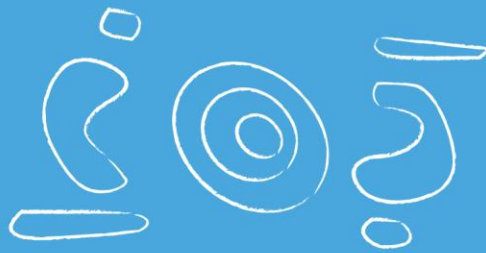


From Displacement to Participation: Across the Fence - Women's Dialogue as a Catalyst for Community Empowerment



"In what ways can women's community education programmes support both Traveller and non-Traveller women to shape and maximise the use of a dedicated community house?"



KATHLEEN MARGARET DOWD

Submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements for the
MED in Adult and Community Education

Supervisor: Professor Camilla Fitzsimons 2024/2025

Dedicated

“To my Mother Kathleen Carrig and Pearl Mc Donagh and all mothers who carry the weight of loss with love and strength.”



Acknowledgment

Heartfelt thanks to my family for their patience, understanding, and for travelling with me on this rewarding journey.

I am eternally grateful for my children, Robert, and Rachel, for reflecting my labour of love through your love of art, creativity, magical places, and vision.

To my husband, James, thank you for your wise words and steady support.

To my mother, Kathleen and my late father, Robert Carrig (RIP), thank you both for your open minds, for teaching me at an early age about social justice and for filling me with the gift of Community Spirit.

I am forever grateful for your love and guidance, the cornerstone of my growth.

Thank you to Longford Women's Link (LWL), Founders, Elsie Moxham, Tess Murphy, and the late Mary O'Hara (RIP), for your vision, dedication and unwavering commitment to developing the exceptional and supportive Lifelong Learning facility, which stands strong in the heart of Ireland today, a dynamic social enterprise that has over the past 30 years served as a source of strength to Longford Women and their families.

"We made the road as we walked it."

To my supervisor "Wise Woman," Professor Camilla Fitzsimons, thank you for your inspiration, your authentic approach, and for instilling in me a belief in the power of "I."

To Maynooth College, the Department of Adult and Community Education, and the excellent team of holistic lecturers and special thanks to Rose Gallagher for her active listening ear.

To LWL's former CEO Louise Lovett for your inspiring leadership in the field of Social Enterprise Development.

To LWL Current CEO Tara Farrell, your ability to truly listen, connect, and offer wise, grounded advice has been to me deeply impactful and inspiring.

To the LWL Staff and the Seven Sisters Women's Group, thank you for your circle of love.

To the Ardnacassa Community, and to all who live, work, pray, and learn together within and outside the walls of Ardnacassa Community House thank you for your generous participation in the focus groups and interviews that provided me valuable direction and insight.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	Page2
Abstract.....	Page 7
The Clock	Page 8
Chapter 1: Contextual Background-The Community House Narrative.....	Page 9
1.1Setting the Scene – The Community House story.....	Page10
1.2Structural Barriers.....	Page12
Chapter 2: Researchers Background	
2.1 Introduction.....	Page 14
2.2 Researchers Early Years	Page 15
2.3 Longford late 70's/ early 80's – Insight to Local Political Landscape.....	Page 17
2.4 Witnessing at a young age a Force Movement - Marginalised Community.....	Page18
2.5 Stories at the Kitchen Table: Movement, Memory, and Grief.....	Page 19
2.6 Need to know Policy to Pavement.....	Page 20
2.7 20 years working with LWL - Role of the Researcher in the Community.....	Page 20
2.8 Personal Reflection of the Researcher.....	Page 21
Chapter3: Literature Review	
3.1 Introduction – Curiosity to Research – Listening to the silence.....	Page 23
3.2 Historical Origins and Ethnic Identity of the Irish Traveller Community....	Page 24
3.3 Nomadism to 20th century Government Assimilation Policy	Page 25
3.4 Relocation, Cultural Displacement and Legacy of Post Colonial Oppression. Page	26
3.5 Power, Hegemony - the Structural Marginalisation.....	Page 27
3.6 Absence of identity from Irish Education System	Page 27
3.7 Education as a Site of Struggle: Colonial Control, Religious Power.....	Page 28
3.8 Towards Transformative Inclusion – Ethnic Identity	Page 29

3.9 Conclusion - Moving Forward.....	Page 30
---	----------------

Chapter 4 - Women's Community Education & the Power of Critical Reflection

4.1 Introduction.....	Page 31
4.2 The Evolution and Legacy of Women's Community Education in Ireland.....	Page 32
4.3 Legacy lives on in grassroots organisations like Longford Womens link	Page 32
4.4 Paulo Freire - Education through Dialogue.....	Page 33
4.5 Coming Full Circle Space and Dialogue - Driving Meaningful Change.....	Page 36
4.6 Connecting Communities: Participation in Local Democracy.....	Page 37
4.7 WCE Community Response – Grassroots LWL Seven Sisters Group.....	Page 39
4.8 Conclusion	Page 41

Chapter 5 Methodology - A Young Woman Questions

5.1 Introduction to Methodology	Page 42
5.2 Positioning the Researcher: A Personal and Political Standpoint.....	Page 44
5.3 Ontological and Epistemological perspective.....	Page 45
5.4 Lived Reality - Social Constructivism.....	Page 46
5.5 Research Methods – Positivism and Anti Positivism.....	Page 47
5.6 Feminist perspective.....	Page 48
5.7 Feminist Paradigm and where I Stand: Lived Experience	Page 49
5.8 Desk Research – preparing the ground.....	Page 50
5.9 Limitations & Challenges - Traveller participation.....	Page 51
5.10 Adaptive Methodology.....	Page 52
5.11 A Dual Method Approach: Collective Dialogue and Personal Narratives....	Page 53
5.12 Focus Group - The Lantern Workshop.....	Page 54
5.13 One to One Semi structured Interviews.....	Page 56

5.14 Reflective Journaling	Page 56
5.15 Ethical Considerations.....	Page 57
5.16 Conclusion.....	Page 59

Chapter 6 - Findings

6.1 Introduction	Page 60
6.2 Lantern Workshop – Focus Group & Semi Structured Interviews	Page 62
Aboriginal Images.....	Page 63
6.2.1 Piti Maitjara – Bowl with Bush Tucker	Page 64
6.2.2 Iwara – Travelling Sign with Resting Place or a Water Hole.....	Page 64
6.2.3 Kali – No7 Boomerang.....	Page 64
6.2.4 Ili – The Fig.....	Page 65
6.2.5 Tjara – The Sheild.....	Page 65
6.2.6 No identity Chosen as felt symbol did not sit with her Religion (Christian). Page	65
6.2.7 Remained Silent	Page 66
6.2.8 Tali - Sand Dunne.....	Page 67
6.3 Themes from Focus Group.....	Page 67
6.4 Semi Structured Interviews with Traveller Community – Ardnacassa Area...Page	68
6.4.1 Ann – “Charlie’s Bedroom”	Page 69
6.4.2 Tom – “LWL T&E Building”	Page 70
6.4.3 Joseph “Charlie’s Bedroom”	Page 71
6.4.4 Mary – LWL Counselling Suite.....	Page 72
6.5 Themes from Semi Structured Interviews.....	Page 73
6.6 Researcher Reflection at this point.....	Page 74
6.7 Conclusion.....	Page 75

Chapter 7 - Analysis

7.1 Introduction.....	Page 76
7.2 Turning point - Across the Fence - Dialogue Building Communities.....	Page 77
7.3 Reframing the Community House - More than a building	Page 78
7.4 Traveller Perspective of the Community House.....	Page 78
7.5 Community House is a Catalyst for Empowerment and Inclusion.....	Page 79
7.6 Risk of Tokenism.....	Page 80
7.7 Implications for Policy and practise.....	Page 80
7.8 Limitations.....	Page 81
7.9 Conclusion.....	Page 81

Chapter 8 Concluding Chapter

8.1 Researchers Reflection of the Research	Page 84
8.2 The power of I.....	Page 85
8.3 The next chapter	Page 87
Research Information Sheet.....	Page 88
Consent Form.....	Page 90
Bibliography.....	Page 91

Abstract

The following research focuses on the Ardnacassa Area of Longford, a community that has frequently in the past made headlines for negative reasons, including reports of antisocial behaviour, high levels of criminality, deep-rooted social issues, and tragic loss. The area faces significant challenges such as low literacy, early school leavers, unemployment, domestic violence and high levels of addictions and poverty, all having a toll and impact on the wellbeing of diverse vulnerable families living in fear and isolation within the area. This qualitative study explores the ways Women's Community Education (WCE) programmes can support critical dialogue by centring the often-overlooked voices of marginalised communities. Empowering the voices of both Traveller and non-Traveller participants, through the delivery of an outreach creative focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews, offering a rich and grounded account of lived experiences, cultural perspectives, and community-driven insights on planning of community spaces. The study highlights how WCE bridges the personal and the political by sharing stories, building relationships, fostering understanding, and co-creating inclusive, community-based learning spaces. It identifies the structural barriers facing women and their families, it promotes a gender balanced regeneration, advances social inclusion and above all leads collective action, encouraging collaborating partnerships among local community services for the common good. By sharing my life journey, this research offers the reader a sense of where my curiosity lies, in my personal observation from a young age to date, of an absence of the Traveller Community from local conversations and in my desire to understand this more deeply. The image of an empty chair at the table serves as a powerful image of absence, the passing of Charlie, a young Traveller child from the Ardnacassa community and as a symbol of broader exclusions often experienced by marginalised communities. This shared grief is both personal and political, forming the emotional starting point of this thesis. Speaking from the hearth in this study, I aim to slow down, truly listen and to build trust.

"The Clock on the wall"

On a cold, grey November morning, there was still of silence within and outside the Ardnacassa Community House. I turned on the heat, hung a welcome sign outside and put on the radio, hoping to draw some attention. But no one came.

Later that morning, I got a clock from my car, that was gifted to the house from a caring lady who was part of the LWL, newly established, Seven Sisters Women's group, a lady that I have had the privilege of her companionship on this journey. Leaning across the fence I said "hello" to the neighbour and asked if he had a hammer and nail. "It's hard to get anyone to do things these days," I said. He smiled back at me, grabbed a hammer from his van, and followed me inside.

In the front room, we paused to remember Charlie. He asked me where I wanted the clock hung, I said "you choose." He tapped along the walls, picked a spot near the door, and hung it. I stepped back and said, "Looks a bit off."

He looked at me, confused. "Do you think so?"

I could sense he thought I was judging the work "Not you," I said, smiling. "The time."

Chapter 1 - Contextual Background – The Community House (CH) Narrative

On a warm summers day on July 14th, 2022, an open day was held within the Ardnacassa Community House located in the Ardnacassa Estate Longford Town, Co Longford with representatives from Longford Community and Voluntary Sector, Longford's Public Participation Network (PPN) staff and Local Community/Voluntary member groups, Local Longford County Council, Councillor Uruemi Adejinmi, at the time Local Senator Michael Carrigy, staff from the Local Education Training Board and Longford Community Gardai.

As I stood in the hallway of the house, I welcomed all inside for a cuppa. On the day, many children played outside, and a young girl came up to me and expressed her desire to bake in the Community House one day. This little girl's voice was the first step of active citizenship for the Ardnacassa Area setting the pathway to the grassroots development of the Ardnacassa Community House.



1.1 Setting the Scene - The Community House Story

My life journey to date takes me to the new Ardnacassa area, in my hometown, County Longford, set apart from the “old Ardnacassa” that sits the far side of the railway track, a difference negatively noted on many occasions by a Longford public representative and we wonder why division lies. Over the past two years I have worked outreach with residents living in the Ardnacassa area, an area that fell into deprivation in the aftermath of the 2008 recession. During this time Longford and neighbouring counties were hit hard by the recession, according to the 2011 Pobal HP Deprivation Index, the Midlands was the third most deprived region in Ireland, with Longford County Council ranked as the most deprived local authority in the area. Longford’s deprivation score worsened from -4.93 to -5.12, a decline of -0.19, in contrast to the national average, which improved by +0.47 (Longford County Council, 2014). This decline in deprivation coincided with a noticeable rise in antisocial behaviour, crime, and related social issues across the region.

In 2021 the Ardnacassa area, a region already struggling with economic hardship encountered further trauma an added layer of tragedy witnessing a traffic accident resulting in the death of a local Traveller boy named Charlie. Ardnacassa is a housing estate made up of both long-established residents and newer arrivals, including a significant Traveller community. In recent years, the area has become home to families from diverse backgrounds, many of whom have come to Ireland seeking refuge from global challenges such as war, poverty, economic instability, and unemployment. Like many rural Irish communities, Ardnacassa has seen an increase in people relocating in search of safety, stability, and a fresh start. However, with this demographic change have come several social challenges. Community spirit appears to be weak or, in some cases, missing entirely. Many residents both from long established and newer communities have expressed feelings of isolation and a lack of safety. This points to a growing need for investment in community development efforts that promote inclusion, trust, and

shared understanding among all residents. Supporting integration, improving safety, and fostering a stronger sense of community are now vital for the long-term wellbeing of Ardnacassa area. As Maslow (1943) outlined in his *Hierarchy of Needs*, safety is a fundamental human requirement that must be met before individuals can focus on higher-level development (Maslow, 1943).

Longford Community Safety Partnership (LCSP) a national leading pilot programme delivered within the community sector of Longford County Council responded to the voices of the marginalised by developing an Ardnacassa Area Action Group (www.longfordcoco.ie, 2025). Longford Women's Link (LWL), a grassroots organisation located in the Ardnacassa Area, having 30 years' experience in delivering WCE, an approach that actively listens to the voice of local community, played a significant role in directing the LCSP initiative. I have had the privilege of working with LWL over the past 20 year and my role as Community Activist within the organisation enabled me over the past number of years be part of a team of staff that actively contributed to the enhancement of LWL wraparound service model, a comprehensive and impactful range of vital services and supports that enable women to overcome barriers and make choices for themselves and their families. LWL local quality services have been particularly notable in the areas of Domestic Violence support, Early Years Education, and initiatives to support women in Business and Politics. LWL's dedicated and tailored (WCE) approach has played a central role in empowering women's voices. This empowerment has had a profound and lasting impact on the development of women, their families, and their wider communities (Longford Womens Link, 2025).

