

# ULRR

## **An evaluation of the Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Life Skills (CWELL) programme January 2014—January 2016**

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# UL Engage Reports

2016, No. 3

**An Evaluation of the  
Community Wellness, Empowerment,  
Leadership and Life Skills (CWELL)  
Programme  
January 2014–January 2016**

M. Adshead  
C. Dempsey  
B. Quillinan  
G. Reidy



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2016, No. 3

An Evaluation of the Community Wellness, Empowerment,  
Leadership and Life Skills (CWELL) Programme  
January 2014—January 2016

M. Adshead

C. Dempsey

B. Quillinan

G. Reidy

UL Engage,  
University of Limerick,  
Limerick, Ireland  
[www.ul.ie/engage](http://www.ul.ie/engage)



# ABSTRACT



The **Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Lifeskills (CWELL)** programme is a joint partnership between St Mary’s parish and staff from the Education and Health Sciences Faculty, UL, designed to achieve specific outcomes such as health literacy, application of knowledge to practice and personal and professional growth of programme participants, particularly the demonstration of leading and sustaining positive change. The innovation centres on the partnership design, philosophy, governance structure, innovative community orientated pedagogical approaches utilised. The focus is to engage “with” the community, supporting them to develop projects utilising community resources, rather than imposing solutions “on” them without their involvement. Evaluation of the programme took place throughout the two years, recording the experiences of CWELL students, stakeholders and support staff, with a view to gaining a better understanding of processes and experiences encompassed in building a successful community-university partnership. This report presents an evaluation of the two year pilot programme in terms of its impact: on the community of St Mary’s; on teaching and learning opportunities in UL and in terms of the research contribution that this project can make to our understanding of health and well-being. The evaluation is based on one to one interviews, case studies and focus groups that were routinely undertaken over two years, with the study sample which included CWELL students, members of the Programme Steering Committee, community residents and programme lecturers and facilitators. CWELL involves the implementation of an accredited community/university partnership programme comprising university staff from six departments, community partners and students.



# INTRODUCTION

The Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Life Skills (CWELL) programme is a two-year community-driven diploma programme which was developed in partnership between the community of St. Mary's parish, an underserved area of Limerick City, and staff of the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences at the University of Limerick (UL). The programme brings together community partners, university staff and students to work collaboratively towards the overall aim of building capacity in wellbeing, leadership and life skills within the local community. Following a curriculum co-construction process, the first two-year cycle of the CWELL programme took place from January 2014 to August 2016. The first cohort of CWELL students graduated in 2016.

CWELL comes to fruition at a propitious time, illustrating ways that national policy objectives in education, health and community development may be realized at local level in a sustainable way. The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (Higher Education Authority, 2015), in line with its parent strategy, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (Higher Education Authority, 2011), prioritises the expansion of participation in higher education to include those previously excluded. In particular, emphasis is placed on engaging under-represented groups such as those disadvantaged by socio-economic barriers, those who are first-time mature students and those wishing to access higher education on a part-time/flexible basis. Prioritising community engagement, the latter document also stresses a need for 'inward and outward flows of knowledge, staff, students and ideas between each institution and its external community' (Higher Education Authority, 2011, p. 14). From the perspective of health, the recent Healthy Ireland Framework (Government of Ireland, 2013), acknowledging that prevalence of chronic conditions and accompanying lifestyle behaviours are strongly influenced by socio-economic status, levels of education, employment and housing, calls for a reduction of health inequalities as one of its four goals. Further, through two of its six dedicated themes the Framework prioritises (i) fostering partnership between local structures working towards common health goals and (ii) empowering people to respond to challenges affecting health and wellbeing in their own communities.

Civic engagement and equity of health and educational outcomes are principles echoed within the local policy context. Both the *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan* (LRFIP) (Limerick City & County Council, 2013) and the University of Limerick's *Broadening Horizons* Strategic Plan 2015-19 (University of Limerick, 2015) focus on strengthening links between the university and local communities, improving the quality-of-life and wellbeing of regeneration communities through sustainable development and opening access to training and education opportunities within targeted areas in order to promote greater social and economic inclusion.

In short, all pertinent recent national and local policy documents set out ambitions which are at the core of the CWELL programme.

## INSPIRATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Based on the north side of Limerick City, close to King John's Castle and St Mary's Cathedral, St Mary's Community nestles in the historical centre of the city. St Mary's is a vibrant area that struggles proudly with long-standing disadvantages in housing, education and health.

In light of this, St Marys Community in partnership with the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences developed a community/university co-authored curriculum for a Diploma programme in Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Lifeskills (CWELL). The CWELL programme is designed specifically to address local needs and was the first programme at the University of Limerick to include the local community in its formal adoption and accreditation process by the University Programmes Committee. All CWELL students are members of the local community, many of whom left formal education early and whose educational attainments are limited due to a number of factors associated with social disadvantage.

The need to promote the principles and practice of community development in improving health and well-being for disadvantaged communities and to explore mechanisms for effective, meaningful and sustainable community participation in decision-making related to health has been acknowledged by a number of national and local reports (CEC, 2006 Fitzgerald, 2007, Blackett 2008, Humphreys *et al* 2012) highlighting the need for community education initiatives in skills/strategies to improve health outcomes.

Sustaining healthier communities and community capacity-building is widely acknowledged as an important community development strategy (Burke 2009). The strength of this approach lies in its ability to empower community members as citizens to self-manage their lives and environment through acquisition of relevant skills and through the building and enactment of a shared community vision.

This approach supports the belief that when empowered to do so, all people possess valuable skills, strengths, assets and knowledge that can be contributed towards mobilizing community vision into action. (CWELL Report 2014).

*"I am finding it good just for the fact that we are local ourselves. We know the people. It is actually very easy even to do it because they know us. It's not like we are total strangers coming up saying 'we want to do this now down here for ye'. They are going 'you are one of us, you are doing it for us' and it's so much easier to do it that way."* **Mary, CWELL Student**

## PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

In March 2012, a meeting was initiated with a senior member of Limerick Regeneration, Limerick City Council and the Dean of Education and Health Sciences, UL to discuss the expansion of engagement of a third-level education institution to respond to the needs of learners through an innovative and flexible programme designed through a partnership with the community and the University. Following confirmation of support and commitment to the project, in particular for the use of community facilities suitable for the delivery of the programme from the local community (Limerick City and County Council and St Mary's Adult Education centre), a series of public information sessions were held in local schools, community centres and one in Limerick City Hall. Attendees were asked to submit their expression of interest on working on the development of the CWELL programme.

From these activities, six community group members and a community leader for the programme were identified. The community curriculum group was established, holding its first meeting in June 2012. Confirmation of committed support for the CWELL programme was received from six departments in the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences at the University of Limerick in September 2012. The first community/university collaborative meeting was held in September 2012. Two Co-Directors of the programme were appointed: one from the university and the other from St. Mary's community. A Project Management Team was established and this included six community representatives (one acting as Co-Director for the programme), six University representatives (one from each of the six departments residing in Education and Health Sciences and one acting as Co-Director for the programme), plus an *ex-officio* Research Assistant. The Research Assistant was appointed during the first year of the programme, before the programme commenced, and given responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the CWELL programme taking into account specific outcomes such as health literacy, application of knowledge to practice and personal and professional growth of programme participants. The Research Assistant also oversaw the running of the programme on a weekly basis.

In the first year of the programme, the Project Management Team became a Programme Steering Committee changing their focus to the longer term strategic development and support for the programme via a series of sub-committees set up to address identified needs. These Steering Group sub-committees were charged with addressing: academic issues; research and funding; the future of the programme; and programme support structures. The aim was for these sub-committees to consider how best to be pro-active rather than reactive in developing the programme and the partnership that underpins it. The programme steering committee met once a month over the two years of the programme. A sub-group of this Steering Committee (the two Co-Directors, the Chair of the Committee and the Research Assistant) met informally on a more regular basis to reflect on the development of the programme and chronicle progress being made.

## COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

It is important to recognize that a programme of this nature requires a lot of supports to be in place if it is to work. From 2013 onwards the CWELL programme was overseen by the CWELL Steering Committee, comprised of stakeholders from the community and university. As outlined above, a course director from the University was responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme, along with a course co-director from the community.

The role of the Research Assistant was split between collecting data for the process evaluation of the programme and providing administrative support to the programme and academic support to CWELL students. These three people, along with two programme lecturers, formed a CWELL Project Co-ordination Group in 2014 which met regularly to reflect on the development of the programme and address any day-to-day issues arising. In addition, all CWELL students had access to an Academic Advisor as part of the UL Faculty Advisor system.

