this opportunity would have been out of reach without financial support. The cost of the course was a restrictive barrier, as was transport and access and one beneficiary shared that they had

even considered taking out a loan to pay for it once they realised this was an area they would like to work in.

The funding provided through SICAP action, Boxed Out made it possible for them to take part safely, without adding new financial stress to already challenging circumstances. The course included two accredited modules: “Competence in Felling Small Trees” and “Chainsaw Maintenance and Cross-Cutting”, delivered over one week. Both modules are recognised City & Guilds qualifications, which are strong, practical certifications that carry real weight in this specific sector.

The training provider could cater for 4 candidates at a time, so our 8 candidates were training in 2 consecutive weeks in June 2025. Every beneficiary successfully completed the training and received their certificates, marking a major achievement for this group. This success, however, did not come easily. Many participants faced practical barriers such as transport issues, long travel distances, and time constraints. Despite these challenges, they spoke about how the consistent support from WCDP made all the difference. Help with transport, regular check-ins, encouragement, and follow-up kept them motivated and made it possible to finish the course.

Participants described the communication with the WCDP Development Officer as open, supportive, and easy. Knowing that someone was available, understanding, and genuinely interested in their progress gave them the confidence to keep going, even when things felt tough. The feedback about the course itself was overwhelmingly positive. Participants highlighted the welcoming atmosphere, the professionalism of the instructors, and the sense of teamwork that developed over the week. The course helped strengthen bonds and create new connections with like-minded peers.

Several participants said the course gave them the confidence to apply for jobs they would not have considered before. In a few cases, it directly led to new employment

opportunities in this working area. Beyond the certificates, the most powerful outcome was renewed motivation. Every beneficiary expressed a desire to continue learning, whether through another course, training, or job opportunity. This experience sparked a sense of purpose and self-belief. It reminded them that, with the right support and trust, progress is possible. For a group who have often felt “boxed out” of opportunity It was a step towards inclusion, confidence, and community belonging. The young people shared genuine appreciation for the chance to prove themselves and to see a future where they can build meaningful, independent lives.

This case study shares the journey of those availing of the Boxed Out action demonstrating how the rational and intention is to build a bridge between isolation and participation, and how small, steady steps can open a way back from feeling “othered” to belonging.

OUTCOME

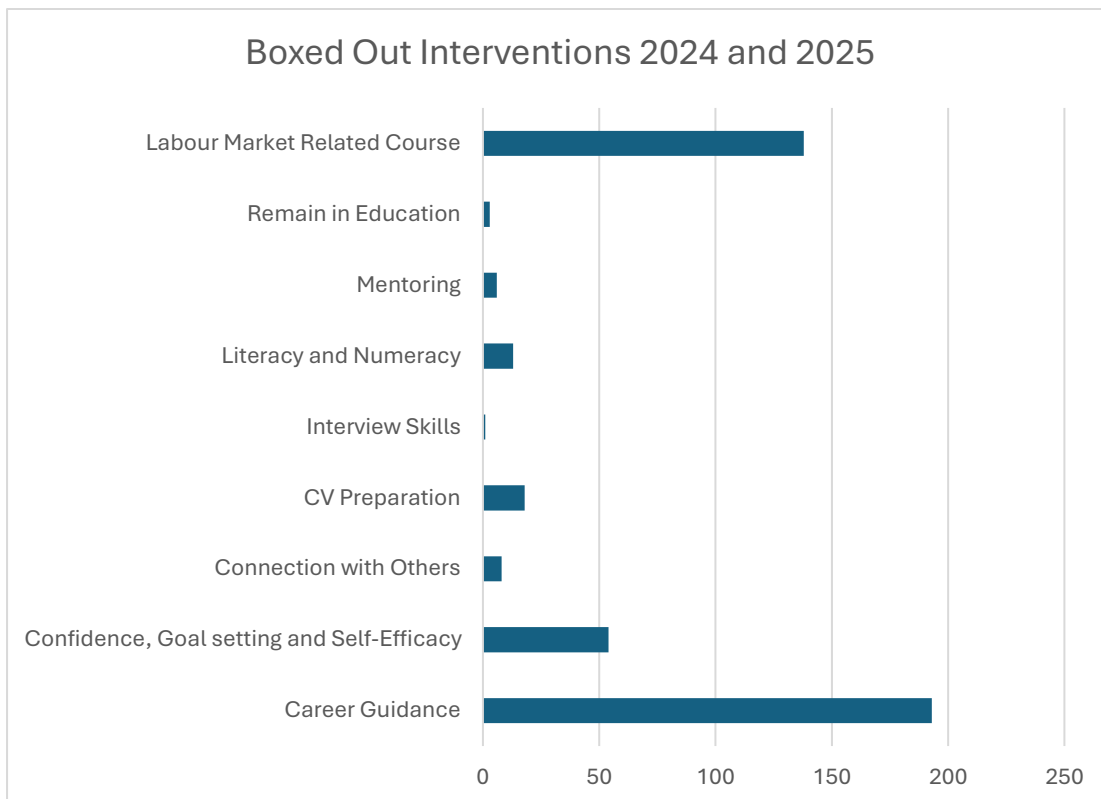
Statistics Profile for Boxed Out Action – 2024 and 2025.

As mentioned, the BOXED-out action has been delivered in both West Cork and Bandon Kinsale districts in 2024 and 2025.

In that period 140 individuals have been supported across both territories in both years.

	2024	2025 (To date)
West Cork	66	34
Bandon Kinsale	27	13

Total of 434 interventions with a wide variety of Support Types provided



References.

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- Smyth, E., et al. (2022). *Disrupted Transitions? Young Adults and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. ESRI Research Series. [ESRI](#)
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