After the heartbreaking death of Charlie, LCSP worked closely with his grieving family to navigate the loss. The family decided to relocate and, in memory of Charlie hand their home back to the community, in the hope it would become a place of connection. Like many newly

established community initiatives, the first steps came with challenges. The area been labelled unsafe due to previous antisocial behaviour and the aim to create a sense of safety for local community required a significant and sustained effort. LWL impactful grassroots community work led the organisation to having a seat at the table for action, supporting Charlie's families wishes, the development of a Community House within the Ardnacassa Area, a wish which I have had the privilege of leading. Being no stranger to a challenge, I found that this struggle brought me closer to the lived realities of the local community.

1.2 Identifying Structural Barriers

The urgency of this work, backed by local data, particularly concerning the Longford Traveller Community. This group makes up a considerable proportion of the population living close to the Ardnacassa Community House. Despite the Traveller Community being long-established in the area, their voices overlooked amidst the broader focus on external global migration and resettlement. During wider social change, the specific needs, concerns, and perspectives of the Traveller community risk being neglected. It is essential that efforts to build a stronger, more inclusive community, within the Ardnacassa Area include meaningful engagement with the Traveller population, ensuring that their voices and their culture are recognised, and their needs addressed as part of any community development initiatives.

In the 2022 census there were 913 Travellers this constitutes a rate of 19.7 Irish Travellers per 1000 of the total population, Longford is the second highest of any administrative county in the state (6.5 per 1000) ((WWW.CSO.ie, 2025) cited in Longford County Council, 2023 - 2029, p.21). Despite this, Longford's Traveller Community remains systemically underrepresented. Recognition of Traveller ethnicity only came in 2017, after centuries of

exclusion that has resulted in significant barriers to participation in systems never designed to accommodate cultural difference. The consequences are deeply structural, 64% of Traveller children do not complete secondary school, only 1% go on to higher education, compared to over 60% of the general population. The unemployment rate among Travellers is 82%, versus a national average of 7%. Life expectancy is 10–15 years lower, with higher rates of infant mortality, mental health issues, and chronic illness. 85% of Traveller households experience consistent deprivation, lacking access to necessities like sanitation, heating, and nutrition (WWW.CSO.ie, 2025).

This evidence forms the rationale for this long-overdue research to be conducted and provide a space for local Traveller voices, particularly in Longford, to be heard and taken seriously in local decision-making. Formal education systems have often failed to reflect the realities of marginalised communities. In response, I will demonstrate ways in which WCE offers a grassroots alternative, a space for dialogue, empowerment, and collective action. Drawing on the emancipatory ideas of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, and the feminist work of Camilla Fitzsimons and Bríd Connolly, WCE positioned as a transformative force where silenced voices can emerge, be heard, and shape local development. The research draws on key studies, including *Traveller Culture and History in Education* (Murphy, 2023) and the NCCA Curriculum Audit (2019) and applies Gramsci's theory of hegemony to examine how dominant structures shape education, housing, and participation. Real-world examples, such as LWL and Longford Public Participation Network (PPN), will highlight how feminist-led, community-based education can challenge exclusion and promote meaningful involvement in public life. Finally, this thesis argues, when voices are absent, social issues go unaddressed, and communities become stagnant and left behind. If we want real change, communities need to be at the table, shaping the decisions that affect them.

Chapter 2

2.1 – Introduction

My early childhood experiences have profoundly shaped who I am today, both personally and professionally. Growing up, I gained valuable insights from conversations around the kitchen table about an Ireland of long ago, through reflecting on the past I now know the knock-on effect and power it must anchor and instil a steady balanced, holistic mindset that supports vision and ability to pave a pathway to move forward. Also, my early years experiences on the playground of a local authority housing estate and from witnessing firsthand the displacement and challenges faced by our Irish Traveller community in County Longford and with a balanced guidance response from both my parents, instilled in me at a young age a social justice perspective. From this memory and having studied to an important level in the field of Early Years, I believe investment in a quality early years education is key for Governments to develop future caring and active communities. My early images of society witnessed a society ignoring the needs of a fellow human, these images have stayed with me today and influenced my work in the field of community activism.

In this chapter, I revisit my memories, reflecting on the social dynamics of Longford Town at the time, where I spent my early years, I explore how heritage and storytelling were deeply woven into the fabric of a rural village where I spent my latter youth and how this cultural richness profoundly shaped who I am today. Beyond the places themselves, I endeavour to demonstrate how environment and early education shape's identity and quietly marking the rhythm of growing up in a rural county both rooted in tradition and yet touched by change.

A major turning point in my life to date was returning to education in 2003, the successful outcome of this journey not only instilled a hunger in me to learn more but it empowered me to continue with the ebb and flow of my lifelong learning journey, finding myself today studying a master's in education in Maynooth University. Along the way, an area of education

that played a vital part in guiding my pathway to master's Level was completing an Early Years Degree, during which I was particularly influenced by Bronfenbrenner's theory, highlighting how a child's development is shaped by their environment (Hayes, 2013). Looking back now, I feel my understanding of this area has grown, allowing me to connect this theory to my early life experiences. Through this, I have recognised the important need for Early Years education, a collective community support and strong community structures. All these factors have played a crucial role in shaping my research and have led me to develop my research question.

“In what ways can women's community education programmes support both Traveller and non-Traveller women to shape and maximise the use of a dedicated community house?”

This chapter outlines my background and the personal motivation behind this research. I draw heavily from my personal experience because it gives me a deep, lived understanding of the issues at the heart of this research. As someone who has benefited from WCE and witnessed the ongoing challenges faced by both Traveller and non-Traveller women, I bring an insider's perspective. This connection allows me to approach the research with empathy, authenticity, and a strong sense of purpose. While I remain critically reflective throughout, my lived experience is not separate from my academic work, it strengthens it and permits me to stay anchored in my aim is to highlight how WCE can create meaningful change for women from all backgrounds.

2.2 Researchers Early Years

I was born in 1975 in Longford Town into a pre-war local authority housing estate where the street was my playground. My parents were both from rural backgrounds and like many others at the time they moved to Longford for accommodation and work. My father worked locally

for the Electricity Supply Board (ESB), and my mother like many women of her era stayed at home. At the time, women's role in society was heavily influenced by the Marriage Bar, which was first introduced by the Irish Free State government through the 1924 Civil Service Regulation Act. This law required female civil servants to resign from their jobs once they got married. In 1932, the rule was extended to include female primary school teachers. While it was not legally enforced across the private sector or all state-sponsored employers, it still became widely practiced, reflecting the strong belief in Ireland that a woman's place was in the home. This idea was later reflected in Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution, making the Marriage Bar one of the clearest examples of gender discrimination limiting women's economic freedom and social independence (I. Mosca; R. Wright, 2020, p. 4). The Marriage Bar remained longer in Ireland than with our European counter parts, it lasted in Ireland till 1973. Across Ireland, the bar significantly limited women's ability to work when a second income was necessary, and for women parenting alone, it created substantial financial hardship. During 1920 – 1960 in the south 15% of women were working low number in comparison to 21% working in Industrial Belfast, men held the power as main bread winner. In the 1960's the Irish Country Women's Association (ICWA) pushed for change (Fitzsimons, 2025). At the same time in Dublin there was a feminist movement evolving, the second movement since the early 20th century suffragette movement, the move pushed against barriers such as MB that hindered women, this led to the formation of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) (Hill, 2003, P.153).

In the early 1980s, my family relocated to a newly built housing estate in the town where my memory of my early years was filled with positivity, with both parents encouraging my learning and fostering a deep inner confidence that remains with me today. My father struggled to adapt to urban life, but to his advantage, his rural community spirit pushed through, getting involved in community initiatives such as community games and my mother equally involved in

gardening initiatives, which provided a sense of belonging for them both. Although they were happy living the urban lifestyle, they always viewed their urban stay as temporary, planning eventually for us all to return my father's rural roots, a village along the Shannon, Clondra.

2.3 Longford late 70's/ early 80's – Insight to Local Political Landscape

At this time, local Fianna Fail public representative and future Taoiseach Albert Reynolds was making his political mark, looking back now observing his rural and urban background, combined with his community and business experience I believe strategically attracted major industries to Longford, opening employment opportunities and spurring economic growth for the county. As a result, numerous families moved from rural areas to Longford Town. Throughout Ireland newly constructed local authority housing estates became a common development, sparked by the *1966 Housing Act* (1966) (www.legislation.ie, 2025) these estates were initially designed to relocate people from inner-city tenement slums to suburban outskirts. Over time, this model reached rural counties like Longford, enabling families from rural areas and nearby counties to move into urban estates. The 1980 Housing Act, provided further funding for such developments, allowing many residents to purchase their homes. Those with higher incomes often moved on, taking their first steps onto what is commonly called 'the property ladder' (O. Kelly, 2019). The flip side of this growth, was that residents who remained in estates were often low-income earners or unemployed, leading to eventually the estates being labelled as disadvantaged, this stigma had a long-term, hurtful impact on residents' confidence and well-being as noted by Michelle Norris in her examinations of Irish housing systems (M. Norris & D. Coates, 2014, pp. 299 - 315).

2.4 Witnessing at a young age Force Movement of a Marginalised Community

Among all this relocation, there was another movement taking place in rural Ireland because of the 1963 *Commission on Itineracy*, this document promoted the idea that the Nomadic lifestyle typically associated with Irish Travellers was problematic and needed to be addressed through housing and education. In the late 70's and early 80's the Traveller community were struggling with disruption as new regulations began upsetting their centuries-old custom of travelling the bye roads. This led to cultural tensions and challenges in adapting to settled lifestyles (Fanning, 2014, P.45 - 55). In 1960's Ireland in the absence of political leadership and legislation to protect Traveller, identity, culture/heritage, this colonial style approach created chaos among both settled and Traveller communities with a surge of anti-Traveller protests conducted (NCCA, 2023, p. 44). Through a child's eyes, I witnessed firsthand this chaos, observing the movement of Irish Travellers living in rows of tents and caravans on the margins of the estate, juggling their resistance with the necessity of finding a place to fit in. I remember, locals reacting to this movement negatively and harshly, with petitions for their removal exposing extreme prejudice, while some Traveller families crammed themselves onto tennis courts or play areas within estates, fighting for their right to exist.

My most vivid memory and the closest I have come to truly feeling the struggle was as a young girl, walking with my mother to a community sports day at the Slashers football grounds in Longford. On this day along the side of the road, I noticed caravans and a few scattered tents. But one tent caught my eye. It was not really a tent at all, just a fragile shelter made from polythene bags, sagging low to the wet ground. Beneath it, I noticed movement and felt human breath. Half-scared by the movement under the polythene and what I had just witnessed in the middle of the day, I looked up at my mother to see her reaction. She met my

eyes and said quietly, with a sadness in her voice, “That is the home of a family.” Her words, filled with empathy and understanding, stayed with me. In that moment, I felt something shift inside me her compassion connected deeply with me.

2.5 Stories at the Kitchen Table: Movement, Memory, and Grief

During all of this, at the kitchen table, my parents empathetic attitude shone through, I curiously listened to the stories my father told bringing an image to my mind of a group of people living long ago in colourful wagons, telling stories at campfires, travelling Ireland and making connections by offering helping hand to farming communities. Looking back now, my father’s story telling also engraved in me an empathic view for a salt of the hearth community, providing me an understanding and a social perspective on the hardships faced by the oppressed Irish Traveller Community. Amid all this change, we too as a family at the time were faced with a huge loss, the sudden death of my older brother Robert, this loss prompted an early return to my father’s rural roots, the Shannon side village of Clondra. From encountering death early and tragically, it was in the village of Clondra I found refuge from grief, from listening to stories about the history of the village and fond memories of neighbours and passed family members. The close-knit connecting community spirit helped me cope with my loss of confidence and provided me a feeling of belonging in time of displacement. Reflecting with elders who had lived in the area offered me a vivid vision of a time gone by. These conversations deepened my faith and gifted me a much-needed foundation stone one that steadied me through uncertain times and instilled a lifelong strength and shaped my commitment to community activism today. I believe that all families should have the privilege to experience a sense of belonging and community spirit this can be achieved through thoughtfully planned housing, carefully designed, attracting a balanced mix of age groups and

social backgrounds, this can foster meaningful intergenerational relationships and build resilient, inclusive neighbourhoods. When housing policy values not just shelter, but connection, it lays the groundwork for stronger, more cohesive communities.

2.6 Need to know Policy to Pavement: Examining Rural Housing Challenges Then and Now

From 1922 in Ireland the Free state prioritised redistribution of land reforms and home ownership. Up until the 1980s, the state played a major role in supporting homeownership through subsidies and public housing. But during the Celtic Tiger era (1995 – 2007), this support was rolled back, with Ireland experiencing unprecedented house price inflation driven by the volume of outstanding mortgage depth and housing growth. Reliance on private borrowing and market forces along with an unbalanced approach made the housing system more vulnerable taking it from boom to bust in 2008 (M. Norris & D. Coates, 2014, pp. 219 - 315). The effects of the recession of 2008 are still evident today throughout Rural Ireland particularly on rural communities like County Longford, in 2016 Longford had a pobal index score of -6.01, the second highest deprivation rate in the country a decrease from -5.12 in 2011. In 2020, the disposable income per person in Longford is €18,754 less than 80% of the state average (€23,461) (Longford County Council, 2023 - 2029, p. 25).

2.7 Over 20 Years working with Longford Women's Link (LWL) - Role of the Researcher in the Community

As a practitioner-researcher, my role is inseparable from my work in community development. With over two decades of experience across urban and rural settings, I bring a deeply practice-

based perspective to my research. My work spans the sectors of community development, adult education, community employment, and development of a quality early years sector, all of which were underpinned by a commitment to inclusive, participatory approaches. Grounded in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework and shaped by the principles of critical Pedagogy, I see research not as an external or purely academic exercise, but as a collaborative, community-embedded process. I view myself not as an expert studying others, but as a facilitator and co-learner collaborating with communities to create change.