The CWELL Steering Committee has been keen to integrate the CWELL programme fully into existing university structures, whilst at the same time recognizing particularistic CWELL needs. In consequence, the CWELL programme has deliberately sought to integrate a range of diverse UL students within its operation. For example, as part of its Cooperative Education programme, the University of Limerick provides all undergraduate students with an opportunity to experience work placements within their programme of study. The Coop placement is designed to give students the chance to experience the world of work before they graduate enabling them to develop skills that will equip them to succeed in their chosen career. The CWELL programme provided a Co-op placement and was able to avail of three six month Co-op placements (one after the other) between January 2014 and December 2015. These students were primarily responsible for the administration of the programme with additional duties including media engagement (e.g., Facebook, web page) and student support (see section on ‘Scaffolded Learning’, page 31).

An innovative aspect of the CWELL programme was the establishment of a service learning module within UL which allowed UL practicum students to provide peer support to the CWELL students throughout their learning journeys. A total of 18 UL practical students from Australia, the United States and Canada participated in the service learning module (three to six practicum students per semester).

Working with the CWELL community students, UL Practicum students were primarily responsible for providing a system of peer-mentoring for the CWELL students. Meanwhile, CWELL students introduced their Practicum peers to the challenges and realities faced by community-based student learners from disadvantaged areas. The system of peer mentoring enabled the Practicum students to identify what the specific learning needs and support requirements of the CWELL students were and to offer study supports and up-skilling opportunities in areas such as word processing, accessing the internet and preparing presentations. Along with the Coop students, the international students staffed a student helpline, a drop-in clinic and administered a CWELL suggestion box where students could choose (anonymously if preferred) to share their ideas and opinions on the programme (see pages 31-36).



*From left: Bernie Quillinan, Co-Course Director CWELL; Jan O'Sullivan, former Minister for Housing and Planning; Prof. Don Barry, President, UL; Geraldine Reidy, Co-Course Director CWELL with children from St. Mary's Park*

The CWELL programme was officially launched by local politician and Minister for Housing and Planning, Jan O’Sullivan, on Tuesday 26 November 2013. Over 250 invited guests and members of the local community attended the launch event which was held at King John’s Castle, Limerick, in the heart of St. Mary’s community. Entertainment on the night was provided by St. Mary’s Tin Whistle Group and St Mary’s Prize Band. A short video of the launch can be accessed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqjg-wag0Bk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqjg-wag0Bk)

**Fig. 1: CWELL Management and Support Structures**



## CWELL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the CWELL programme is to proactively address community health issues in a way that enables the building of healthy partnerships to enhance existing strengths, foster community resilience and leadership, and contribute towards improved quality of life and the creation of healthy and sustainable communities. The programme provides the following:

- A means to strengthen local communities by enabling and supporting course participants' engagement with the community and promoting social inclusion through developing local projects in the area of health and well-being.
- A supported structure within which to respond to identified community needs with content that addresses physical and mental health and personal and professional development
- An approach to learning that empowers course participants to effect positive change in their well-being and lifestyles within their own community.
- The means to build leadership capacity within the community.
- An accredited first-aid course.
- An accredited pathway for further education.
- A flexible mode of delivery, over two years (full-time) or four years (part-time).

This evaluation report demonstrates how the CWELL programme responds directly to this two-fold aim and identifies the impacts of the project in terms of community development, teaching and learning, and research outcomes.

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The CWELL programme responds to requests from local community groups (such as St Marys Adult Education Group) to the University of Limerick to deliver education initiatives in skills/strategies to address community-identified needs and improve health outcomes. It was reported that previous similar requests from local community groups to the University to deliver education directed towards developing physical and mental health and well-being had tended to result in one-off events, delivered by a single staff member or a single department – and very often as a theoretical presentation on health strategies for disadvantaged communities *in the abstract* as opposed to the St Mary's community *in particular*. Furthermore, strategies and approaches to changing or improving health practices were seldom addressed in the context of the local community culture and environment, taking into consideration the real world problems encountered where residents lived and worked.

## CWELL .....

...is a **two-year community co-authored diploma programme** accredited by the University of Limerick

...addresses relevant **content on mental health, physical health and personal and professional development**

...is **responsive to local needs** and **builds on existing knowledge and experience**

...adopts a **situated learning perspective** whereby learning is shaped by the context and the culture in which it takes place

...**empowers** students, **building leadership capacity**, to effect positive **change in wellbeing and lifestyles** within their own community

...**includes practicum modules** which aim to have students initiate local projects in response to identified needs within the community

...**actively facilitates wider community involvement**

The CWELL programme has been devised in response to these identified issues. The aim of this educational intervention is to address community health issues in a way that:

- enhances existing strengths,
- fosters community resilience and leadership,
- facilitates access to further education,
- promotes greater social and economic inclusion, and
- supports people to help themselves.

The programme content is comprised of three identified areas requiring specific educational supports: (i) mental health, (ii) physical health and (iii) personal and professional development.

Delivering this support requires a three-fold intervention:

- first, with preparatory workshops for prospective students’;
- second, in terms of its community sensitized programme delivery; and
- third, building sustainability into the intervention via the creation of, and continued support for, a CWELL graduate network.

“I suppose the university is about academia, the academics of the whole thing. And I suppose this would have been the best piece of community development work that I've seen. If this was a community development programme, you'd be getting straight As” **Ellen, CWELL Stakeholder**

## CWELL AND THE LIMERICK REGENERATION IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK PLAN

In the context of the Limerick Regeneration Framework Plan, the CWELL programme delivers a range of evidenced based impact outcomes in the identified LRFP priority areas:

- Improving the quality of life and well-being in regeneration areas through sustainable development initiatives.
- opening access to training and education opportunities within targeted areas in order to promote greater social and economic inclusion.

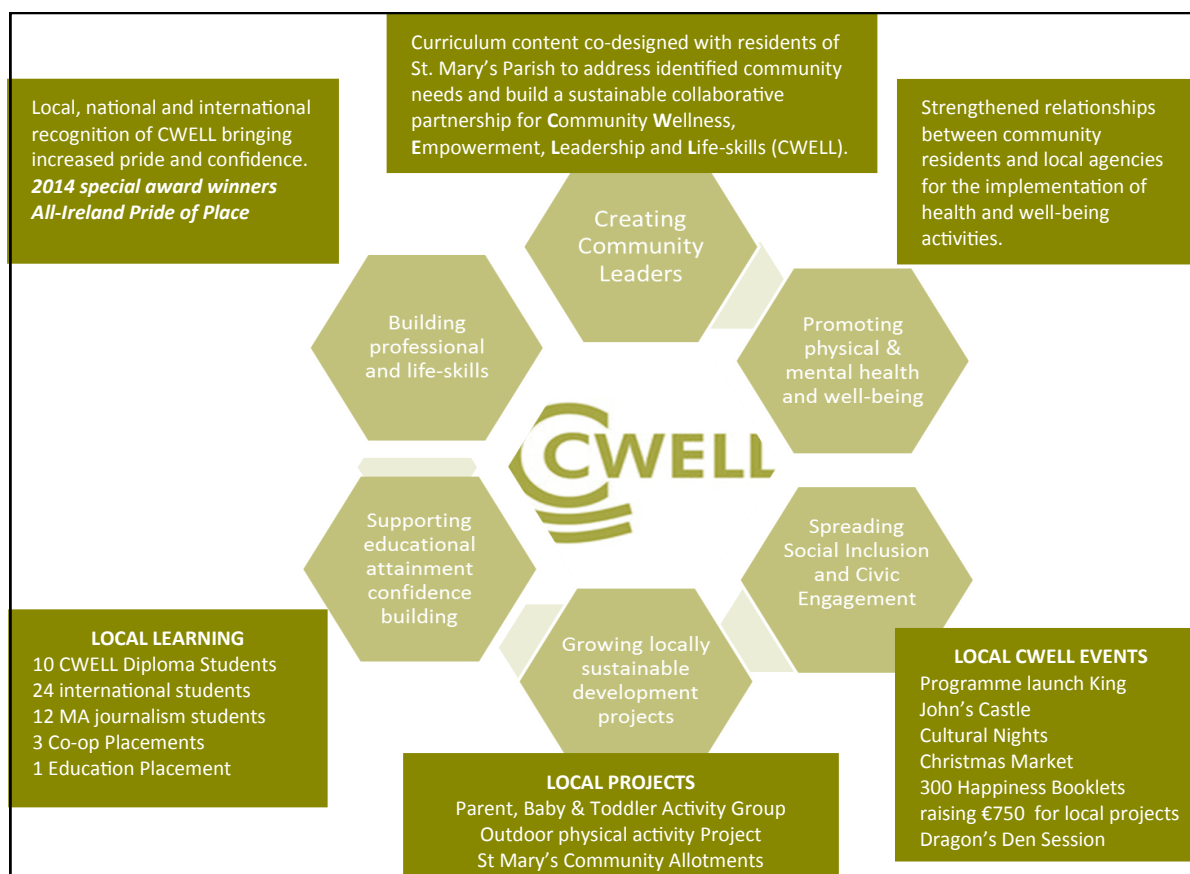


Fig 2: CWELL Impacts in relation to Limerick Regeneration Implementation Framework Aims

The remainder of this section provides evidence of impact in: professional skills, improved knowledge of mental health and well being; improved knowledge of physical health and well being; improved life skills and communication skills; improved community leadership; locally sustainable community development projects; social inclusion and civic engagement; external recognition for CWELL and CWELL impact on the community.