Having returned to education as a mature student, I have a personal understanding of the barriers that many adults face in accessing learning opportunities. This insight informs my work supporting individuals and groups to identify and address personal and structural challenges through mentoring, facilitation, and programme design. My research approach centres on co-creating inclusive learning spaces, which are dialogical, culturally responsive, and grounded in real-life experiences. In these spaces, participants are not passive recipients of knowledge but active co-creators, whose lived experiences are central to the inquiry. I draw on a social constructivist perspective, where knowledge generated through shared dialogue, reflection, and collective action. These learning environments aim to challenge traditional power dynamics, build confidence, and foster mutual respect and understanding. I see education and research as powerful tools for community empowerment and organisational transformation. My goal is to help foster sustainable learning cultures that are participatory, reflective, and rooted in community needs supporting long-term, meaningful change.

2.8 Personal Reflection of the Researcher

Reflecting on the early part of my life, I recall feeling a deep sense of difference and sorrow for a community of people living on the margins of society, sheltered only by polytene sheets

against wind and rain. A Community forced by bylaws to settle without transition into enclosed spaces, corporate housing not designed to include but to exclude. The experiences I witnessed at a young age of a community of Irish Traveller Community enduring displacement and judgment instilled in me a social connection which I believe played a part in my development as a community activist, fuelling my dedication to advocate for those facing exclusion and injustice. Today I have had the privilege of working on a vision for a Community House, over the past two years I have walked this place, watching how people move, live, and connect here. The Community House mission is to provide a place where all can come together and gain a sense of belonging and pride as a community. But at the early stage of my work in the area, I dug deep, preparing the ground by talking, planning and dreaming, it was through this process I noticed an absentee from the Traveller Community which make up a large part of the population living in the area. Their voices, their ideas, are missing from the conversation round the table of planning. This absence sparked in me to learn more about a displaced community, to help me to further understand and get closer and steer my research Question.

“In what ways can a Women’s Community Education (WCE) support both Travellers and Non-Travellers to shape and maximise use of a dedicated Community House?”

To answer this question, I first needed to better understand the Traveller community, its history, culture, and the barriers it continues to face. Travellers have long been excluded from education and community decision-making, often leading to mistrust and underrepresentation. A review of the literature is essential to explore these issues.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

3.1 Introduction – From Curiosity to Research - Listening to the silence.

The following literature review stems from a personal need to understand the reasons behind the absence of the Traveller Community in local conversations. In many ways, this need arose through adopting WCE approach, which enabled me to recognise this absence in the first place. A WCE approach will continue to play a vital role throughout the study, not only in identifying gaps but also in building trust and creating open, honest conversations with the Traveller Community. Although I am not from the Traveller community myself, my work in Adult and Community Education, working with adults returning to education, many of whom are Travellers has opened my eyes to stories that are often I feel missing or overlooked. Through these experiences, I have heard powerful accounts of resilience, but also of exclusion and silence around identity and history, this leads me to question.

Even with recent Ethnicity Status gained in 2017 (O Halloran & O Regan, 2017)

Why are the Traveller Community the hardest to reach?

Being deeply committed to actively listening to the Ardnacassa Community in shaping the Community House (CH). A strong effort is required to reach and include marginalised and hard-to-reach voices, this has guided the direction for the enquiry.

The following literature I have reviewed moves beyond surface assumptions to explore why both Traveller's and Non-Traveller women who are too often absent from tables of planning. To carry out a meaningful and respectful inquiry and to do justice to both the Ardnacassa community and the vision for the CH, firstly I need to research the Traveller Community to gain a better insight into their world and enable me to make connection and ensure that I represent their perspectives accurately and respectfully. This review looks back at the journey

of the Irish Traveller Community, it reviews Traveller history, identity, cultural and a brief insight into nomadic life and historical governance from colonialism to a Post colonial Education system, to an Irish Free State and gain understating why a centuries old way of life continues to socially exclude a community living on the margins of society. In conducting this review it deepens my awareness, informs the research direction, and lays the foundation for the methodology that follows. Understanding a community's structural barriers is essential in shaping a pathway forward that is inclusive, informed, and grounded in lived realities of residents of Ardnacassa.

3.2 Historical Origins and Ethnic Identity of the Irish Traveller Community

The Irish Traveller community represents one of Ireland's oldest and most marginalised ethnic groups, while their exact origins are still a matter of academic debate due to their nomadic way of life for centuries going on documented (Gmelch, S.B & Gmelch. G, 1976, p. 10). Some theories suggest they date back to pre-Christian times, supported by the Cant word "*Galyune*" meaning God, possibly linked to a pagan deity and Travellers have also been linked to chieftains and skilled craftspeople, with historical references to itinerant whitesmiths in the 5th century AD (Gmelch & Gmelch, 1976, P.235 - 238). Others propose they are descendants of Celtic tribes who remained nomadic, later joined by those displaced during the Famine, this formed the basis of the "Drop-Out Theory" (Hayes,2006 cited in (NCCA, 2023, p. 9)) In a Study carried out to see if Irish Travellers have a genetic link with the Roma Community, it proved incorrect in the study and it was confirmed through the DNA study their presence in Ireland before the Cromwellian period, with genetic research showing a shared ancestry with the settled population but a separation occurring 1,000–2,000 years ago (Gilbert. E et al, 2017, pp. 1 - 12). Some would argue that it is important to note that ethnicity is not merely a product

of poverty or displacement but because of a society with lack of awareness of their culture and heritage (Helleiner, 2000, pp. 27 - 29). Anthropological studies have shown that Travellers possess a distinct language, *Canta*, a hybrid of Irish Gaelic and English, with unique grammar used primarily within the community (Ó hAodha, 2011, p. 23). This linguistic distinctiveness supports the argument that Travellers are an ethnic minority with deep historical roots rather than a socio-economic subgroup of the general population (NCCA, 2023).

3.3 Nomadism to 20th century Government Assimilation Policy

Historically, Travellers fulfilled essential roles within rural Irish society, they worked as tinsmiths, horse dealers, seasonal labourers' occupations that required movement and contributed to the cultural and economic fabric of local communities (Gmelch & Gmelch, 1976, pp. 225 - 238), whilst maintaining their economic independence. This nomadic way of life continued until around 1960, when a significant push toward assimilation began.

Since 1960, a range of government policies have been introduced based on the belief that the challenges faced by Travellers could be resolved by encouraging them to abandon their nomadic lifestyle and integrate into settled communities by moving into standard authority housing (Norris & Winston, 2005, P.803). Under *The Housing Act 1931*, Traveller accommodation considered within the framework of local authority rental housing, which accounted for approximately 90% of social housing in the Republic of Ireland at the time. It was not until 1963, when the government developed a policy specific to Travellers, the *1963 Report on the Commission on Itineracy* (M. Norris, Winston, 2005, p. 205). Future Taoiseach Charlie Haughey at the launch of the 1963 stated, 'there can be no final solution to the problems created by Itinerants unless they are absorbed into society' this set the direction for Ireland (Mc Veigh, 2008, p.91 - 102). However, with no Traveller Representative involved in the

Commission, this marked not a recognition of cultural difference, but a first step from government to assimilate the Traveller community to a settled way of life, the legacy of this report paved the way in government policy towards Travellers (U. Crowley, 2009, p. 4).

3.4 Relocation, Cultural Displacement, and the Legacy of Post-Colonial Oppression

From the previous paragraph, it becomes clear that the political landscape of post-independence Ireland played a significant role in shaping assimilation, not only for the Traveller community but also for many settled rural families. The newly formed Free State government adopted a top-down approach, echoing the colonial governance style it had replaced. Church and state worked hand in hand, continuing to exert control over the population, particularly in rural areas. Many rural Irish families, who had previously worked for large landowners under the old estate system, members of my family included, found themselves in a free state Ireland unemployed and homeless following the decline of the big estates. With land redistribution offering limited economic stability, a new model was needed. This came in the form of industrialisation, factories and industrial projects slowly began appearing in rural towns, marking a delayed entry for rural Ireland into the Industrial Revolution a century after Britain and mainland Europe (McPartland, 2020, pp. 80 - 83). As a result, rural areas experienced significant social and economic shifts, including increased migration to cities and larger towns in search of work and opportunity. From the 1960s onwards, Ireland experienced a shift toward urbanisation and state-led modernisation, which involved relocating both rural settled communities and Traveller communities into urban areas. However, for the Traveller community, this marked a significant turning point. Government housing policies enforced a sedentary lifestyle, effectively forcing Travellers to abandon their traditional nomadic way of life. This led to a deep cultural disruption (www.legislation.ie, 2025).

3.5 Power, Hegemony - Structural Marginalisation

Power, as defined by theorists like Luke (Lukes, 2005, p. 27), is not only about who makes decisions but also about whose voices are heard and whose are silenced. For decades, both power and hegemony have contributed to the oppression of the Irish people, creating a culture of conform. Gramsci's concept of hegemony explains how dominance maintained not just through force, but through consent, reinforced by cultural institutions such as media, religion, and education (A. Gramsci, 1971, p. 57). For the Traveller community, this has resulted in long-standing structural marginalisation. Dr. Sindy Joyce (2019) points out how institutions like policing, housing, and education continue to uphold norms that exclude Travellers building on historical non inclusive legislation and practices aimed at absorption and assimilation have resulted in cultural genocide and severe internalised trauma passed from generation to generation (Joyce.S,2019, p.146). When Travellers are left out of planning decisions, they are often expected to fit into settled ways of living, which pushes their own culture to the side (Joyce, 2019, p. 15).

3.6 Absence of identity from Irish Education System

Education plays a critical role in either sustaining or challenging inequality. As Gramsci argued, the development of class consciousness and counter-hegemonic resistance depends on access to knowledge and critical reflection (Femia, 1981, P.61). For the Traveller community, historical exclusion from education has not only been a consequence of inequality, but it has also served as a tool for maintaining it. Rooted in Ireland's colonial past, education was used to instil rigid hierarchies and exclude rural Catholic and nomadic populations from participation in national progress (Mc Partland, 2020). Even post-independence, the shift toward a capitalist, consumption-driven society deepened this divide. Traveller and some settled communities, already marginalised, were left further behind by systems that prioritised

assimilation over inclusion (MacLaughlin, 2007, p. 47). This educational marginalisation has contributed to cycles of poverty, exclusion, and limited civic participation. From this, I believe understanding this legacy is key to designing inclusive approaches that acknowledge both historical trauma and community resilience.

3.7 Education as a Site of Struggle: Colonial Control, Religious Power.

To better understand the context mentioned prior, it is important to consider the origins of the Irish formal education system. During the Penal Laws, informal hedge schools emerged to serve the Catholic population, who were excluded from state education. Under British rule, the state took on responsibility for education, but with limited engagement from the Catholic community. After Catholic Emancipation, the responsibility was effectively handed over to the Catholic Church. The establishment of the national education system in 1837, while progressive in theory, was rooted in control and conformity. The Church became a powerful gatekeeper, shaping both religious and national identity through education (Walsh, 2016, p. 10). Despite hopes that Irish independence would lead to greater educational justice, many groups, particularly Traveller families, remained marginalised. In rural areas, education was hard to access, and for those with nomadic lifestyles, even more so. Laws like the Vagrancy Act of 1824 further stigmatised Travellers, casting them as beggars and social outcasts and remained in place till 1988 and Mac Laughlin argued after this year still anti nomadic were still enforced by the then Irish State ((ibid)cited in NCCA, 2023, p.18 – 19). For many Travellers, formal education has not only been physically inaccessible but also emotionally harmful. The legacy of discrimination has been internalised by generations, often felt as shame or self-doubt, what some refer to as the "monkey on the shoulder," a lasting inner critic shaped by systemic bias. While rural, settled Irish communities have historically faced displacement under long-standing aristocratic rule and while the effects of that control have carried through generations,

Irish Travellers have endured the most of persistent prejudice to this day. Unfortunately, still today, the actions of a few are often used to justify damaging stereotypes, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and mistrust.

3.8 Towards Transformative Inclusion: Ethnic Identity

While policy developments and ethnic recognition mark significant milestones, meaningful inclusion of Traveller culture in Irish education remains limited. On 1 March 2017, then Taoiseach Enda Kenny addressed a full Dáil as he formally recognised Travellers as an ethnic minority, acknowledging “a long and difficult history” and stating it was “a day for mutual understanding and respect” (O Halloran & O Regan, 2017). Despite intercultural education policies (NCCA, 2023), there is little to suggest that Traveller identity remains underrepresented or stereotyped in schools. Traveller parents continue to report that their children face bullying, stereotyping, and exclusion within school environments with Collins (2012), as cited in (Boyle. A, Flynn. M & Hanfin.J, 2020, p. 1405) underscoring the enduring resilience of the Traveller community in the face of this persistent exclusion.

In contrast, community education, provides inclusive spaces where Traveller voices, experiences, and knowledge are listened to and centred. These grassroots platforms challenge deficit narratives, promote critical dialogue, and foster resilience and identity formation. For formal education to become truly inclusive, it must move beyond tokenism embracing culturally responsive pedagogy, co-designed curricula, and authentic Traveller participation in shaping education policy and practice. Without such structural change, recognition remains symbolic rather than transformative. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

3.9 Conclusion – Moving Forward

The Irish Traveller community has deep roots in Irish history, yet they have faced generations of exclusion and misunderstanding. Far from just being a group shaped by poverty or displacement, Travellers have a unique culture, language, and identity that has often been ignored or erased especially by government policies and the education system. Even with official recognition in 2017, real inclusion is still lacking. Traveller children still deal with discrimination in schools, and their culture remains underrepresented. Community-based education has done more to support Traveller identity than formal schooling ever has. So, where do we go from here? To make education a space for real change, I believe we need to look at theorists Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Mezirow, and feminist educators who all argue that learning should be about empowerment and not control. Their ideas will help explore how education can become a space where Traveller voices are not just heard but valued. I believe that to truly evoke the voice of the Longford Traveller Community living in Ardnacassa, I must first build trust and make meaningful connections. Drawing on successful approaches from the past, I feel it is important to begin with individual outreach, followed with an attempt to bring about collective engagement that includes both Traveller and non-Traveller women and also I believe it is vital that this process is gender-balanced, ensuring that the voices of male travellers are included, as their perspectives are essential to understanding the full range of travel experiences and creating truly inclusive outcomes. Firstly, I will explore the role of WCE as a powerful catalyst for empowerment and initiating long-term change.

Chapter 4 - Women's Community Education (WCE) and the Power of Critical Reflection

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the powerful legacy and continuing impact of WCE in Ireland, a movement deeply rooted in the values of empowerment, critical consciousness, and social justice. Drawing inspiration from the pioneering work of Paulo Freire, it reflects on how adult and community education, particularly for women has served not just as a means of personal development, but as a form of collective resistance and societal transformation. As both a researcher and female community activist, my journey through this study has been deeply personal. Engaging with the literature has not only expanded my academic understanding but also provoked profound reflection on my own experiences and the lived realities of the communities I work with. It is in this space, where the personal meets the political that true insight has emerged. Freire argues that understanding oppression requires not just academic knowledge but personal recognition of its presence in our own lives. This resonates with my evolving awareness of the parallels between historical injustices in Irish society and the ongoing marginalisation the Traveller community and many women who are affected by poverty, domestic violence, exclusion from tables of discussions on matters that concern. The chapter traces the origins and evolution of WCE in Ireland, from its emergence in the 1970s to its enduring legacy in organisations like Longford Women's Link (LWL). It demonstrates how feminist educators challenged the dominant narratives of a patriarchal and clerical state, creating empowering non formal educational spaces where women find their voice. The practice of outreach community activism work, starting with dialogue, it is "across the fence dialogue" that turn shared experiences into collective action. Through a Freirean lens, this chapter reaffirms that community education is more than a method, it is a movement. It is rooted in democratic values, enabling learners to question, reflect, and act on the social conditions shaping their lives. As I reflect on this journey, both academic and personally, I see more clearly the transformative potential of

WCE, grounded in empathy, mutual respect, and social justice. In this chapter I endeavour to not only honour the legacy of WCE but also demonstrate the ongoing need for WCE to be funded, without questioning, core funding is essential to support the ongoing struggle for inclusive, dialogical, and socially conscious education in Ireland today.

4.2 The Evolution and Legacy of Women's Community Education (WCE) in Ireland

Women's Community Education (WCE) has played a transformative role in shaping adult education in Ireland, particularly for marginalised women. Emerging in the 1970s, WCE bridged the personal and political, offering women a space to challenge the dominant narratives shaped by a patriarchal and religiously influenced state (B. Connolly, 2007, p. 125). Rooted in Freirean principles of empathy, love, and critical consciousness, WCE responded to high literacy needs in disadvantaged communities. Through active listening and systemic critique, it uncovered broader educational gaps (Grummel, 2023, p. 147). WCE offered empowering spaces where women, long silenced by a church-state coalition and post-colonial ideals of Irish womanhood, could see themselves as agents of change ((Fitzsimons & Kennedy, 2021) cited Fitzsimons, 2023, p. 1). These groups not only supported personal development but also became integral to wider social movements, helping to shape inclusive, community-driven education structures like VTOS and PLCs and develop leading organisations in the field Longford's LWL and Tallaght's an Cosan.

4.3 Legacy lives on in grassroots organisations like Longford Womens link (LWL)

The legacy of WCE lives on through grassroots initiatives like Longford Women's Link (LWL). In the mid-1990s, Longford's ICA brought together women from both rural and urban backgrounds who, through shared dialogue, identified common barriers such as childcare,

transport, finance, education, and domestic violence. In response, three feminist activists—Tess Murphy, Elsie Moxham, and the late Mary O’Hara, acted. They highlighted these issues at European level, successfully securing funding for the *New Opportunities for Women* (NOW) programme, laying the foundation for LWL and its wraparound model of support. Over the past 30 years, LWL has been pivotal to the adult education sector in Longford. By centring women’s voices, LWL helped facilitate the passing of the Childcare Act (1991) and established Catkins Childcare to enable women’s return to work and learning. Building on this success, LWL later secured a partnership with Southeast Technological University (SETU), bringing third-level education to Longford and surrounding rural counties. LWL’s work has significantly influenced the Early Years Sector in Ireland, contributing to the development of childcare regulation, child protection policies, and the transition to an accredited sector. Through access to education, many women have experienced personal achievement and gained social and economic independence.

4.4 Paulo Freire - Education through Dialogue

“Before I became a citizen of the world, I was and am first a citizen of Recife” cited in (KIRYLO, 2011, p. 3). Freire reflects on his first word stating that before we become citizens of a world, we must become aware of citizens of our place of origin, embody an awareness of our existence, place of doing, dreaming and landscape of our identity (Darder.A, 2021, p. 20). Paulo Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil, he grew up during this time of deep inequality, and his family, once middle class, experienced significant financial hardship during the Great 1930’s. During his childhood he witnessed firsthand poverty, within his own family and surrounding communities, this early observation played a major impact in his mind, hearth and soul and set a seed of empathy that anchored him in dedicating his life to support others to

overcome an oppressive banking education system that he believed to be the root cause of inequality (KIRYLO, 2011, pp. 3 - 23). Freire opposed colonisation seeing it as a means of devastating impact on humans setting them up to conform, follow without question and see the boss as the one who knows all, and this reasoning can result in the oppressed becoming the oppressor (Freire, 1970, p. 36). The delivery of a banking method of education, where the student is a mere passive recipient of the knowledge delivered by the teacher, this top-down approach left no room for questioning resulting in the downtrodden having no self - belief and moving further from the margins of society (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Paulo Freire's early critical observations shaped his mission to address social and economic injustices. These insights planted the seed for his revolutionary approach to education, one that seeks liberation through a collaborative teacher–student relationship.

Freire argued that unlike animals, which unconsciously adapt to their environment, humans are conscious beings capable of reflection. While animals build hives or burrows by instinct, humans live not just in the world but with the world, through language, reflection, and action. Because of this capacity, humans are constantly evolving. Although shaped by limitations, their conscious awareness empowers them to transform their reality. This transformation occurs when individuals recognise themselves as agents of change, capable of stepping outside their immediate circumstances and taking ownership of their decisions in solidarity with others (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970, pp. 71 -72). We live in a world full of limits, like poverty, injustice, or lack of education and these can hold us back. Even though we have the power to think and act, this power can be blocked by the systems we live in, an example of this is when we look at Ireland's education system was then centralised, formal, and dominated by the Catholic Church, limiting access for women and disadvantaged groups (AONTAS, 2021, p. 12). Despite different contexts, Freire's focus on education as liberation

inspired many grassroots movements in Ireland, especially among women, promoting collective reflection and action to challenge rigid structures (McDonagh, 2001, pp. 45 - 46).

Paulo Freire was heavily influenced by Marxist ideas and thinkers like Antonio Gramsci he opposed an oppressive education approach that just served as a way of passing on information, he believed education could serve as a powerful tool with capabilities of helping people who are marginalised or oppressed to understand their situation and feel empowered to act. He thought that through dialogue and critical thinking, people could challenge unfair systems and work toward a more just society. In short, he saw education as a way for the oppressed to gain the tools they need to fight for their own liberation. He disapproved of the conventional "banking" methods of education, in which instructors provide knowledge to obedient pupils. Rather, he introduced the concept of Critical Consciousness through the promotion of dialogical education, in which educators and learners participate in a reciprocal process of inquiry and introspection. According to Freire, education should enable students to challenge injustices, critically engage with their surroundings, and actively participate in social change, when we consider a woman in a domestic violence situation the impact of oppressive power has led to many women internalizing their experience leading to sense of hopelessness and blaming themselves which can result in mental distress (Tew, 2006, p. 43). Freire approach helps shift learning from passive reception to shared power and social transformation which has resulted in organisations such as LWL enable women together to combat soul destroying issues such as Domestic violence and enable women to heal. Freire's ideas about education as a means of empowerment and social change have played a huge part in shaping and developing my approach.

4.5 Coming Full Circle - Driving Meaningful Change through Dialogue

Community Education (CE) was formally recognised in national policy (Department of Education and Science, 2000) and further strengthened in 2024. Its importance outlined in the *Charter for Community Education*, strengthened by conversation round the meaning of outreach ¹ which I was afforded the opportunity to participated in. The Charter frames CE as flexible, learner-led, and rooted in participation and personal growth, allowing learners to progress at their own pace while also contributing to the development of their communities. CE is not just educational it is deeply democratic.



LWL Wall

¹ [Stream episode 4. Meaning Of Outreach in Community Ed by EPALE Ireland podcast | Listen online for free on SoundCloud](#)

To drive meaningful change for women in Longford, continued investment in women's groups and the delivery of WCE is essential to fostering critical thinking, empowerment, and lasting social transformation. Today, I continue to uphold WCE, an approach that has guided me from the beginning and I find my studies and my work coming full circle, witnessing myself using across the fence dialogue in Ardnacassa Area, like the technique used by the women of inner-city Dublin in the 1970's. The principles of Paulo Freire (1970), who emphasised education as a tool for empowerment, dialogue, and social transformation (Freire. 1970, pp. 71 - 72) remain at the heart of what I do. Dialogue plays a vital role in both the formation and ongoing strength of groups in community education. Drawing on Paulo Freire's work, true dialogue is more than just conversation, it is a process rooted in mutual respect, critical thinking, and shared understanding (Freire. 1970, pp. 71 - 73). When women come together in a learning group, dialogue holistically managed creates a safe space where everyone's voice valued, and where trust and solidarity can grow. This foundation is crucial for forming strong, collaborative groups.

4.6 Connecting Communities: Inclusive Practice and Participation in Local Democracy

Inspired by Freire's ideas, and after witnessing a vulnerable community in need of support, I looked for a practical way to help them have a real voice in decisions that affected their lives. I believed it was important to support the Ardnacassa community in becoming meaningfully and actively involved in local planning in a way that could lead to lasting change. This means looking at how the community can move beyond just being consulted and instead become active participants and leaders in local council decisions. Central to this is examining how community groups can better access funding streams and influence local development plans through structures such as PPNs and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs). By uncovering these entry points and barriers, my research aims to support a marginalised Ardnacassa community in asserting their voice and visibility within local governance, helping

to turn policy commitments into lived realities, reflecting the roadmap set out by Department of Rural and Community Development (Department of Rural and Community Development with Pobal, 2023, p. 9).

Longford PPN, now over a decade in operation, provides a valuable example of how participatory structures can support community engagement. Designed to enable local community groups to apply for democratically approved local funding, the PPN framework offers a platform through which marginalised voices can be amplified. While critiques persist about the complex and competitive nature of its application process, the PPN has nonetheless become a meaningful tool for community-led advocacy and action. As a community activist, I gained a seat at the table of Longford PPN Secretariat and part of LWL member group permitted me a pathway to bring the voice of the Ardnacassa community to life through this process. I advocated for the creation of non-formal WCE space and funding for the delivering of non-formal WCE programmes as the starting point for dialogue within communities Like Ardnacassa that have long been left behind. Democratically, this advocacy helped draw local government attention to the value of WCE. It also highlighted the important role of established WCE providers like LWL and underscored the urgent need for sustained financial support from local authorities to promote genuine community growth. first programme I developed for Ardnacassa Community House, to get the ball rolling, I titled "*Teacht Le Chéile*" (Coming Together), which I sourced funding through Longford Sláintecare programme a new initiative to improve health and wellbeing in Longford (Longford County Council, 2022). This programme, focused on community wellbeing, through delivering a unique Personal Development programme which I designed through Covid, having at this time prior studied during this time in area of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), I believed RPL could play a key part in supporting a vulnerable Ardnacassa Community to take time to recognise their achievement and skills and build upon them, this approach along with incorporating inclusive

workshops such as cultural diversity, and practical community gardening, played a part in meeting the needs of all living within and it initiated for some confidence, recognition, and opportunities for continued learning and growth. However, after delivering the programme, it became evident that a deeper understanding of the wider community is still required especially for those who were not at the table and then involved further outreach and making connections to understand the trauma. Through ongoing observation and dialogue, it became clear that some voices were notably missing, particularly those of the local Traveller community. This realisation marked a turning point in the project's direction and purpose. In response to this observation, I reached outward and evoked conversation and through dialogue and hearing the needs and gaining support from other women to continue creating an outreach space for women in the CH to come together and converse and plan, from this I developed with an active ear a second programme: *"Connecting Communities"*. This initiative aimed to strengthen partnerships with other custodians of the Ardnacassa Community House and with an aim to actively engage underrepresented groups in its activities. The overarching goal was to foster a more inclusive, collaborative environment one in which all community members could feel seen, heard, and empowered to participate fully and it was successful with the development of Seven Sisters Women's Group.

4.7 WCE - Community Response - Grassroots LWL Seven Sisters Women's Group



The Seven Sisters supportive women's group name derived from an Aboriginal folklore story, drawn from myself sharing a magical visit I had last Summer to Uluru in Australia, where I became interested in Aboriginal art, serving as a visual language, to convey cultural knowledge and ancestral connections and how it and how it is deeply intertwined with storytelling, Aboriginal Artwork, not merely decorative but serves as vital tool for passing down history, laws, and spiritual beliefs through generations (Morphy, 1991). Hearing about the Seven Sisters Story, one of the most widely shared dreaming songlines I recognised how this story along with depicts ancestral women pursued across land and sky, embodying themes of perseverance, kinship, and law and continues to be represented in painting, ceremony, and star knowledge further information on this story can be viewed in link in footnote at the end of page ². Sharing this resulted in the group of women having individual and collective reflections on community care, shared learning, and interconnectedness, symbolised by the idea that we are all united under the night sky. This reflection inspired a star-making workshop, held in the community house and facilitated by one of our group members who was completing a piece artwork for a National Domestic Violence Campaign, titled One Million Stars to End Violence (www.onemillionstars.ie, 2025). Through a creative process, creativity emerged as a welcoming and authentic approach, one that supports the complex and busy lives of women,

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9pu4fGOp2Y>

fosters connection, and offers a way of expressing emotion both silently and verbally through demonstration, building collective resilience. I continuously observed and I found through this activity held the front room of the CH titled “Charlies Room” emerged as a space of empowerment, connection, cultural dialogue, when students are creating art around social topics it facilitates critical consciousness (Tunstall, 2024, p. 17).