## IMPROVED PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

CWELL students were supported to develop skills such as writing skills, oral presentation skills, creating a portfolio, preparing for PowerPoint presentations, profiling different learning styles, study skills, research skills, the conventions for writing academic assignments, financial planning and budgeting and career decision-making and preparation.

*"It was my first time in an interview in about 10 years I'd say, easily ten years since I had an interview. I went in there and I was relaxed. Not hunched up, 'oh what am I going to do?' . . . I was a lot more confident and actually starting to speak out a lot more for myself as well."*

**Mary, CWELL Student**

*"I Kind of said it to myself 'at your age, what are you doing to yourself?' But then when the presentation was over I thought 'God, you can do something, you can actually do something'. I wouldn't have great confidence in myself. 'You can do something, you're not stupid'. 'Cos I was always led to believe that I was stupid at school . . . If we have an essay to do again I don't think I would be as frightened. I wouldn't be as panicky as I was and I am glad I did it because I felt 'well, you did it'."*

**Amy, CWELL Student**

*"it's not as scary as school. You can ask questions. In school you couldn't. If you didn't understand something in school, you were told 'sit down, shut up and do it'. This is different."*

**Sarah, CWELL Student**

*"Now with the confidence I am getting at work through this, I feel I am actually enjoying work. I am not technically afraid going into work. I am not afraid if they challenge you on your work. I can now say, this is right and I can say it with confidence. I wouldn't have said it with confidence before."*

**Amy, CWELL Student**

## IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Through their modules, **CWELL** students learned about the factors associated with well-being and mental health problems over the life course from childhood to old age.

*“The thing I got from the mental health aspect was the children’s mental health. We are just after having our first grandchild. We thought my daughter-in-law was too close. There was a thing in our day you were too close to the children. [The lecturer] really opened my eyes about it. I can see it now with the child, he is grounded, he can mix with people, more confident . . . you can see the confidence in him. He’s his own little character now. I was saying she’s too close, too lovely to him. But it wasn’t. She was doing him right. That has opened my eyes.”* **Joe, CWELL Student**

*“The mental health module was amazing in the sense that I never realised like that babies can actually feel stress because their mum is stressed. I never realised that some of the silly things that teenagers do, that’s because their brains haven’t developed. The whole course was fascinating.”* **Christine, CWELL Student**

An experiential and reflective approach was fostered where students explored different definitions of wellbeing, ‘normal’ mental health and common mental health problems. An overview of mental health and its features and factors which impact on mental health were addressed including the negative effects of stigma and discrimination.

*“I suppose really from the mental health aspect of it [I have learned] that we don’t have to have a mental illness to have mental health issues. And I suppose maybe I’m a bit more understanding. Maybe I’m more aware of somebody having a bad day.”* **Nicola CWELL Student**

*“You’d be more aware of how you talk about someone now . . . You wouldn’t be calling them the names you used to call them. You think more into it before you pass a remark.”* **Louise, CWELL Student**

Ways to reduce risks of developing mental illness were explored, as were social and community factors associated with the promotion of well-being and positive mental health. An experiential and critical reflective approach was developed in students where they explored the most effective methods of applying preventive and treatment measures to reduce the burden associated with mental health and to foster positive mental health.

An important dimension to this approach is the integration of ‘the everyday’ into a more ‘academic’ exploration of mental well-being. Programme work was deliberately and consciously designed to develop robust approaches to positive mental health. An example of this is the ‘St Mary’s Happiness Book’. CWELL and Practicum students worked together to present a compendium of all of the things that make people in St Mary’s community happy. The students interviewed local residents, shared stories and recorded pictures and photographs of the ways to be happy. The book was such a success that 300 copies were sold and the proceeds used to develop other CWELL projects (see p. 22).

*“What I noticed was before we started this module all I knew about mental health was the other side of it, the mental problems people had, but we were shown then there’s a happy side to mental health.”* **John, CWELL Student**

*“CWELL taught me that [mental illness] is not taboo and statistics say 1 in 4 and I used to think it was just our house. Through CWELL I have learned so much and I am now able to deal with [a family member] better. I will actually listen to her more and I think I helped her in the last year, sitting down, talking to her and asking her how she feels about her mental illness.”*  
**Amy, CWELL Student**

## IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE OF PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

CWELL Students learned about lifestyle choices and health including diet, physical activity, smoking and substance use.

*“We have changed following on from various discussions I had with the boys at home about this module we were doing. We did make a conscious effort to eat more healthily. To be honest we did.”*  
**Christine, CWELL Student**

Specific issues affecting physical health for particular groups and at various life stages were considered including child health, adolescent health, women’s health, men’s health and ageing. Factors that impact on the health of people with chronic illness and on their families and communities were explored, including coping with reduced independence. Students learned about the role and needs of the carer in managing someone with chronic illness.

*“Before I would have never taken a lot of what I have in my community, yes it does benefit mental, physical wellbeing, health, but I would have never looked at it that way. Whereas now after doing this I can see now the benefits of them.” Michelle, CWELL Student*

Students also developed skills in looking after an individual in an emergency situation (First Aid, Basic life Support/ Cardiac first response) and in injury prevention.

### **IMPROVED LIFE SKILLS AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

CWELL Students learned about life skills, communication, group theory and conflict. They had opportunities to develop skills in assertive communication, conflict resolution, team working, group facilitation, peer education, time management and decision making. Students also learned about the relationship between psychosocial competencies (self-awareness, self-esteem) and interpersonal relationships.

*“What I took from it was I would have to relax more and let other people do more talking. I usually talk too much and I talk aggressively at times so I am going to have to step back and quiet myself down. I have been taking notice of that, even at home. “ Joe, CWELL Student*

*“The way I would approach somebody now, if someone is pure negative . . . I would be asking them now ‘why do you think that? . . . What’s actually bothering you? Explain yourself. Don’t be bottling it all up’. Sit down, actually have a chat. Before, I would there, ‘no, that person is actually annoying me, I can’t be listening to them’ . . . now I ask them why. Literally, ask them why. “*

**Mary, CWELL Student**

*“I have learned to put my point across but then again everybody is entitled to their opinion. Everybody, like, if one person says one thing and I say another, it doesn’t mean that they are right and I am wrong or I am right and they are wrong. That’s what community’s about, everyone’s entitled. “ Amy, CWELL Student*

*“I am more relaxed with the group. I could walk up to anyone in the group and say I need a hand. When we first started this off, it was ‘no. I can’t’ so I held back a bit. “ John, CWELL Student*

## IMPROVED COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Students learned about psychological and social theories of relevance to leadership, leadership styles and the contexts where leadership occurs. They had opportunities to reflect on and develop their own leadership skills (e.g. conducting effective meetings, group facilitation, negotiation skills, needs analysis, community profiling) and learned about the benefits and challenges of community leadership and the qualities of effective community leaders.

Students were enabled to apply the disciplinary knowledge that they had learnt to multi-faceted real-world problems. They took part in problem identification and ideation, developed a deeper understanding of issues and problems in consultation with external stakeholders, worked towards solutions in collaboration, implemented identified changes and evaluated outcomes. Reflective practice underpinned the student experience throughout.

*[CWELL] has given me a diploma that I would never have had. Long term, it has made me a more confident person and I think by being more confident, I can help my community better and it has given me the ammunition to help my community better. Joe, CWELL Student*

*When we got the notification that we secured the land, we've secured the funding, we're going to be meeting an architect, I mean, compared to when we first started, I don't think I would have achieved half as much as what we all have done together. Michelle, CWELL Student*

*The majority of people are positive and what everybody forgets, we live here and it's our home and if we don't do it, nobody else is going to do it. You can't wait for outsiders to come in. You live there so you have to start from the ground up. We are proud of where we live. Amy, CWELL Student*

*I am finding it good just for the fact that we are local ourselves. We know the people. It is actually very easy even to do it because they know us. It's not like we are total strangers coming up saying 'we want to do this now down here for ye'. They are going 'you are one of us, you are doing it for us' and it's so much easier to do it that way. Mary, CWELL Student*

## LOCALLY SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Three community projects were initiated by the CWELL students as part of their diploma programme. These projects were set up following consultation by the students with local residents regarding what they would like to see introduced in their neighbourhood. The projects are outlined here, followed by a summary of progress made to date.