4.8 Conclusion

Building on these insights and experiences, the following methodology chapter outlines the approach taken to explore these issues more deeply. It focuses on inclusive, participatory research methods specifically designed to amplify the voices of those often excluded from mainstream decision-making processes, particularly members of the Traveller community.

Chapter 5 Methodology

A Young Woman Questions

One cold November morning, a young lady was putting rubbish in the bin outside the Ardnacassa Community House, Longford. I approached her and said Hello, she smiled and responded Hi. I introduced myself and informed her of a Personal Development programme I was delivering in the Ardnacassa Community House, she looked at me confused and responded to me, Personal Development, what is that? I smiled gently, took a small step back, meeting the gaze in her eyes and with open hands, I said, “it is a space where you can take time for yourself, reflect, talk things through... over a cuppa.

In Chapter 3, of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire emphasises the importance of teaching with love, where dialogue allows learners to co-create knowledge. The teacher becomes a researcher too, working with students to shape a curriculum that reflects the needs of the community (Freire, 1970, pp. 61 - 62). We cannot learn if we do not know, this statement works both ways, as a teacher I am also an active learner within this research. Capturing the conversation with the young women reflects Paulo Freire’s core idea that though dialogic process education can be transformative.

5.1 Introduction to Methodology

In this research, I explored the ways WCE programmes support both Traveller and non-Traveller women in shaping and maximising the use of a dedicated community house in Ardnacassa Area of Longford. The study captures the perspectives of both members and non-members of the Longford Traveller community. Data collected through a focus group involving eight women from diverse backgrounds, as well as through semi-structured individual interviews with two women and two men from the Traveller community. This chapter outlines

the methodological approach that underpinned the study. Building on knowledge I gained from Desk Research, the Literature Review conducted to deepen my understanding of the Irish Traveller community and the years of displacement they endured, this enquiry drew on Paulo Freire's principles of critical pedagogy and bell hooks' feminist engaged participatory pedagogy. These frameworks inform both my ethical stance and participatory relationship with the participants resulting in the development of a naturally occurring action piece of research, not just a set of technical steps. Inspired by Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1929–1935), this study draws on Gramsci's ideas stating rather than privileging formal expertise, the methodology values lie with local, lived views and sees participants as co-creators in the research process. Gramsci viewed two intellectual types, the Traditional intellectual, today they would be viewed as someone maybe in a professional role such as a doctor, academic etc and the organic intellectuals viewed today as someone distinguishable today not by their profession, but by their work close to the ground, as community leaders in directing the ideas and objectives for communities, those who know what is needed for an area, referred to as the insider (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 3 - 7). Gramsci's idea of an organic intellectual is especially important in working with the local Ardnacassa community, the need for this approach is vital for Government to deliver upon guidelines set in 2023 Departments Guide for Inclusive Community, stating that lived experiences are valued as important sources of knowledge that can provide direction for local community planning (Department of Rural and Community Development with Pobal, 2023, p. 9).

In the research I adapted a qualitative, critical feminist methodology approach as it positively aligned with the exploratory and reflective nature of my inquiry and allowed me to engage directly with the participants involved, in a collaborative and individual sensitive manner. As the research is based with Community Development principles, I chose a bottom-up approach

to support me as an Social Constructivist Researchers to gain insight into Ardnacassa Community by involving community members, this approach permits democratic participatory to identify where they sit in their community, analyse their surroundings, identify problems and articulate solutions (Kumar.R, 2005, p. 109) to support further grassroots development of a programme for the Ardnacassa Community House.

5.2 Positioning the Researcher: A Personal and Political Standpoint

My perspective, shaped by my lived experience as a young girl growing up in 1970s Ireland, within a social and cultural context where educational and career opportunities for women were limited and poverty and exclusion of the Traveller community was part of the reality. I believe we cannot undertake meaningful research without thoroughly knowing ourselves and acknowledging our position as part of the very fabric of the epistemological tapestry. My personal story placed within the Thesis provides the reader an insight to who I am, socially, culturally, politically, and I believe this reflexivity is a key component of ethical and transformative research. Rather than claiming objectivity or distance, I was part of the research process, engaged with participants in a shared journey of inquiry and understanding. From my current studies, I came to learn about autoethnography and identified that it underscored my role as a researcher. Autoethnographies are narrative expressions of life, it requires you to be immersed in your self-experience, in the research I share part of my personal story with the reader so that they can journey with me in the process of meaning making, evoking response and enabling the reader to witness learner transformation (Mc Cormack, O Neil. J et al, 2020, p. 81). My personal narrative is not separate from the research but is a constitutive thread that shapes its direction, meaning, and relevance. By weaving my personal narrative into the broader social and historical context, I aim to contribute to a more holistic and authentic form

of knowledge production, one that recognises the value of lived experience as a source of insight, resistance, and transformation (Mc Cormack, O Neill et al, 2020, P.75).

5.3 Ontological and Epistemological perspective

Ontology concerns the nature of reality, what exists and how we understand being. It recognises that humans are not passive observers of the world but active participants in shaping it through their interactions. Human Existence otherwise known as Dasein is not only close to us, but also us being in the world, we don't simply exist as isolated individuals, we are always "in the world," therefore our identity and understanding arise through our interactions with others and the spaces we inhabit. This concept highlights that human life is inseparable from the world around us and it is through this embeddedness that we find meaning and purpose. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 36). Epistemology, on the other hand, focuses on how knowledge is acquired and understood, how we know what we know, what counts as reliable knowledge, and how we justify our beliefs. To question permits us to know, considering this we should all be critical realists, Tom Fryer's approach to epistemology is rooted in critical realism, he combines the idea that there is a real world independent of our perceptions with the understanding that our knowledge about it is always influenced by social and cultural contexts. So according to Fryer while reality exists outside of our minds, our access to it is never direct or complete. Instead, we interpret and understand the world through lenses shaped by language, culture, and experience. This means we should be aware that what we "know" and that our knowledge is always partial and subject to revision. Critical realism encourages us to dig beneath surface appearances to uncover deeper structures or causes, while remaining open to questioning and refining our understanding. Fryer's ideas highlight why it is important to adopt a critical realist epistemology: it balances acknowledging an objective reality with recognising the complexities

and limitations of human knowledge. Epistemologically, knowledge is acquired through various means, including witnessing, experience, and conversation (Fryer, 2020, pp. 19 - 26).

5.4 Lived Reality - Social Constructivism

This research is grounded in a social constructivist worldview, which holds that reality is not objective or static, but is continually shaped through social, cultural, and historical interactions. What we often see does not always reflect the lived realities of communities, capturing reality requires digging deeper, a critical awareness of social constructivism. An understanding of 'truth' in society is contending accounts of reality (Grint.K, 2005, p. 1471). Berger and Luckmann, in their study of the sociology of knowledge, explained that knowledge is shaped by what a society collectively considers to be true or valid. (Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T, 1967, p. 3). In communities, where there are deeply rooted social issues such as low literacy, domestic violence, high levels of addiction, and criminal activity, these challenges often lead to a silenced or disempowered community. Sometimes in places where people are silenced in fear it is important for leadership.

Addressing this silence requires a participative leadership approach that actively involves community members in creating change. This research adopts a social constructivist ontological position, acknowledging that reality is not fixed but shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Drawing on my experience working with adults returning to education, I have observed firsthand how cultural background, social positioning, and educational access shape how individuals interpret and navigate the world. Lived experience is central to understanding how people make sense of their realities. Therefore, this research rejects a detached, objective stance. Instead, it embraces a relational and interpretive methodology where future planning is co-constructed through critical dialogue and reflection.

Having worked with adults returning to education, I have seen how background, culture, and social position influence how people interpret the world. A single, objective view of reality cannot account for the diverse experiences within a community. Aligned with this, my epistemological stance is interpretivist. I believe knowledge is co-created through interaction, dialogue, and mutual understanding. I do not approach this work as a detached observer, but as an active participant in the process, engaging with learners through critical dialogue. In the research ontology and epistemology interconnected form the foundation of this research (Crotty, 1998, p. 4). This study through leading with an autobiographic this reflection adopts a participatory approach, using human dialogue to explore the lived realities of a community.

5.5 Research Methods - Positivism and Anti Positivism – Qualitative

In the early 19th century Hegelians led an enquiry of practical social analysis, positivism research through data and in the turn of 20th century anti-positivism was introduced identifying that because human research was so complex, continuously moving and with humans not experiencing the world numerically, a new approach named anti-positivism (qualitative research), was required and valued as an approach to capture the full human experience (www.positivism.org, 2012). Humans do not naturally experience the world numerically, qualitative unlike quantitative that captures everything scientifically, it is more interesting as it captures the lived realities, measuring the human experience face front. In previous research, I used a balanced mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative paradigms rooted in both positivist and anti-positivist perspectives, often aligned but this is not always the case. This approach, whilst it suited my study at the time previous, which involved critically analysing the accredited Early Years sector, examining the number of qualified staff in Longford and their views on behaviour management, with the live nature of the current study

a freer flowing, organic conversational style was required. Recognising that I am not a member of the Traveller community and from thinking through the best approach to engage with participants from the local Traveller community, I sought advice from two Traveller women with experience collaborating with the Traveller Communities. Their thoughtful guidance affirmed that my intention to engage in open, informal dialogue was respectful and appropriate. They highlighted the value of storytelling and the importance of listening with presence and care. This approach further confirmed by reflection on my own personal and professional experiences, which have shaped my understanding of marginalisation, agency, and the importance of voice.

These experiences support me in deciding the best approach would be a qualitative methodology, one that centres relationships, trust, and shared understanding. Qualitative research can explore a wide range of social world elements, including the texture and weave of daily life, and provide insights into the experiences and imaginations of research participants (Mason, 1993, p. 1). My Feminist standpoint starting with women's lives and voices (L. Peake & M. Mikhail, 2025, p. 180) my voice included formed the foundation of my research approach.

5.6 Feminist perspective

Feminist research values the inclusion of voices from marginalised and oppressed groups, especially those often left out of traditional research. Traditionally Women were largely excluded from early moral development research, Lawrence Kohlberg a well-known researcher in the area, played a part in this displacement, he based much of his research on male participants primarily boys and the results of his enquiry led the development of his theory of moral development. As a result, he concluded that women were less morally developed than

men. Thankfully, this claim later criticised for overlooking the different ways women tend to approach moral reasoning by feminist researcher Carol Gilligan (1982) challenged this view. She argued that the research was biased because it did not include women's experiences. Gilligan showed that women were not less developed, but simply not studied properly, highlighting the need for more inclusive research methods (Wigginton, 2019, p. 4). Considering the need for more inclusive research and my alignment with Ledwith and hooks, who see feminist pedagogy as a distinct approach to education that should be applied in all learning contexts, regardless of topic or gender (Fitzsimons, 2015, p. 185) this neoliberal approach is consciously used in my research with male voices included.

5.7 Feminist Paradigm and where I Stand: Lived Experience

This research is rooted in my understanding from birth to date and from having the privilege at a young age of experiencing what I come to realise now to be organic grassroots community education, gained whilst actively listening and curiously questioning the stories my father shared with me around the kitchen table. This along with taking the wise step to return to education as an adult 20 years ago, the space I returned to was inviting, safe and open, which permitted me to grow, develop, find my voice and enable me dismantle the internalised oppression I and many others had received from an one size fits all, archaic education system that demanded conformity over individuality.

This perspective has shaped a research paradigm as critical feminist research grounded in constructivist and transformative values. Individualised learning is an approach I too use today when working with adults returning to education, From working with many women who have experienced gender trauma my approach aligns with Carl Rogers' view of the learner as autonomous and capable of self-directed growth with student centred teaching permitting a

curious mindset can transform individuals to emerge powerfully in inclusive, community-based learning environments (Rogers, 2020, pp. 184 - 188). These values resonate deeply with WCE, which frames learning not just as personal development but as a form of social and political engagement. WCE embraces the idea highlighted by Brid Connolly that “*the personal is political*,” positioning learning spaces as places where transformation can occur (B. Connolly, 2007, p. 124) and I have found to work and be truly transformative in individual learners’ lives. A holistic education is one that intersects the personal experience, critical thinking, and political awareness linking individual growth to broader social structures and enabling learners to become active participants in their journeys and shape change (hooks, 1994, P.15). This research paradigm is not value neutral. It is explicitly aligned with principles of equity, inclusion, and empowerment. As Feminist methodology is not tied to one size fits all it provided me space to consider the best method for the research at hand, we never know how what it is like to be someone else, but we can gain understanding through listening and accepting their lived experience (Oakley, 1981, p. 3).

5.8 Desk Research – preparing the ground.

Guided by a feminist approach, the desk research phase was a crucial first step for me in this research it shaped how I engaged later with the Ardnacassa community. Feminist research prioritises ethical responsibility, reflexivity, and an awareness of positionality, especially when working with groups who have historically been marginalised (Letherby, 2003, p. 74). In this review, I recognised my position as an outsider to the Traveller community and understood the need to approach the enquiry with care, cultural sensitivity, and humility. The desk research allowed me to begin this process by deepening my understanding of the Irish Traveller community’s history, culture, and the systemic inequalities they continue to face (Pavee Point,

2018, pp. 22 - 29). It also helped me to reflect critically on the risks of “othering” a central concern in both feminist and participatory research (Said, 1978; hooks, 1984) and reinforced the importance of listening and learning before acting. This phase laid the foundation for engaging with the community in a way that is respectful, informed, and grounded in social justice. From carrying out desk research it also provided me an insight to how much the Traveller heritage and culture was missing from the academic books and how only for the resilience of the Traveller Community themselves to push their voices through very little would be known of the Irish indigenous people.

5.9 Limitations and Challenges faced especially in evoking Traveller participation.

Through my initial outreach grassroots community work within the Ardnacassa area I observed the absence of the Traveller community from local planning discussions, this steered my initial goal to collaborate exclusively with this Traveller Community. However, due to a slower than expected engagement, I moved with the local need and adopted throughout the research a broader yet still a focused approach, welcoming diverse participants from the area who expressed interest in the Community House, while continuing to prioritise inclusion and representation of the Traveller community. This reflects a core principle of qualitative research adaptability to context and a respect for community-led direction (Brydon - Miller et al, 2003, pp. 13 - 15). Over the years of working to address the needs of a local community, I developed a committed work ethic and a critical consciousness to ensure problems were identified and through discourse overcome, this approach stood to me in carrying out this research, as identifying an absence led me to enquiry to know why the Traveller community wasn't getting involved. To gain an understanding I spoke with a local Traveller woman, a gatekeeper who worked on behalf of the Longford Community. She helped me understand the recent shift of

the Longford Traveller community under the Offaly Traveller Movement; this shift made it hard to source participants within the study's timeframe.