**Fig 3: CWELL Parent, Baby and Toddler Activity Group**



This project aims to provide a safe, secure place where parents, babies and toddlers can come together and participate in activities for the benefit of all. The target audience for this project is parents/carers with a child or children aged 0-3 years.

### PROGRESS

- ◆ Funding secured from TULSA (Child and Family State Agency)
- ◆ Site for classes identified
- ◆ Evidence of community involvement and engagement (young mothers in the local area)
- ◆ Consultations undertaken with Primary health care team (Kings Island Health Centre, University of Limerick)



**Fig 4: Outdoor Physical Activity Project**



This project aims to provide an outdoor physical activity area which serves all age groups in the community with a view to improving the physical, mental and social health of residents and strengthening social bonds. The provisional location for outdoor physical activity area is in the land beside the community centre and crèche.

**PROGRESS**

- ◆ Community based ‘Be Active’ committee in place
- ◆ Evidence of community involvement and engagement (working with local primary school, Men’s Shed)
- ◆ Plan for physical activity area and equipment agreed with community groups and residents
- ◆ Consultations undertaken with Limerick City and County Council, Limerick Sports Partnership, University of Limerick Architecture and Design Department, Community Development Project (CDP) Office



*“Now with the allotments going in, the outdoor physical activity area and the girls’ parent and toddler group, I mean, that’s a small step but it’s going to have a massive impact . . . I can absolutely see the benefits it’s going to have for this community.”*

**Michelle CWELL Student**

**Fig. 5: St Mary's Allotments**



This project aims to provide opportunities for community residents to plant and harvest their own fruit and vegetables in local allotments. The project team hope that the allotments will encourage healthy lifestyles, reduce isolation, improve the health and mental wellbeing of the community and become a source of happiness, wellbeing and pride.

**PROGRESS**

- ◆ Engaged with St. Mary's National School, where a small plot of land has been identified to use as an allotment.
- ◆ Sites for main allotments identified.
- ◆ Evidence of community involvement and engagement (working with local primary school, Men's Shed, local GP)
- ◆ Consultations undertaken with Limerick City and County Council, University of Limerick, voluntary groups within the local area
- ◆ Chosen as Limerick Leader's entry into the Get Involved competition (A competition designed to promote voluntary sustainability projects)



When asked whether they would continue to manage the community projects they had begun within the programme, the CWELL students were unanimous in their affirmative response. As Sarah, one CWELL student, eloquently replied: *'You only planted the seeds, we have to grow the flowers.'*

*"When we got the notification that we secured the land, we've secured the funding, we're going to be meeting an architect, I mean, compared to when we first started, I don't think I would have achieved half as much as what we all have done together."* **Michelle CWELL Student**

## SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the two-year programme, as part of their coursework, CWELL students were engaged in a variety of wider community initiatives through activities and projects that were integral to the CWELL programme and supported by it. Following the initial series of community meetings to establish CWELL, it was agreed that the majority of programme lectures took place in the community and programme content would be related directly to issues of importance to community members.

In consequence, the programme achieved extensive reach into the community through various community gatherings which were held as part of the programme activities. These included, for example:

- Event launch (attendance approx. 200 people.)
- Cultural nights (attendance in total of approx. 300 local residents)
- Christmas market (attendance 40 approx.)
- Happiness Books, 300 books produced generating an income of €750 which was re-invested in CWELL student projects, through a 'Dragon's Den' initiative.
- Dragons' Den 19th October 2015 Panel: Noel Gavin, Vice President, Northern Bank Trust; Elaine O'Connor, Limerick City and County Council; Ann MacPhail, Professor and Head of Department, PESS, UL; Bernie Quillinan, UL Engage Civic Champion
- Two culture nights
- A world café
- A Christmas market
- 4 Newsletters published and distributed within St Marys Parish.



The programme's positive outcomes with regard to the **families of participants and the wider community** was commented upon frequently. It was felt by many that CWELL had the potential to have a transformative effect beyond those directly involved. A sense of stronger social and community connectedness was also evident.

*I think just raising people's hopes for themselves has a knock on effect for their children, for the people in their families, so I think you can't quite measure the ripple effect of one person feeling empowered, learning, and developing new skills. I genuinely think it has a knock on effect.*

**Marie, CWELL Lecturer**

*"We've strengthened our ties within the community. Definitely . . . Just interacting with them, developing these project that we have ongoing and everything. So definitely strengthened our ties within the community."* **Mary CWELL Student**

*"It didn't just build the self-confidence of the ten people that are going to graduate, it has actually built the confidence of people around them in the sense that they realise now that they are capable of so much more. And what I find is very exciting also about it is the outcome from one of the projects. Some people are much more inclined to get in volunteer work around it . . . they're interested in seeing [the project] work . . . because this is going to be good for the community."*  
**Ellen, CWELL Stakeholder**

*"[CWELL] has given me a diploma that I would never have had. Long term, it has made me a more confident person and I think by being more confident, I can help my community better and it has given me the ammunition to help my community better."* **Joe CWELL Student**

## **CWELL IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY**

Beyond the knowledge and skills gained by CWELL students, the programme also had a **transformative impact on the personal development of the students**. Although an unanticipated outcome of the programme, this was the most discussed impact and that on which stakeholders, students and lecturers alike placed the highest value. They deemed this personal development, including increased confidence self efficacy, to be most likely to have a lasting impact on the students themselves, their families and the community. Although one of the included modules had content directly related to personal development, this broader impact was the result of all lecturers teaching to some degree beyond their content and taking shared responsibility for developing the students' confidence, awareness and ability to realise their broad potential.

*"What I took from it was I would have to relax more and let other people do more talking. I usually talk too much and I talk aggressively at times so I am going to have to step back and quiet myself down. I have been taking notice of that, even at home."* **(Joe, CWELL Student)**

*"Now with the confidence I am getting at work through this, I feel I am actually enjoying work. I am not technically afraid going into work. I am not afraid if they challenge you on your work. I can now say, 'this is right' and I can say it with confidence. I wouldn't have said it with confidence before."*  
**(Amy, CWELL Student)**

*"If CWELL was never to happen again, the fact that there are so many people down here who, it didn't just build the self-confidence of the ten people that are going to graduate, it has actually built the confidence of people around them in the sense that they realise now that they are capable of so much more."* **(Ellen, CWELL Stakeholder)**

*"It's actually beginning to open up doors for them, you know what I mean, in terms of their own personal development, they are beginning to talk about the future, their grandkids future, the people around them. It's all those little things that have changed for the students and I suppose for the community."* (Niall, CWELL Stakeholder)

## **EXTERNAL RECOGNITION FOR CWELL**

### **April 2014 CWELL presents to CCPH 13th International Conference, Chicago**

In April, 2014, CWELL representatives were invited to present the programme at the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health's (CCPH) 13th International Conference in Chicago. CCPH is an organization that promotes health equity and social justice through partnerships between communities and academic institutions.

### **June 2014 Campus Engage salutes CWELL**

In June 2014, the CWELL programme was highlighted as an example of good practice of campus-community partnership in action at the launch of the Campus Engage Charter on Civic and Community Engagement in Dublin Castle. At the launch, the presidents of 20 Irish higher education institutions underscored their commitment to the civic and community engagement role and responsibilities of their institutions.

### **July 2014 CWELL awarded the Healthy Ireland mark**

In July 2014, the CWELL programme was awarded the Healthy Ireland mark. Healthy Ireland is national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland. Its main focus is on prevention and keeping people healthier for longer.

### **October 2014 public vote selects CWELL for IPH conference, Belfast**

In October 2014, members of the CWELL team were selected by public vote to present as one of the top 24 proposals which formed the conference programme at the Institute of Public Health (IPH): Open Conference in Belfast. The IPH works with a range of partners to bring people and organisations from across the island together to promote collective action for sustained improvements in health. Tackling inequalities in health across the island of Ireland is a focus for all of its work.

### **November 2014 CWELL special award at the IPB All-Island Pride of Place Competition.**

In November 2014, the CWELL programme received a special award at the IPB All-Island Pride of Place Competition. The competition acknowledges the work that communities are doing all over the island of Ireland. Its focus is on people coming together to shape, change and improve daily lives in their communities.

### **2015 Limerick Leader enters CWELL into the 'Get Involved' competition**

In 2015, the allotment project was chosen as Limerick Leader's entry into the Get Involved competition (Organized by Local Ireland and sponsored by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, the competition is designed to promote voluntary sustainability projects.

# LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AFFORDED BY CWELL

The CWELL programme and its associated community / university partnership structures provide a supported learning environment for a variety of students as well as opportunities for peer mentoring and the development of UL Graduate Attributes.