As the research unfolded in real time, I adopted a flexible, organic approach, aiming to create inclusive, reflective spaces where knowledge could be co-produced with participants. During this process, I shared my positionality with members of the Seven Sisters Women's Group. Some were already active in local initiatives and familiar with the research context. Our shared dialogue about the impact of inconsistent funding and political interference in community support evoked strong interest, and several women voluntarily stepped forward to participate.

Informed consent was obtained, and participants agreed to be part of a focus group session, held during a final Lantern Workshop, a workshop derived from conversation about Aboriginal art and storytelling and delivered by a local feminist facilitator who too participated in the research. The session was recorded to support transcription and data analysis. As detailed in the findings chapter, the focus group yielded rich insights and demonstrated the power of WCE, while also underscoring the need for continued engagement and research.

5.10 Adaptive Methodology

Given the unstable dynamics within the Ardnacassa area and the influence of shifting global issues, the small rural community of Ardnacassa continues to experience a constantly evolving environment. In response, a flexible and inclusive design approach was adopted, one that adapted to changing circumstances and fostered ongoing community engagement. This consideration reflects the flexible and responsive nature of participatory, community-based research, which adapts to real-world dynamics and values all contributions (Brydon - Miller et al, 2003, p. 15). The research process was shaped by a commitment to co-creating knowledge through dialogue, reflection, and shared experience. Ensuring humans reach their full potential

by recognising their uniqueness, I drew on a powerful blend of educational and social theorists, Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, Bell hooks, and Jack Mezirow. Together, these theorists form a rich tapestry for my work. Freire and hooks provide the emancipatory and humanistic foundation, urging education to liberate and affirm individual potential. Gramsci's lens highlights the structural and cultural barriers embedded in systems, while Mezirow offers for me a practical framework for fostering transformative change in learners' mindsets. This mix in practice, pushes for policies that actively listens to the voice of the learner, cultural relevance, and reflective teaching challenging oppressive systems and creates safe spaces where every learner's uniqueness is nurtured to its fullest potential.

5.11 A Dual Method Approach: Collective Dialogue and Personal Narratives

To gain a better insight into the thoughts of the Ardnacassa community the methodology approach use was a qualitative approach, with the nature of it exploring a wide range of social world elements. Including the texture and weave of daily life and provided insights into experiences and imaginations of the research participants (Mason, 1993, p. 1). This research took a qualitative, participatory approach through the delivery of a WCE which identified the need to support both Traveller and non-Traveller participants in shaping and making the most of a dedicated local community house. Based on earlier groundwork, I had insight into the different levels of comfort people had with group engagement. This understanding helped shape the data collection methods. Creative, community-based Lantern Workshops was chosen to gather insights in a relaxed, collective setting, which was ideal for those who felt safer and at ease in group discussions. To offer a complete inclusive approach, individual semi-structured interviews were also conducted, offering a more private and confidential space for participants who preferred one-on-one conversations. Research cannot be completed through rote or by recipe it must be participative (Mason, 1993, p. 1). This collective approach provided a time

and space for less heard community voices to be vocal on matters that affected them, the conversations were captured with non-formal dialogue recordings.

5.12 Focus Group - The Lantern Workshop

As part of the research process the focus group was made up women from diverse backgrounds, living, working, and learning in the Ardnacassa area who actively participated in the Lantern Art workshop rooted in Aboriginal storytelling, delivered in the house weeks prior. The initial concept was inspired by the Aboriginal story I shared with you in the previous chapter. As part of the workshop the Participants viewed a video created by an Aboriginal community and were shown images collected during this journey, aligning with Indigenous storytelling methods. The initiative fostered a reflective and inclusive environment, enabling women from the Ardnacassa area and surrounding communities to engage meaningfully. This coming together of local and external women highlighted the value of both internal and external support in community-based work. Local women contributed their lived experiences and a deep understanding of the community, while women from outside the area brought fresh ideas, creative approaches, and different ways of thinking. The combination of these perspectives helped everyone feel more confident in sharing their stories, exploring their identities, and guiding the direction of the workshop. It is crucial to acknowledge that communities often rely on both internal resilience and external facilitation to empower individuals in articulating their experiences, expressing new ideas, and exploring personal and collective identities (Ledwith, 2011). In this context, the presence of supportive structures beyond the community played a pivotal role in evoking dormant voices and fostering self-expression. A collective interest in creativity organically emerged during the process, shaping the direction and ethos of the workshop.

The workshop ran over six weeks, 2-hour sessions. These sessions encouraged inclusive participation and facilitated open dialogue around personal and community development, particularly in relation to the envisioned Community House. This process of communal storytelling and creative expression fostered trust, connection, and collective insight.

The first sessions involved constructing lanterns using wire and paper, with discussions on sustainability and recyclable materials. The final session which was informed to be part of the research, it was 45mins long, Individual participative consent was given and participants individually decorated their lanterns with Aboriginal symbols that resonated with them, representing their personal journeys and connections to their community and a critical discussion was had, all of the focus group was recorded and transcribed and all evidence was kept in locked cabinet.

5.13 One to One Semi structured Interviews

The four semi-structured interviews each 20 minutes long were carried out with four members of the Traveller community, two older participants a man and a woman who had lived on the roadside and received very little formal education, and two younger participants a man and a woman who had experienced significant exclusion, class-based discrimination, and othering within the Irish education system. Despite these challenges, both younger participants returned to education as adults where they became empowered, leading to employment and recognition as role models within their communities. The focus group consisted of eight women from diverse cultural backgrounds, all of whom live, work, study, and practise their faith in the Ardnacassa Community Area. This dual approach ensured inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and responsiveness to participant needs, particularly given the Traveller community's early stage

of engagement. Data from both methods were thematically analysed to identify key themes and insights that can inform WCE further programme development.

5.14 Reflective Journaling

A reflective journaling, maintained throughout the research process to document informal dialogue, participant observations, significant moments, and the evolving trajectory of the inquiry. This journaling practice supported a continual process of reflexivity, helping to surface the researcher's own positionality and the subtle shifts occurring within the research relationships. Aligned with the interpretivist framework, the reflective journal served as a tool for capturing co-constructed meaning and maintaining awareness of the relational and ethical dimensions of the work.

5.16 Ethical Considerations

The participants involved in the research were each connected in some way with Local Ardnacassa Area, either through work, learning, volunteering, and living. In undertaking this research, I consciously positioned myself not solely as a professional or leader, but as a learner and co-creator alongside participants. This stance aligned with the values of grassroots community development that underpin the work of Longford Women's Link (LWL). By adopting a participatory and collaborative approach, I aimed to reduce hierarchical barriers and foster mutual learning.

This orientation allowed the research to become a shared process, supporting the voices and agency of community members while reinforcing the organisation's broader commitment to empowerment and social change. It also reflected Tew's (2006) view that power, when used empathetically and reflexively, can support constructive transformation. Similarly, Coughlin and Brannick's (2014) emphasis on managing insider power dynamics addressed through my intentional positioning as a partner in knowledge creation. In this way, the research process

itself became an extension of LWL's ethos, supporting grassroots leadership, community voice, and sustainable development through respectful, ethical engagement.

In response, a human-to-human approach adopted to mitigate these dynamics. By meeting participants as a woman, mother, and curious learner rather than as a professional figure of authority, the researcher fostered trust and mutual understanding. This ethical stance prioritised empathy, shared experience, and identity preservation over extractive or institutional motives. Such a positioning aligns with the critique of dominant Western, masculine paradigms of power (Weber, 1968; Tew, 2006), which often fail to reflect the realities of communities with limited access to social and economic capital. Reflecting the interpretivist and participatory nature of the research, ethical engagement was ongoing and relational. The Aboriginal symbols and their meanings discussed with participants prior to the sessions to ensure understanding, respect, and cultural appropriateness.

Ethical principles embedded throughout the research process, with priority given to informed consent, care, confidentiality, reflexivity, and cultural sensitivity. Participants received both face to face verbal and written explanations of the study, including a one-month window for withdrawal without consequence. A safe, non-judgement, confidential space is vital for trust and wellbeing, Women express greater degrees of worry when considering dangers or threats in a range of public settings because they believe that there is always a chance of sexual assault (Diederik Cops and Stefaan Pleysier). All interviews and group sessions were conducted in safe space of choice and for individual Semi structured Interviews the individual Participants were provided a choice of location Community House or LWL Training Building/Counselling rooms. Consented audio recordings were stored securely in a locked cabinet to uphold confidentiality.

Furthermore, recognising the research fatigue and historical over-surveillance experienced by the Irish Traveller community who have frequently targeted in research yet blamed in broader social narratives ethical sensitivity was particularly crucial. The research actively resisted exploitative practices by centring participant agency, providing options for support (e.g. counselling services), and communicating that participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw any data within the designated time. As Mustajoki and Mustajoki (2017) highlight, ethical research is not only about formal procedures but also about relational integrity: the ability to actively listen and understand participants' values, worldviews, and emotional landscapes. This principle guided the conduct of semi-structured interviews and group sessions, ensuring that every interaction, was grounded in respect and mutual care.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and a group discussion with the Seven Sisters women's group, held at the Ardnacassa Community House. The group discussion explored the house's social and cultural significance. Data was transcribed and thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method. Participants came from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, reflecting the house's ethos of inclusivity.

5.17 Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has outlined a research approach that is intentionally participatory, grounded in feminist and critical perspectives, and shaped by the lived realities of the Traveller and non-Traveller women living in Longford. Rooted in social constructivist thinking, the critical feminist methodology used placed a value on co-creating knowledge, building trust, and being flexible to the needs and rhythms of the community. Rather than sticking to a rigid plan, the process unfolded organically guided by relationships, shared experiences, and constant reflection. I was very aware of my own position within the community and within

Longford Women's Link and tried to approach the research in a way that reduced power imbalances and encouraged open, honest participation. At times this meant slowing down, rethinking, or stepping back allowing the community to lead. There were, of course, limitations. Working within a new initiative made it harder to spark engagement compared to a well-established group. Constant shifts in focus made it difficult to settle on a clear research question. Balancing close involvement in the initiative with other work commitments also created time pressures, making it challenging to keep the enquiry aligned and on track. Collaborating closely with communities I am connected to brings its own challenges, especially in balancing roles and ensuring participation was always voluntary and informed. But by staying present, reflexive, and responsive, I believe the research remained grounded in ethical practice and meaningful connection. This methodology was not just about collecting data it was about learning, listening, and supporting spaces where voices that are often unheard could speak, be valued, and potentially influence change. The hope is that this work does not just describe lived experience, but honours it, and plays a small part in shaping more inclusive and supportive community spaces.

Chapter 6 Findings

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this study was to explore how WCE can support both Traveller and non-Traveller women in shaping and maximising the use of a dedicated Community House in Longford, a county in the Midlands. By examining how WCE encourages meaningful conversations, the study found that the first steps taken by participants involved getting to know themselves and each other. This process highlighted a real need for connection and mutual understanding. It also highlighted how a WCE valuable conversations where participants shared their thoughts, experiences, and ideas laying the groundwork for a shared vision of how they see the Community House moving forward. The following chapter presents the findings from both a creative Focus Group with eight women from diverse backgrounds and four individual semi structured interviews with members of the Travelling Community. Conducted with a group of eight women from diverse backgrounds who participated in 5-week grassroots developed Lantern Workshop within the Ardnacassa Community House. The Focus Group held on the last session of a 5-week workshop that involved the creation of festive lanterns workshop, it was delivered in the front room of the CH “Charlies Room”. To maintain anonymity and support the cultural theme the workshop, each participant, as part of the activity picked an Aboriginal symbol that resonated with their creative identity, these individual symbols, used as a pseudonym throughout the findings for the Focus Group. The four Semi Structured Interviews carried out with 4 members of the Traveller community, two male and two female also maintained anonymity with the individual participant matched with made up names to protect their identity and the individual interviewees were given a location choice, the option offered was Community House, LWL or place of choice decided by themselves.

To begin, this chapter an overview of selected participant conversations will be presented to bring the reader closer to the qualitative nature of the research. This initial narrative will provide context and demonstrate how participants engaged with the research topic in their own words, helping to ground the subsequent thematic analysis in real-life experiences. All participants involved in the Focus Group were informed in person about the research and the ethical conditions outlined in methodology chapter was informed to them prior face to face and consent was obtained in accordance with ethical research guidelines set in the methodology chapter, all the documents can be accessed at the end of this research. All data collected and transcribed was managed with cultural sensitivity and stored securely in a locked cabinet to maintain confidentiality and uphold ethical and community-based research standards.

The following two paragraphs identify the themes that emerged from the dual methodological approach. The first paragraph presents the themes derived from the focus group discussions, while the second paragraph outlines the themes generated through semi-structured interviews. A third paragraph will then provide a synthesis of the collective themes arising from both approaches, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence.