## CWELL .....

...provides opportunities to apply curriculum-based knowledge in a real-world setting

...develops competence to work effectively as a member of a multi-disciplinary team in collaboration with external community stakeholders

...develops project work and problem solving skills

...develops competence in conveying ideas clearly and effectively to a range of different stakeholders in different organisational and/or community or cultural settings contexts

...explores issues of social responsibility, ethical practice and in sustainable community contexts

... develops the capacity to see new opportunities to address commonly identified issues/problems within the community

...recognises the capacity of those outside their own area of expertise to deliver their own professional and/or experiential expertise into collaborative project work

...deploys particularistic pedagogies, such as incidental learning, context based learning and deep learning (Sharples, M. *et al*, 2015)

This unique learning platform provides a host of opportunities to develop innovative teaching and learning pedagogies including inventive curriculum design, deep learning and situated learning. It is a learning environment where lecture content is tailored to suit student learning needs and one where supports are available to 'scaffold' student learning.

To date the CWELL programme has supported:

- 10 CWELL Diploma students from the community, completing a two-year diploma programme
- 24 Junior Year Abroad UL students
- 3 UL co-operative students
- 12 MA Journalism students undertook an Engaged Module in Broadcast Journalism

In this respect, the CWELL programme is best seen as a multi-functional learning platform for a variety of student placements, deploying a range of innovative pedagogies in response to identified learning needs.

## INVENTIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN

Inventive curriculum design refers to the design of curriculum content that is embedded in communities, creating new perspectives that can ripple through and change community practices (Heard 2014). This design approach, adopted by CWELL, positions curriculum planners, lecturers, community members, and students as co-authors in knowledge making, acknowledging that self-authorship is central to a twenty-first-century tertiary education (Heard 2014). Students are no longer viewed as passive consumers of third level education but instead should be considered by educators as co-creators of knowledge and drivers of social change (Baxter Magolda 2004). Inventive design in this way actively encourages designers to pose questions that disturb the boundaries of established values and practices in the field. There is less emphasis on provision of knowledge and instead inventive design focuses instruction on bigger questions that require students to recognize the limits of their own skills and knowledge. An example of integrated inventive design occurred throughout the second year of the programme. Action-oriented/service-learning practicum modules were designed to facilitate CWELL students to collaborate in teams to address real-world problems present in their local community. Problems and their solutions were identified in collaboration with a support team that included external community stakeholders (civic, public, private). Students were challenged with emerging factors which sustained problems and the complexities around implementing solutions and change management. Recognising the limits of their own skills around how to implement change proved more difficult than agreeing what changes need to be implemented to address a problem.

*“Overall, the type of learning in this module was different from anything else I have been involved in before, as it involved learning in a real world setting. Even though it was different from previous courses I have taken, it helped me to develop different strengths and also realize areas that I can improve. This definitely was an effective type of learning environment, as it was a lot about personal growth and learning about these things in regards to that..... I have surely grown as a person through this practicum as well. I have become more self aware in regards to how I work within groups, and I see more of my strengths and the places where I can improve.”*

**Elizabeth Irr, Roger Williams University, USA, 2015**

*“I knew this would be an interesting module, but I never would have predicted how much I took away from it. ....The CWELL Practicum Experience was an exceptional learning opportunity. There was nothing traditionally academic about the module, but it was—in every aspect—an educational experience. An added bonus was that it was just as much enjoyable as it was educational. I believe that experiential learning is the most beneficial kind of learning because it is engaging and provides opportunity to work intimately with others and to experience real life situations firsthand. “* **Summer Howard, New York, USA, 2015**

*"If in your mind you are debating participating in this program, do not hesitate any longer. This practicum is an experience that you will not regret. You can sit in a lecture hall or you can go and be with the people of Limerick. They will teach you more about Irish culture than you will ever learn on your own or in a lecture hall. You will be pushed to try things you've never tried before; experience things you've never experienced and talk to people you've never talked to. I will likely forget what I learned in my four other classes here but I will never forget the CWELL practicum. To conclude, participating in the CWELL programme has influenced my personal and professional development in many ways including formal writing, communication skills and a deeper understanding of adult community learning."* **Cecilia Hudecki, McMaster University, Canada. 2015**

## DEEP LEARNING

Deep learning is defined as going beyond simple intellectual development so that the learning experience may become more transformational, including physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral, social and personal kinds of learning. Deep learning elements include higher order learning, integrative learning and reflective learning (Nelson Laird, Shoup, Kuh *et al.* 2008). The CWELL programme course design team continue to consider all elements of potentially rich learning experiences and scope opportunities to develop experiences that promote engagement and deep learning.

In the first semester the students completed a portfolio which consisted of three sections 1) A *Classroom Reflection Section*, which evidenced work undertaken during class times with supervision and support from the class lecturer, 2) A *Homework Reflection Section* which consisted of reflections completed as 'homework' and 3) An *Evidence Supporting Learning Actions Section* which accommodated completed questionnaires, evidence of reading and any other examples that the student wished to include supporting their learning actions.

The purpose of these reviews was to provide guidance, support and feedback on portfolio writing, deep learning and personal development.

All academic staff associated with the delivery of CWELL modules either adapted, or created *ab initio*, teaching and learning resources tailored to a project-oriented model of education that is responsive to the identified needs of the CWELL community. These included for example: 'How to host a world café'; Community Project proposal and implementation templates; communication and mental health tools for personal reflection; individualized learning and study planning.

*"This practicum placement was a very unique and worthwhile experience for me. I got to learn a lot about myself and got to experience a different learning environment from what I have previously been a part of. I think that the learning style of the module was truly unique and it added a lot to the experience as well, as much of it was based on what we got out of the course personally. It was a great opportunity to be able to engage directly with the community and to be a part of this program."* **Elizabeth Irr, Roger Williams University, USA, 2015**

"Personally, CWELL allowed me to become familiar with my own strengths and weaknesses. It pointed me to areas of improvement and gave me the opportunity to improve upon them. The program put me into a new and unfamiliar environment, ultimately giving me the ability to cope and adjust to completely different situations. Being involved in the CWELL Program was a great way to improve upon myself, get involved and make connections in the community, and create positive change." **Alicia Rogers, Pennsylvania State University. 2015**

## SITUATED LEARNING

The *situated learning approach*, (Lave & Wenger, 1991) which underpinned all modules, meant that learning experiences were directly related to the lives of students, ensuring learning was both relevant and applicable. This appeared to enhance the teaching-learning encounters and resultant outcomes.

*"We had this terrible flooding . . . So it was a case of interrupting the learning in a different way to focus on what happened, tell us about it. Because what I found was, for me, being willing to listen to their life's experience was more valuable for me, I found. It really changed my perspective on people. Because when you drew that life experience you could reflect it back into the outcomes of a course . . . I needed to get their voice, because there was no learning unless it was their voice and there was no learning unless the outcomes of the course were implanted into their way of living and doing business."* **Julie, CWELL Lecturer**

*"I think probably actually what surprised the students as well is the amount of knowledge and input they had in our module. And I think that was one of the things that was fed back afterwards. Rather than us sitting down and lecturing for three hours for five weeks on health, it was drawing out how society and the community that they lived in, in particular, influenced health."*

**Mark, CWELL Lecturer**

*"With the CWELL programme, it's very much what you're teaching people is directly applicable to their everyday lives. So people are telling you about how they're changing. [One] of the stand out things I remember is somebody talking about how our discussion about how you can give critical feedback in a way that doesn't demean somebody had changed how she interacted with her own children. That's such a practical effect, a directly tangible effect of your teaching. "*

**Marie, CWELL Lecturer**

*"It's not as if you have to write an essay all about a flower on the wall, or whatever. D'you know what I mean? Everything that we did was always related back to ourselves. "*

**Louise, CWELL Student**

*“It is about people and once you took care of them and had their trust, whatever you asked of them and whatever you gave them to do, you know, the readings, you’d explain to them and it’s like anything, ‘we’ve chosen this reading because last week you said this and we’re going to go here in two weeks’ time, this is why’. There was that element of trust in that we weren’t just filling time. It was about them, they were central to the whole piece.”* **Laura, CWELL Lecturer**

## **LECTURE CONTENT AND DELIVERY**

Related to the situated learning approach taken, an important strength of the programme was its flexibility with regard to lecturing and content. Among the CWELL students were early school leavers as well as those who had not engaged with formal education in a long time. This had two effects. First, some skills that students entering a university diploma programme might ordinarily be expected to possess, such as academic writing skills or ICT skills, needed to be learned quite quickly. Second, and perhaps more importantly, there was an initial fear within the students, possibly related to a concern about being perceived as in some way inadequate, which inhibited their initial engagement with the content such that there was a need for lecturers to be flexible in their delivery and adjust the pace and structure of modules accordingly.