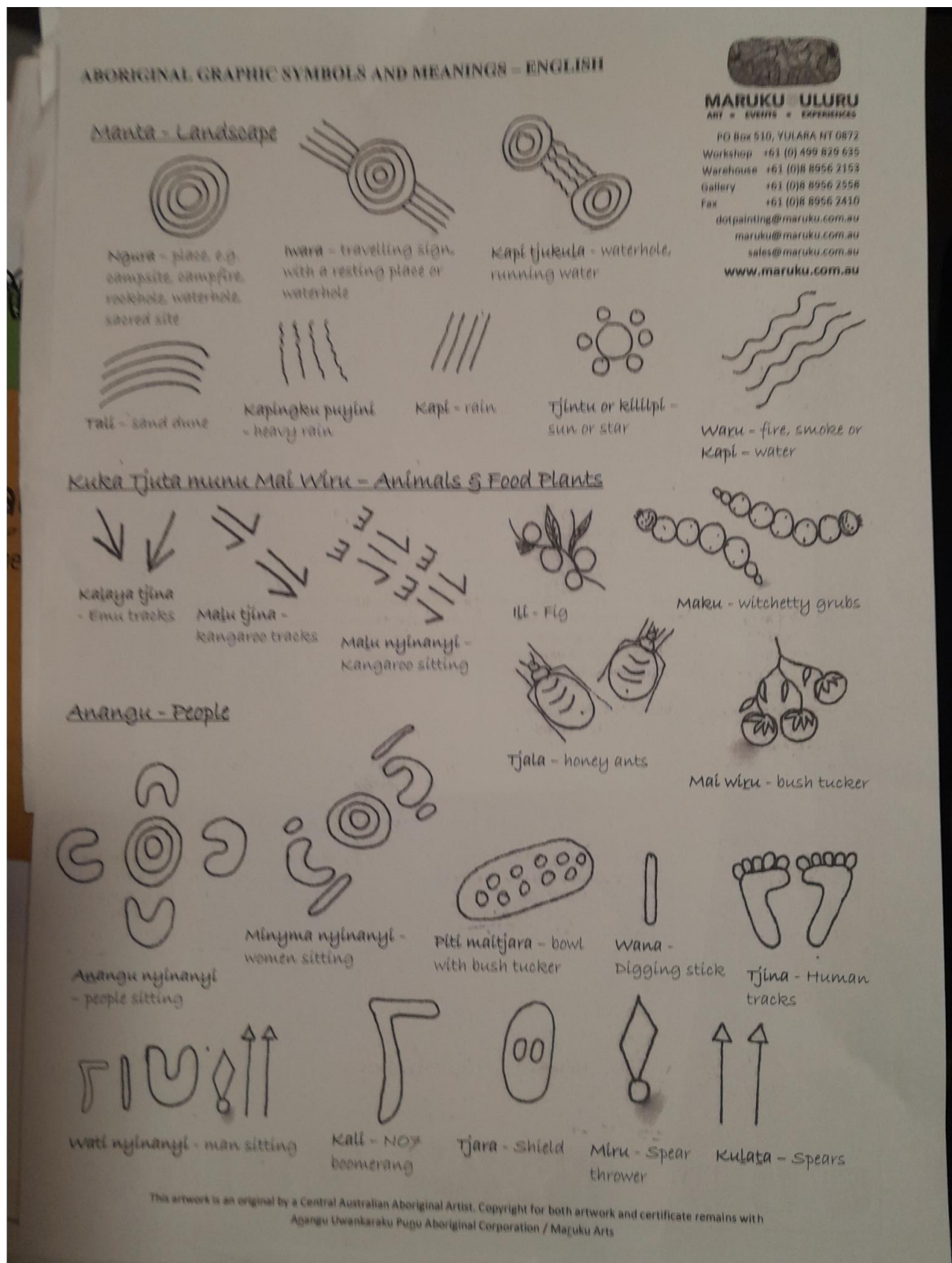
In the conclusion section, the findings will be reviewed and summarised. This will serve as a bridge to the subsequent analysis chapter, where the themes will be explored in greater depth in relation to the research questions and relevant literature.

6.2 Lantern Workshop - Focus Group and Semi Structured Individual Interviews

Dialogue

The following are the finding from the final session of a Lantern Workshop - Focus Group, involving 8 women from diverse backgrounds who came together to paint their individual lanterns, with symbols that represent their individual voices and evoke their thoughts of ways WCE can help shape and maximise the use of a Community House.

To help the reader visualise the symbols chosen - Aboriginal Symbols are displayed in the following picture (www.maruku.com.au, 2024).



6.2.1. Piti Maitjara -bowl with bush tucker a migrant woman from Nigeria, who has lived in Ardnacassa for 20 years, over this time she has experienced health issues and social exclusion, her chosen symbol evoked the following dialogue.

“I see my life as a ball of thread - knotted. If I unravel it at my age, I’m afraid of the instability that might come. But if I leave it, I am stagnant, not moving. It’s not like it was 40 years ago.... then it might have been okay to unravel. But once you cross the threshold of sixty... I ask the question, “Do you want to that?” that’s the way I see it.”

6.2.2. Iwara – Travelling sign with Resting place or a Water Hole, born and reared in Longford, returned to education as an adult over 20 years ago and since then actively learning and working in Longford her Symbol chosen evoked the following dialogue.

“I will go next and give another perspective.... I chose the symbol Iwara because for me it represents a resting place. The lines in the drawing depict people moving, reflecting the journeys of the Aboriginal community like those who moved to Longford in search of a new life, I can relate the image to this. The circle in the centre symbolises a place of rest, which is how I see the CH as a place where people come together to rest, share a cup of tea and conversation, while also engaging in meaningful work with each other”

6.2.3. Kali – No 7 Boomerang raised in rural Longford and now living in the urban area, returned to education as an adult learner and now has started her business in Longford, her symbol chosen evoked the following dialogue.

“I like the idea of the CH can be space all people can come into, also that it is not fluid it’s not a strict place space.....I like the it is like a resting placenot rigid, a place where people can come and go.....I really love the symbol Minyma Nyinanyi, which depicts women sitting together, the whole idea of women sitting down together, sharing their stories and life experiences always leads to better things, conversations are always enrichingThe past

few days working on the lanterns we have had some amazing chit chats with women coming in and out ”

6.2.4. Ili -The Fig lives in Westmeath returned to education as an adult and now works and learns in the Ardnacassa area and her chosen symbol evoked the following dialogue.

“As a Christian I see the figand you know and the leaves on fig tree are with the fruit,.....but the fruits... what would be the fruits of this house? the leaves are great you can hide everything with the leaves and leaves will cover up and you won't seebut if there are no fruits, we can be all talking, we are doing this and that you know but what's the Fruits where are the fruits of our work ?we can root around to see them....but unless we have fruits.....that is the community, the people using the housewe have no Community House?”

Kali pointed to the symbol Wana and said, “Theres is digging stick.”

Ili replies “Oh yes there is digging stick I suppose, we have to dig.”

6.2.5. Tjara – The Sheild migrated from India, is interested in local politics and community development, active in public life and returned to education as an adult and found through her studies her interest in politics, her symbol evoked her to voice the following.

“But still I would say ...cause this one caught my mind especially the one..... said, the human tracks, so a few years ago the CH it wasn't like it is today, or maybe few months ago, but now we are leaving our tracks, we have started something for quite some time now and although I was unable to attend some sessions..... today I look around and I am admiring the new faces; this CH might become a legacy.”

6.2.6. No identity - No symbol chosen as felt the symbols did not sit with her religion **(Christian)** - migrated from England over 20 years ago and studied and worked as a qualified

Early Years professional in Longford. She raised her family in Longford and now retired remains interested in volunteering and community care. Her choice was not to choose a symbol, and this choice evoked her voice to say.

“I see this place as the foundationits grounding....its preparing.....you can’t just go without knowing what particular carer you want to go into or make changes to your life around your family, you can’t just register for something and do just what the system wants but it’s might not always the best thing for you.

Everyone is an individual and everyone has different commitments and are at different levels, we are all individuals here in the CH, we can come here and support each other to open the door for the next chapter..... This should not be just a ticking exercise for authorities but space to provide time to make a Choice.”

Piti Maitjara - bowl of bush tucker - who previously spoke responded with a silent sigh of relief.

No Identity - had through her response provided her a space for time to think for herself.

6.2.7. Remained Silent - a lone parent who has recently got involved in WCE outreach programmes delivered in the CH. Although her specific area of focus is still emerging, her engagement represents the importance of accessible spaces, local dialogue spaces that provided a non-formal education pathways for women at the beginning of their adult learning journeys – this lady exited the Focus Group early due to family caring needs, demonstrates the flexibility of the group to meet her needs.

Tjara - The shield comes back in again” *I choose the shield.... I see the shield ...especially for women most of the time we as a women and community members need to save yourself.... myself as a woman over the past year so many things happened in my life, and I made so many big decisions the choices made now I must think ten times before deciding as.”*

6.2.8. Tali- the Sand Dune had the final word - a Longford native and early school leaver, returned to education and gained confidence with herself from working and studying in CH. Her symbol evoked her to say.

“I do not know what to say about it..... the sand dune gives characterto carry on and keep going till you have the strength.”

Iwara - The Resting place responded to Tali - The Sand Dune

“That is a very powerful image you have provided us... picturing oneself in the sand, ploughing along...sometimes getting stuck when it rains but when the sun comes out it enables movement.”

6.3 Themes from Focus Group

The ways WCE can support women to shape and maximise the use of a dedicated CH have been captured beautifully in this creative space, providing a space and time for an authentic for women to get together and from their experiences share their thoughts of what the CH can offer the wider community. WCE offers safe holistic space and time and opportunity for individuals to reflect on their current stage in life, supporting thoughtful decision-making and personal development. It provides a supportive environment in which participants can explore their options and identify meaningful directions for their futures. Crucially, WCE is not a space designed to enforce conformity or to meet externally imposed targets in a tokenistic or ‘tick-box’ manner. Rather, it resists such reductive approaches by fostering critical thinking, creativity, and authentic engagement. The space encourages collaboration and mutual support, enabling individuals to overcome barriers collectively. Through dialogue and shared experience, participants build solidarity and develop confidence. The physical CH is understood as more than just a venue; it becomes a site of encounter, where programme

development is co-created with the community. It acts as a catalyst for conversation, connection, and active engagement.

At its core, WCE is committed to creating an inclusive and respectful environment, one that recognises the value of lived experience and seeks to empower individuals through participation and voice.

WCE derived the following themes and set direction for development of CH.

Critical Reflection - Supporting individuals in navigating life choices and identify individual stages of life.

Resistance to Conformity - Challenging box-ticking, standardised approaches to education and engagement.

Collective Support and Solidarity - Emphasising community-building and shared problem-solving.

Space as Dialogic - a space for co-creating programmes and building active citizenship.

Inclusion, Respect, and Empowerment - Valuing diverse experiences and fostering belonging and voice.

Self-Care - fostering resilience and self-care within community.

6.4 Semi-Structured Interviews with the Traveller Community – Ardnacassa Area

The following findings emerged from four semi-structured interviews with members of the Traveller community who live, work, and learn in the Ardnacassa area. The four participants will be names Mary, Ann, Joeseeph and Tom for purpose of anonymity.

By choice, two of the interviews were held in the upstairs room of the Community House, known as “Charlie’s Bedroom”, a space thoughtfully prepared by an adult learner from LWL, designed to create a warm, comfortable setting that encouraged open and honest dialogue, making it a meaningful and trusted space for conversation.

By choice, two of the interviews occurred in the counselling and training rooms of LWL. These spaces selected individually by the participants themselves, offering a calm, private, and supportive atmosphere. The counselling room, softly lit and comfortably furnished, provided a sense of emotional safety, while the Training and Education building open, quiet, and purposefully designed for focused conversation created a professional yet approachable space for deeper reflection.

All interviews were open with a natural conversation with interviewees sharing their indivial life journeys.

6.4.1 Ann - March 4th, “Charlie’s Bedroom,”

Ann spoke about her early education while travelling the roadside, starting school around the age of seven or eight, and the challenges of moving frequently. She reflected on the value of the Community House as a place for learning and connection, for both children and adults and expressed hopes for a local playground, homework supports, and more cultural activities.

Ann shared memories of traditional Traveller crafts, especially her mother making paper flowers, and said she would love to see workshops revive these skills. She also highlighted the

need for safe spaces where both women and men in the Traveller community can talk openly about their feelings and mental health.

Mother - Early Years and Paper Flowers

“I went to school around till age 7 or 8... at that time, we were travelling around... I went to different schools, yeah...I liked school”

“My mother used to make flowers out of crepe paper and wire she was very good at it She’d make lovely big roses, every colour... people used to ask her to make them for funerals and things..... I would love to do something like that again.”

Place to play & talk things out - Mental Wellbeing

I think a CH is a good idea...It’s a place where you can go, have the chat, talk things out.....you learn things, learn skills that you wouldn’t really do otherwise..... it’d be lovely if there was a playground for the kids.”

“It’d be a good idea to have a space for the men to talk.... the young fellas are into handball now; that’s the new thing..... They love football too, something like that would be good for them”

6.4.2 Tom - April 15th, 2025 “LWL T&E Building”

Tom is a member of the Traveller community and lived and works in the Ardnacassa and surrounding area. Having grown up in a socially disadvantaged area, Tom shared insights into his educational journey, experiences of discrimination, and the importance of sport in shaping his path.

Growing up in the town

“My housing estate was rampant with drugs, antisocial behaviour, crime... everything you can think of, I grew up around all of it... even though we were doing sport, you were still interrupted by violence or drugs.”

“People say you are a product of your environment... I don’t accept that. I come from a disadvantaged background, and I am a Traveller—but that does not define what I can or cannot do.”

“We are one of the hardest groups to reach, but you must ask why. Look at the history: education rates under 5%, infant mortality rates, suicide epidemic, systemic discrimination... It’s generational.”

Education Experience

“School was awful. I was constantly suspended, put in remedial classes, told to sit at the back of the class with my hands on my lap... No one ever asked about my home life.”

“We were never taught about Travellers in school. Nothing about our culture, our language. All we ever heard was stereotypes.”

“If it is included now, it is tokenistic. There is nothing meaningful in the curriculum that teaches people who Travellers really are.”

Sport and Belonging

“I’ve always been involved in sports, sports kept me on the straight and narrow. But I still experienced discrimination and racism in sport.”

“You cannot just come in with a programme and expect full engagement. You must build relationships, build trust. That takes time.”

“One of the strongest themes from our research is that Travellers want tutors and coaches who understand our community—even just a basic understanding of who we are and the challenges we face.”

Imposter Syndrome

“I was the first in my family to get a proper job... every day they used to call me ‘Mikey the pikey’ every morning. I did not realise then that it was wrong... I was just happy to have a job.”

“I struggle with imposter syndrome. Even now, I sometimes feel like I do not belong, that someone will find out I am a fraud, even though I have told them I am a Traveller.”

“Some people think Travellers are just like everyone else—just people who choose not to work. But we have our own culture, language, and traditions. We are a distinct ethnic minority.”