*“One of the things that happened in that first year is that they had consecutive lectures on a Monday night . . . and very early on they were overwhelmed so we did split the night and we did alternative nights. And that did work much better.”* **Julie, CWELL Lecturer**

*“I suppose they weren’t at the level I expected, so that was a challenge for me to actually change the teaching and also to be okay with that . . . I suppose a willingness on behalf of the design team to acknowledge that, for you as a lecturer, that it wasn’t possible to teach at that level . . . So I suppose once you understood that there was flexibility within the course, it kind of gave you the opportunity to go and redesign your teaching.”* **Nora, CWELL Lecturer**

*“We decided we would review at the start of the week with the students so that we would determine whether we actually were getting it right and whether we were approaching the right level or not, while still making sure that we tried to achieve the outcomes.”* **Jane, CWELL Lecturer**

*“So what surprised me [at the start] is not the academic ability, was their personhood, the process of re-entering as a student that brought with it a culture of being down trodden, of their fear and of them taking it so seriously . . . This group didn’t want to hand up everything, they actually . . . it was their fear of seeking help, their fear of revealing what they did or didn’t know, their fear of engaging with people from outside of the community. It was everything else other than their academic ability that we hadn’t maybe thought about how we needed to manage that. All the discussions here before were about bridging modules and supports but it was about, it was about what should happen in those supports . . . It’s what else should come into the supports and how we should make that process that pulls people in and that dissipates those fears and anxieties.*

**Niamh, CWELL Stakeholder**

It was evident that many participants had had negative prior experiences of education which had created barriers to their subsequent engagement with learning. The flexible, grounded nature of the CWELL programme had a very **positive impact on the attitude to learning of CWELL students.**

*"A particular student met with me and it was after an evaluation and it kind of brought it home to me, the importance of affirmation . . . they said they had never in their lives . . . been told they were good at anything and to have it on black and white, to see it in black and white that you are good at something, that you have done something good, it was beyond, it just made them want to fly."*

**Niamh, CWELL Stakeholder**

*"I had a horrible time in school and it's completely different. It's not as scary as school. It's not as scary as school. You can ask questions, in school you couldn't. If you didn't understand something in school, you were told 'sit down, shut up and do it'. This is different."*

**Sarah, CWELL Student**

*"I am looking forward to learning more. Again, over the summer I was thinking, 'God, what are we going to learn?' and I just felt the whole thing is such a learning process that I think actually it has started to put my brain thinking, thinking all the time. I probably was in a rut in my job, in my life, I did the same thing, but now every week it's exciting. There's something new to learn. "*

**Amy, CWELL Student**

*"I'm sensing that from all of them that they didn't have the opportunity in the past. They now have the opportunity and they are glad they availed of that opportunity . . . the barriers are being broken down."*

**Ellen, CWELL Stakeholder**

Many of the lecturers chosen to facilitate CWELL modules had strong connections to the local community and were motivated by a sense of social justice and the value they placed on learning and equity of educational opportunities. Their deep experience in the field of education and community development was key to their ability to motivate and engage CWELL students and respond to their individual needs. The **importance of choosing appropriately experienced lecturers will values which aligned with CWELL** was highlighted repeatedly.

*"It's not just about somebody to deliver the content. The somebody is as important as the content, particularly for this group of students."*

**Niamh, CWELL Stakeholder**

*"These are mature adult learners that are going to be pushing you and challenge you, bringing in their own lives and putting them on the table saying, 'listen, that's great but this is what's going on in my life'. As a teacher you have to be able to respond and interact and bring in what they are saying to you . . . it's very different teaching. The students are influencing how the teachers would actually teach . . . It's not everybody can teach this type of learner. "* **Niall, CWELL Stakeholder**

*"Everything is wonderful in a text book, it's perfect. It's the perfect solution to everything. But life isn't about textbooks. There's grey areas, there's white areas, there's sometimes blue areas and it's life experiences and having somebody who can adapt to dealing with people that are saying 'what's in your textbook, doesn't fit my lifestyle, my life hasn't revolved around your textbook answers'."* **Ellen, CWELL Stakeholder**

*"I think the fact that I've worked with people, it's not that you would have had to work with people from St. Mary's Park, but I think it's important that a lecturer would have experience of working with non-traditional students, or access students, if they're going to [work in CWELL]."* **Marie, CWELL Lecturer**

*"I think maybe it's a kind of a necessary aspect that you come with that mindset and you come with that ability to reach out and say, 'hold on, come with me, I'm not telling lies here, you will get through this and it will open a door for you and it's something that we'll do together'."* **Nora, CWELL Lecturer**

## **SCAFFOLDED LEARNING**

Although the CWELL students were hesitant at first to avail of the support provided by the UL practicum students, academic advisors and programme organisers, with encouragement and time spent becoming comfortable within the group, they did make full use of this support. It was evident that this support was both needed and appreciated by the CWELL students. Moreover, this learning was not uni-directional. Practicum students reported a new understanding of their own situation as well as of the CWELL students they supported, indicative of the kinds of 'deep learning' outcomes referred to earlier.

*"I remember that now, that academic essay and I remember sitting up here with [my academic advisor] and . . . I explained to her in my own words. [And she said], 'you talk about this, this, this and this and that's it, forget about the rest'. D'you know, she made it so plain and simple to me and she said 'look, if you get stuck I'm here'."* **Louise, CWELL Student**

*"The uniqueness of CWELL was that there was a [research assistant] on the ground. And, if you like, 24/7, because there was access to email, there was a mobile phone contact number . . . Now if they didn't have [the research assistant] and the practicum students, I think that they would not have engaged with the programme to its end."* **Julie, CWELL Lecturer**

*"I looked over I think at least three of one of our student's papers and I do that for friends back home without even thinking about it. It's like 'oh, can you look over my essay and make sure'. We don't even think about that from a student point of view, but for them, for someone to be on their side and take the time to do that is a big deal."* **Carol, UL Practicum Student**

*"I almost got the impression that they wanted my reassurance more than anything. That I had the formal education so they were always wanting me to put stuff in my words and I was kind of like, 'no your words are perfect, they do the trick, they're the exact same, they're just not as big'. I just found myself often being like, 'no that's great, keep going, that's good enough, keep going'."* **Susan, UL Practicum Student**

*"The role the practicum students and [the research assistant] played, in terms of providing additional tutorials and support, there was a lot of kind of somewhat hidden behind-the-scenes support going on, on almost a weekly basis . . . peer support from another student who was used to the university, who was used to PowerPoint, who was used to the library, who was able to help them out with getting documents started, those kinds of basic skills. And actually, I think it being a student and a peer made it very accessible and easy for people."* **Jane, CWELL Lecturer**

## **CWELL DIPLOMA STUDENTS**

Ten atypical students from a local disadvantaged area have completed a UL Diploma in Community Wellness, Empowerment and Lifeskills. The majority of these students entered the programme through recognized prior learning (RPL) as many did not have formal education to Leaving Certificate level. An addition to formal certification, this course provides a pathway to further education, but perhaps most important of all, the programme has produced 10 students with the skills and know-how to influence and implement positive changes in their local community.

*"I think I gained an awful lot of confidence, an awful lot of confidence altogether. I never wanted to do CWELL in the first place because I have certificates coming out of my ears above. I kind of never used them, do you know what I mean? But what you learn on this you use every day, you know what I mean? I know it sounds stupid but every single module we are doing, you use every day."* **Louise, CWELL Student**

Students on the CWELL programme are provided with a range of supports which include a system of peer-mentoring provided by student placements from elsewhere in the university. These student placements are part of the UL Practicum, a credited student placement programme that is designed according to the principles of community oriented research. The supports that UL Practicum students provide to the CWELL students range from ‘help with academic essays, workshops, power-point presentations and help practice with presentations’ (CWELL student 1) to ‘all aspects of my CWELL course – from powerpoint to poster assignments’ (CWELL student 3). The UL Practicum students also take turns to staff a mobile phone helpline, which many of the CWELL students singled out as extremely useful (CWELL students 2, 4, 6 and 9). Practicum students also helped with proof-reading (CWELL students 7 and 10) and ‘whatever we need to help us’ (CWELL student 8). Overall, CWELL students reported that they enjoy meeting other university students very much. The two-year programme evaluation concluded that mixing with other university students increases CWELL student confidence as well as their practical skills.

*“[The practicum students] were support to us. You know, if we needed anything done. Like the PowerPoint presentations, they helped us set up those, they showed us how to do it . . . We all got our laptops with us, or we were shown on one, and there could have been six students there and they’d talk us through it and they’d explain it to us and how to do it . . . It was great because we were able to say there ‘I don’t know how to do this, tell me how’ . . . So you were physically shown what to do. It took the fear out of it.”* **Nicola, CWELL Student**

## DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN THE CWELL PROGRAMME

Service learning is defined as a means by which students engage in an educational experience, that involves organised service activities in response to identified community needs, which enable the student to reflect on course content, develop their research skills and a broader appreciation of their discipline and enhanced civic responsibility (Bingle and Hatcher, 1996). Service learning is course based and often becomes an integral part of the formal curriculum, academic credits are appropriate where service activities are evaluated and aligned with learning outcomes.

*“The Practicum Placement has allowed me to assimilate into a local Irish community and share a part of their lives. I have developed skills working with the project that are not obtainable in a classroom and grown as a person. I have made friendships and created memories that I will treasure. I highly recommend this wonderful opportunity to other students.”* **Jennifer Humphrey, 2014**

It is this emphasis on *affective* learning outcomes that differentiates the learning opportunities provided by CWELL from other kinds of student community engagement. Student placements within the CWELL programme facilitated situated learning that requires ‘linking the curriculum to community needs and engaging the student in direct, academically based problem solving on social issues’ (Altman, 1996, p. 76).

*"I learned lessons that cannot be taught in the classroom; they have to come from experience. I really enjoyed this experience and would recommend it to all students. The practicum placement allowed me to get a more in depth experience of Ireland. I wasn't constantly sheltered in a classroom and told what Irish culture was by a professor; I was able to actually go into the community and learn for myself."* **Jennifer Humphrey, Student**

The CWELL programme provides formal opportunities for reflection whereby students deepen their understanding of academic content and the social issues they are addressing (Eyler and Giles, 1999).

*"I could wallpaper the house above with all the different courses I've done. I never got a thing out of them. But this, if you never got a job out of this, between your confidence and everything else, we really have grown, we've grown into adults, d'you know that."* **Louise, CWELL Student**

Although there is growing evidence to suggest that higher educational institutions are increasingly involved in civic and community engagement, service learning programmes take this a step further by facilitating curricular integration and the development of institutional structures to support tailored service learning activities. While elements of volunteering and civic engagement may well emerge out of service learning initiatives they are different activities. The central differences lie in the integration of service learning into academic curriculum versus the more organic nature of volunteering, which takes place in a student's own time and is not a formal part of his/her education.

*"In my mind I really defined disadvantaged communities as their problems and not really as anything more than that. I really thought it was an all consuming experience . . . Then actually taking part in CWELL made me realise that they are people too and they have families and they have a lot of pride and they are capable, just in a different way. They did all this stuff without ever knowing about Foucault."* **Susan, UL Practicum Student**

The UL Practicum takes the spirit of service learning a step further by developing student service in collaboration with local communities and in response to identified community needs.

*"I intend to stay in academia and do research. Definitely it's changed how I would approach it. I'll try much harder to get involved in projects that a community has asked for instead of projects I see them as needing . . . They know best for their communities what's needed and the politics in their communities and who to contact. They have this wealth of knowledge that just isn't formalised."* **Susan, UL Practicum Student**

## UL PRACTICUM PLACEMENTS

- 24 Junior Year Abroad UL students undertook placements in St Mary's Parish to provide peer support structure to CWELL students and assist in the implementation of projects. Their role was primarily to provide a system of peer-mentoring for the CWELL students. In particular, they identified:
  - Individual learning needs and support requirements of the CWELL students
  - Provided up-skilling opportunities, e.g., word processing, accessing the internet and preparing presentations.
  - Oversaw a student helpline, a drop-in clinic and a suggestion box where students could choose (anonymously if preferred) to share their ideas and opinions on the programme
  - Led and facilitated other health/well being activities e.g., dance classes throughout a semester (attended by 12-20 young children weekly) .
  - Four local newsletters produced to keep local residents informed about CWELL and encourage them to engage with locally developed projects.

Practicum students' availability for the CWELL programme is managed by the course director, which can sometimes be challenging when students want to travel during term times. According to one academic on the programme: while this is encouraged, it can make it difficult to ensure that the support is in place 100% of the time for CWELL students and also that the workload is shared equally amongst the Practicum Students depending on their interest and/or availability to travel. (CWELL academic 1, October 17 2014). Overall, however, the view was that 'the support system in place for CWELL students would not be as comprehensive as it currently is without the Practicum' (CWELL academic 1, October 17 2014) and that the programme benefits from 'different perspectives from people with different cultural backgrounds' (CWELL academic 2, October 17 2014)).

*"I had a life-changing experience partaking in CWELL as a practicum student. As a sociology student, though I had learned about community work and the issues and struggles related to poverty, I had never actually interacted with people from a disadvantaged community. This was a huge gap in my education.....CWELL has unquestionably changed me as a person, community member, student, and researcher."* **Caroline Kovesi, Mount Allison University, Canada 2015**

*"My experience in undertaking a practicum program has been very positive. It was a welcome change from the usual classes I had taken before. There was more of a hands-on approach and I felt as though I was actually making an impact in the community as opposed to simply sitting in a classroom, essentially in an academic bubble."*  
**Sara Kohandel, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 2015**

Participation in the CWELL programme was shown to **enhance the learning experiences and transform the perspectives of the UL practicum students:**

*"I just think it was so important, because it would be so easy not to care. You could translate that to any part of life. 'Oh, it doesn't really affect me, so I don't care.' But it will affect you as much as you want it to . . . It meant so much to them that we actually cared about it, their project. You can take that lesson in every outlet of your life. Just being present and caring is everything."*

**Heidi, UL Practicum Student**

*"I appreciated how whenever there was conflict, I liked how they used conflict as a way to spur forward motion. Whenever there was a conflict, like you said, they'd be like 'this is what I'm uncomfortable with'. I found that happened a couple of times. They'd say 'what can we do from here to move forward now that everything is out on the table?' So I thought that was good . . . It was something I really took away from it, the conflict management styles and how they used it to talk about how they feel and then how they can stay cohesive as a group. **Grace, UL Practicum Student***

## CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION PLACEMENT

To date, three students undertook a Co-operative education placement. All three have reported positive and valuable learning opportunities.

*"CWELL introduced me to a whole new world and different ways of learning which I found to be the most interesting and beneficial life or educational experience I have had to date. This experience gave me the opportunity to confirm to myself that helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds was the kind of career that I want after college. Working within the dynamic CWELL partnership enabled me to develop personally and professionally and , it was without doubt, the most worthwhile endeavour I've ever been involved in."* **Co-op student , 2014**

## PBL SITE FOR MA JOURNALISM STUDENTS

In September 2015, 12 MA Journalism students undertook an Engaged Module in Broadcast Journalism and produced podcasts on the three community based projects established by CWELL students in collaboration with the local community. Positive outcomes were reported by both the lecturer and students who engaged with the CWELL project.

*"I'm pleased with the final podcasts [-] and would be very interested in doing it again next. Am definitely in favour of integrating a project like this into that module every year. In fact, I'd be interested in expanding it to the second years also, if we had enough projects for them to work on."* **Dr. Fergal Quinn, Lecturer in Journalism, School of Culture and Communication, UL**

*"Thanks for the wonderful opportunity to work with CWELL. I felt , for the first time , the fantastic benefits of learning while working with real projects....things that were happening now, that made a real difference to people. **Journalism Student 2015***

# CWELL RESEARCH

In recent years, 'action research', 'evidence-based research', 'community-based participatory research' and 'emancipatory research' have become increasingly important and accepted as innovative research practices (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005; Flicker *et al.*, 2008). Much has now been written on how to bind community-university relationships (Baker, et al: 2007, 2006, 2004; Hart and Wolff, 2006; Hart, Maddison, and Wolff (eds), 2007). In this section we outline our efforts to develop an inclusive, engaged and collaborative research dimension to the CWELL programme.

The partnership structures that underpin the CWELL programme provide an extensive and inclusive network of community stakeholders who are aware and supportive of the operation of the CWELL programme in their locality. Because the CWELL students are all local residents, there is a strong sense of community ownership of CWELL initiatives in St Mary's Parish. In consequence, local residents have been, and continue to be, supportive of all dimensions to CWELL projects, including associated programme evaluations and project research. A collaborative research project evaluating the impact of CWELL, taking into account specific outcomes such as health literacy, application of knowledge to practice and personal and professional growth of programme participants, particularly the demonstration of leading and sustaining change was undertaken when the programme commenced. One to one interviews, case studies and focus groups were been undertaken over two years, with the study sample which included CWELL students, stakeholders from the Programme Steering Committee, community residents and programme lecturers and facilitators.

## RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

CWELL case study research will produce valuable data on the learning needs and support requirements of atypical students from an under-served community, as it strives to sustain healthier communities and community capacity building in predominantly disadvantaged communities. The research will identify elements of the programme that have been more successful and less successful for the enrolled students with a view to students being empowered as citizens to self-manage their lives and environment through acquisition of leadership skills and engagement in the building and enactment of a shared community vision.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CWELL research is designed using an emancipatory research framework. Emancipatory research focuses on: the lives and experiences of people historically marginalized; how and why inequities are reflected in asymmetrical power relations; and how results of social enquiry into inequities are linked to political and social action (Stuttaford, 2004). Building on previous feminist (Lather, 1987; Ribbens, 1990) and disability research (Barnes, 2003), Oliver (1997:17) suggests that the emancipatory research paradigm is based on three key fundamentals: reciprocity, gain and empowerment. It is within this context that emancipatory approaches advocate the creation of 'Research Coalitions', which shift the social relations of research production (Oliver, 1997) giving community participants the opportunity to define research agendas that (potentially) impact upon their lives. Within this framework, 'the researched' can be involved in the research: from its initial planning; to its execution and monitoring; and even commenting of the results (Baker *et al.*, 2004: 183-184). Academic researchers are encouraged to explain and justify the research formats and the theories that they

use in order to support the creation of 'learning partnerships'. In doing so, it is intended that 'Research Coalitions' may become 'mutual education forums for academics, researchers and community members', sharing their definitions and interpretations of issues and events (Baker, *et al*, 2004: 185- 86).

According to emancipatory research principles, both 'Learning Partnerships' and 'Research Coalitions' can be used as a method to gather data, to influence and implement policy and as a means of 'realizing change' (Baker *et al*, 2004: 186). It is argued that 'Learning Partnerships' and 'Research Coalitions' provide a most effective mechanism for research dissemination, ensuring that the data is disseminated in accessible form to those about whom it is written or whose lives are affected by it (Baker *et al*, 2004; 186). So much for reciprocity and gain, but what of empowerment: naturally this is not something that can be gifted; but if a marginalized group has decided to embark on a process of empowerment, then academics need to ask themselves whether or not their 'Research Coalition' is contributing anything to that process.

## RESEARCH OUTPUTS TO DATE

Adshead, M. and Quillinan, B. (2016) ' Having it all? Transferring community-oriented research principles to teaching and learning to develop better university engagement', *Educational Action Research*, forthcoming, **DOI number** 10.1080/09650792.2015.1124044

Quillinan, B. 2016 'Reconceptualizing and leveraging a partnership model for co-creation of knowledge and translation to improve and sustain healthy communities: Diploma in Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Lifeskills (CWELL), paper to be presented to the Networking for Education in Healthcare (NET2016), Churchill College, Cambridge, 6-8 September 2016.

Quillinan, B. and Adshead, M. 'Scaffolding support for collaborative research, teaching and learning, and mindful community engagement – an integrated model for responsible research', paper presented to the 7<sup>th</sup> Living Knowledge Conference, Dublin Castle, 22-24<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

Quillinan, B, Reidy, G. 'Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Life skills (CWELL) — A community-university partnership approach to a co-authored programme', paper presented to the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) Open Conference, Titanic Belfast, Ireland, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2014.

Quillinan, B, Reidy, G. 'Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership and Life skills (CWELL) – A Community-University partnership approach to programme development and implementation', paper presented to the 'Community-Campus Partnerships for Health 13<sup>th</sup> International conference: From Rhetoric to Reality: Achieving Authentic, Equitable & Transformative Partnerships', Chicago, USA, 30 April 30 – 3rd May 2014

Quillinan, B, McKay, E.A and Taylor, A. 'Developing a Community-University Engagement Model in Health Education - An Irish Perspective', paper presented to the Community University Partnerships Expo 11: Bringing global perspectives to local action, Waterloo, Canada, May 10 -14<sup>th</sup> 2011.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR CWELL

The CWELL university-community partnership was successful in its endeavour to bring relevant stakeholders together, engage community residents and build on the expertise of all in order to **build co-operation and trust**.

*“We are all partners and it was really important to me that we had a university representative and we had a community representative but I am shifting my gear because I don’t know that the people around the table are saying ‘I’m here from the community’, ‘I’m here from the university’. I think now it’s almost a sit around the table and people speak about the students and the programme with the interest of the students and the programme, not whether they’re from the community or the university. So I suppose there has been a shift in thinking.”* **Niamh, CWELL Stakeholder**

*“It was respecting each other for the kind of skills we had. I think we were respected for the skills of actually developing a programme, and putting it through the [Academic Programme Review Committee]. Whereas, actually, it was incredible the skills that some of the people from the community had in relation to managing the people in the community at the various meeting and things like that. Engaging them, getting their interest in the actual programme, and also their funding skills.”* **Jane, CWELL Lecturer**

*“It took a huge leap of faith for [the CWELL students] to actually sign up for the course. But I think out of that trust has grown within the community itself because so many other people, first of all, they saw these students coming in, local people coming in, and they started thinking, ‘Jesus, if they can do it, I can do it. I’m capable of doing it’. But now that we’ve actually proven to the community that you’re sticking to your guns, yes CWELL is here, it’s here to stay, it’s not like other programmes where we were made promises and nothing came out of it. This has actually taken place. And I think there’s a lot of people in shock in the community that’s there’s ten people in the community that have actually achieved a diploma out of [it] . . . They’ve become role models within their community, that it’s spreading out hugely. And you don’t see that and it’s not something you can measure, but it is there.”* **Ellen, CWELL Stakeholder**

A key to this trust was the fact that the CWELL programme was **designed *with* rather than *for* the community**. Community stakeholders worked with university stakeholders to ensure the programme was rooted in needs identified by the community and built on existing community resources.

*“Having community participants sitting at the table as those discussions were taking place meant that we didn’t sort of lose the run of ourselves in terms of getting so focused on the programme, and content, and regulations, that we lost sight of the needs of the community as articulated by the community representatives. So I think it could have easily ended up being a bit tokenistic, people sitting there and not really participating, but I think genuinely it was a very shared experience. There was genuine discussion. There was real negotiation.”* **Marie, CWELL Lecturer**

*"You know, for a long time people have been coming into this parish and telling the people what they want. I think that CWELL is asking them what they want and they're listening."*

**Joe, CWELL Student**

*"What was really important was the personalities of the people [on the steering committee], that they could engage with the community, listen to what they would say, a mix of young and old, that you had all different experiences, that even the content, the actual subject matter content, wasn't as important as being able to listen and people to go out and just to listen to what people wanted on it." Niamh, CWELL Stakeholder*

The **ongoing research and monitoring** within the programme was found to be essential to ensuring that as needs arose they were recognised and responded to.

*"Maybe what helped us not compromise [the programme] is having the concurrent research being undertaken that constantly reminded us, it almost allowed us an opportunity to reflect. So while we were delivering the programme, I think we might have lost our footing had we just gone on and delivered and not come to meet . . . it worked well to keep us reflective and grounded and be true to the programme." (Niamh, CWELL Stakeholder)*

*"Having a group that actually do reflect on the way things are going as opposed to initiating a programme and then coming together at the end . . . that's one thing that I think is essential." (Laura, CWELL Lecturer)*

A process evaluation of the CWELL collaboration has been ongoing since its inception. This evaluation seeks to trace the developments of the programme, identify areas for improvement and determine how the programme might best be sustained into the future. The final report from this evaluation was produced in February 2016. Over the course of the programme, discussions from the steering committee and findings emerging from the CWELL research study strongly indicate the need to see this intervention as a CWELL Model of Community Orientated Education which includes three interrelated, yet distinct stages.

- Pre programme intervention (focused on preparing prospective programme participants, support planning),
- Programme delivery
- Post programme intervention (to maintain existing and further develop continuity and sustainability of community based health and well-being projects)

While one programme cycle of CWELL is now completed, the implementation of pre and post programme interventions required to embed CWELL in the community in a way that fully address sustainability, continuity and leadership has yet to be delivered.

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### 2012-2013

- Development of CWELL community-university partnership
- Co-contruction of CWELL curriculum
- Programme launch
- Student selection



### 2014

- Semester 1:**
  - Mental Health 1 Well-being and Positive Mental Health Across the Lifespan
  - Study Skills and Personal Development
- Semester 2:**
  - Managing Health in the Home and Community
  - Communication and Life Skills



### 2015

- Semester 3**
  - Mental Health 2 Prevention and Management
  - UL Practicum 1
- Semester 4**
  - Leading and Sustaining Change in the Community
  - UL Practicum 2



### CWELL Outcomes

- Ten community leaders with improved professional skills, leadership skills, life skills, communication skills and knowledge of health and well-being
- Strengthened relationships between community residents and representative bodies
- Three new community initiatives responding to needs identified by community residents:
  - Parent, baby and toddler group
  - Outdoor physical activity project
  - St. Mary's Community allotments



### CWELL Future...

- CWELL evaluation report
- Establishment of CWELL Network
- Completion of CWELL community projects
- New student intake
- Expansion to new communities





[www.ul.ie/engage](http://www.ul.ie/engage) E-mail: [ULEngage@ul.ie](mailto:ULEngage@ul.ie)

Telephone: +353 61 202096