“I am trying to be the positive role model I never had. When I see someone struggling, I cannot help but try to support them. That comes from empathy, from knowing what it is like.”

“Whoever manages the community House, they must be from the Traveller community or have a good understanding of Travellers heritage and culture.”

6.4.3 Joseph - On the 14th of March “Charlie’s Bedroom”

Joseph member of the Traveller community living in the Ardnacassa Area. He provided an insight to life on the road and his thoughts on the Community house.

Early Childhood and Exclusion

We could not go to school that much... when you’re going to camp for two weeks or a week, the guards would come and put you out.”

“That’s the reason why the biggest majority of Travellers that time had no education.”

“I was in a classroom just to get my communion... and confirmation. After that, you are fendng for yourself.”

“You’d be sitting there with a paper in front of you, everyone else with their pens and heads down — but you wouldn’t know what to do.”

Learning through Family and Culture

You’d learn more beside your father than you ever would in school.....you saw how he made a living, fixing things, getting by.”

“My mother, she could make flowers, baskets, anything.....and she’d swap them for food or bits.”

Loss of Tradition

The tradition’s gone. Everything has gone..... the tin smithing, the wagons, the old ways.”

“The young ones today don’t know how to light a fire, never mind make a kettle of tea at the side of the road.”

“They dress up, they’ve got everything now, but they know nothing about the culture or the camps.”

“It’d be great to bring back some of that tradition.....have a little workshop, show the young ones how to make a bucket, light a fire, work with metal.”

“Experience is better than a book. The book will not do the work..... your hands will.”

Impact of social Media

“Now, with social media, it’s never left alone. It follows you, stays going. Everyone knows everything.”

“It is a good thing in one way.... for the hospitals, for knowing thingsbut it can be very bad too, used the wrong way.”

“Before, if something happened, you left it behind. Today it’s all over Snapchat or Facebook in minutes.”

“Social media can be abused. It can stir things up when they should be settled.”

6.4.4 Mary - location “LWL Counselling suite”

Mary, a proud member of the Traveller community living in Ardnacassa Area, Mary shared her personal journey of overcoming social prejudice, returning to education as an adult, and embracing her cultural identity. She spoke thoughtfully about the challenges and strengths within her community, the importance of inclusion, and the evolving traditions and values that shape their lives today.

Reflection on returning to education.

“Coming back as an adult there was a lot more encouragement... they said, ‘Hey, think outside the box. Do not worry about your grammar or big words.’”

On community groups and integration:

“Travellers often prefer standalone groups because sometimes they don’t feel welcome in mixed groups... they want to keep their culture and beliefs intact.”

On culture and heritage

“I’d like to see the older traditions preserved, stories shared, and younger people encouraged to learn the crafts and values.”

Thoughts on Community House

“It needs to be an environment that supports inclusion... something that encourages people to commit, to feel like they belong.”

“There should be activities that connect to Traveller culture, like woodworking, poetry, or traditional crafts.”

6.5 Themes from Semi Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews clearly highlighted the potential for WCE to shape and maximise the use of a dedicated CH in Ardnacassa Area. The powerful personal stories shared offered a meaningful glimpse into the lived experiences of a largely unheard community living in Longford. Beyond revealing the urgent need for outreach and dialogue, the feedback provides the Ardnacassa area with valuable insights, underscoring the importance of continued research with individual Travellers to ensure they are given the time, space, and recognition they deserve. It also highlights the importance of having someone who understands the Traveller community in the direction of CH for it to be fully inclusive.

The following are the themes that emerged from the semi structured interviews with the traveller community.

Inclusion & Belonging

Need for safe, welcoming environments that promote a sense of belonging and trust. Spaces that encourage commitment, participation, and openness.

Cultural Relevance

Desire for activities connected to Traveller culture (e.g. woodworking, poetry, traditional crafts). Importance of preserving and celebrating Traveller identity.

Community Spaces & Child Friendly Area - Family Support

Support for a Community House as a space to talk, learn, and connect. Interest in skill-building opportunities not otherwise accessible. Request for child-friendly spaces, like a playground.

Men's and Youth Engagement

Need for dedicated spaces where men can gather and talk. Importance of engaging young people through sport (e.g. handball, football).

Culturally Aware Staff

Strong desire for tutors, coaches, and mentors who understand Traveller life and challenges. Even basic cultural awareness seen as essential for building trust.

Responsible Use of Social Media

Concern about misuse of social media and its impact on community harmony. Desire for more responsible communication and conflict prevention.

6.6 Researcher Reflection at this point

The Traveller semi-structured interviews provided deeper, culturally rich feedback that reflected the collective experiences and values of the community. In contrast, the non-Traveller focus group offered more individual, service-oriented perspectives, highlighting the importance of CH spaces for empowerment and self-care.

Both groups emphasised the need for inclusive, respectful, and culturally sensitive spaces, but the Traveller interviews revealed a stronger desire to preserve culture, shape decisions, and be active partners, not just consulted tokenistic ally. These interviews allowed for personal storytelling within a shared cultural context, making the feedback more meaningful and grounded.

The findings highlight that culturally tailored, trust-based methods like semi-structured interviews are vital for engaging marginalised groups. They capture deeper insights and ensure authentic participation in shaping services, policies, and spaces.

6.7 Conclusion

Through the WCE research approach, the value of sustained outreach and dialogue became clear. It was this ongoing engagement that highlighted the importance of focusing research efforts in the Ardnacassa area, using a two-way, inclusive methodology to ensure that the hardest to reach voices were included. Direction it provided from Traveller and Non-Traveller

Community-led spaces of belonging

Culturally relevant activities and supports.

Trust-based relationships with staff

Digital literacy programmes

Dedicated supports for women, men, and youth

Real voice in decision-making processes

This learning would not have emerged without a commitment to being present, through the cold, quiet days of winter and into the warm summer months, from empty estate to when children return to play on the streets. The simple act of being there, saying hello, and asking, "How are things?" proved essential. Presence and conversation became the foundation for meaningful enquiry and community connection.

Chapter 7 Analysis

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the key findings in relation to the study's central aim: to explore ways in which WCE can shape and maximise the use of a Community House in midland county of Longford. Central to these findings is the role of WCE in fostering informal dialogue that promotes connection among women, which enabled them to get to know each other, collaboratively imagine, design, and take ownership of the Community House as a shared space. This section explores critical moments within the research journey that both revealed gaps and highlighted breakthroughs in community engagement, particularly with the Traveller community in Ardnacassa. What began as an inclusive and creative focus group session was marked by the notable absence of Traveller voices, pointing to a deeper issue of systemic exclusion and the need for intentional, trust-based outreach. Through personal reflection and embodied experiences, walking, talking and active listening, these moments are revisited as qualitative instances of transformation. From the "empty chair" to an unexpected conversation across a garden fence, and finally, to the shared stories around Charlie's Room table, this chapter traces how informal, relational engagements offered meaningful insight and reshaped the researcher's understanding of inclusion, participation, and the co-creation of knowledge. These encounters are not peripheral, they are pivotal. They reveal that sometimes the most powerful data is not what was planned, but what unfolds when trust, space, and mutual respect are cultivated. Using qualitative method, including creative arts workshop the delivery of a Lantern Workshop with focus group held in last session and semi-structured interviews, this chapter examines the symbolic and practical value of the community house. Drawing on feminist theory and community education frameworks, it explores the community house's role as a space for cultural pride, empowerment, social inclusion, and transformative change. The analysis is organised around key themes derived from the dual approach, it identifies the

overlapping of themes and compares how diverse approaches bring about a valuable deeper conversation that provides direction for further CH Programme development.

7.2 Turning Point, Across the Fence: Building Connections through Community Dialogue

Despite intentional efforts to create an inclusive space, the absence of Traveller women at the initial focus group revealed a significant gap. The “empty chair” became a symbol of deeper, systemic exclusion and highlighted the need for persistent, culturally informed outreach. A turning point came not in a formal setting, but through an informal conversation across a garden fence with an elder Traveller woman. This exchange, rooted in trust and mutual respect, shifted the dynamic of the research. It reflected Freire’s (1970) idea of learning as a two-way dialogue, where both teacher and student transform through authentic connection. The informal dialogue blossomed into deeper engagement when the elder woman, along with her daughter and husband, joined a session in Charlie’s Room. What followed was a rich, story-filled conversation that brought Traveller culture and lived experience directly into the heart of the research. It was no longer about outreach, it was about relationship, presence, and shared ownership of the process.

Parallel to this, regular walks to the Seven Sisters sessions became moments of quiet reflection and encouragement. On one such morning, when community scheduling conflicts left the researcher feeling discouraged, a participant's kind words “You’re going to make a real difference” offered renewed purpose. These walking dialogues became a reminder that real connection often unfolds slowly, in everyday moment. One Traveller woman, Ellie, shared that meaningful engagement starts with listening. “Travellers love to converse and tell stories” She said, encouraging the creation of warm, homely spaces where people feel welcome. Her words

became a guide for the project. Through listening, openness, and shared experience, the research grew from a place of genuine, grounded connection, transforming what once felt like silence into something deeply participatory and alive.

7.3 Reframing the CH more than a building.

The research revealed that for many participants, the community house represents much more than a physical structure. It was seen as a safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive space, where people can come together to learn, heal, and grow. One participant described the house using the Aboriginal symbol of the *Iwaru* (resting place or waterhole), conveying a sense of pause, reflection, and recharging:

“It’s like a waterhole... a place where you come to rest, reflect, learn, and heal.”

This metaphor symbolises what Mayo (1997) calls the transformative power of community spaces, where informal learning, solidarity, and empowerment take place on equal terms. Rather than operating under state-defined metrics of “success” (e.g., employment outcomes), the house offers a people-centred alternative, built on trust, participation, and relational support.

7.4 Traveller’s perspective of the Community House (CH)

Traveller participants expressed a strong emotional and cultural connection to the idea of a community house, particularly as a site of cultural recovery, empowerment, and inclusion.

Many noted the loss of traditional practices, such as crafts, oral storytelling, and intergenerational learning, and saw the house to revive and share this knowledge:

“We picked it up from our granny, cousins, my mam... we could pass it on in the house.”

Traveller women also highlighted the exclusion from mainstream institutions, including education and health services, and identified the community house as a space where they could feel seen, heard, and valued a counterbalance to experiences of marginalisation.

The vision for the house included:

- Intergenerational skill-sharing
- Community adult education and second-chance learning
- Childcare and women's support groups
- Cultural events and Traveller heritage workshops

This aligns with Battiste's (2013) call for the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems into educational and social settings, as well as Hooks' (1994) advocacy for feminist spaces of learning and community-building.

7.5 Community House is a catalyst for empowerment and inclusion.

Beyond the Traveller community, participants from other backgrounds also spoke of the house's value as:

- A non-judgemental space for learning and recovery
- A place to address isolation, particularly for women.
- A resource for navigating life transitions through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Personal development in turn bringing about community growth, encouraging role models and community leadership (e.g. returning to education, parenting, ageing)

This reflects Tett's (2010) argument that community education spaces are vital for adult learners, particularly those excluded from formal systems.

Participants critiqued mainstream institutions state agencies and formal education as inaccessible, rigid, and intimidating. The community house, by contrast, was seen as:

- Flexible
- Locally owned
- Responsive to real needs

“You do not feel out of place there. You can just come in for a chat or for a course.”

7.6 Risk of tokenism

The overwhelmingly positive feedback about the idea of a community house, participants also expressed concern about tokenism. Traveller participants were cautious:

“We have been researched before, nothing changes. If the house is just for show, we will not go.”

This concern reflects a broader history of extractive practices, where Traveller communities have been studied but rarely seen the benefit. To avoid replicating this dynamic, meaningful inclusion and shared ownership of the house’s development are essential.

7.7 Implications for policy and Practise

The findings point to the need for policy shifts that recognise and fund community-driven, culturally safe spaces like the proposed community house. Key recommendations include:

Co Design include Traveller community.

- Engage Traveller women in designing, running, and evaluating the community house.
- Ensure the space reflects Traveller culture, values, and aesthetics.

Offer holistic Creative/Practical Grassroots Community Education

- Offer non-formal, trauma-informed education tailored to learners' pace and priorities.

- Recognise cultural learning—such as crafts, storytelling, and family skills—as valid and valuable.

Long term sustainable flexible funding

- Move away from short-term or outcome-driven funding (e.g., job-readiness only).
- Recognise community houses as essential social infrastructure.

Representation and visibility

- Include Traveller heritage in school and public spaces.
- Celebrate cultural events and intergenerational learning at the house.

7.8 Limitations

Research fatigue: Due to historical over-research, some community members were cautious about participating, highlighting the importance of ongoing trust-building. Nonetheless, the study offers a rich picture of how a community house can serve as a shared, healing, and empowering space if developed in meaningful partnership with its users.

7.9 Conclusion

The findings indicate that WCE plays a pivotal role in fostering meaningful dialogue among participants, particularly by creating space for women to explore and share their roots. This process of learning about each other's backgrounds, cultures, and personal journeys helped build mutual understanding and trust. Through this exchange, participants were able to articulate their individual needs and express their identities, perspectives, and ideas with growing confidence. By emphasising connection to their roots and to one another, the educational approach nurtured a strong sense of belonging and collaboration, empowering the women collectively to visualise and take active ownership of the Community House. Through relationship-

building and collective action, they successfully transformed the space into a dynamic and inclusive hub that reflected the values and needs of the wider community. Ardnacassa Community House is more than a physical space, the Community House has emerged as a modern-day “waterhole” (IWARA) a vital place for nourishment, renewal, and relational connection. For many participants, particularly members of the Traveller community, they feel it should represent a rare space of safety and dignity one where exclusion and internal divisions can begin to be healed through everyday acts of dialogue, listening, and shared presence.

Central to this process is the reclaiming of the kitchen table not just as a literal place of gathering, but as a symbol of inclusive education, cultural resilience, and community voice. In this ordinary yet powerful setting, food and conversation become tools for social transformation. This echoes Paulo Freire’s belief that education must begin with peoples lived realities, their cultures, and their everyday language. Freire (1970) reminds us that education should be a practice of freedom rooted in dialogue, reflection, and the co-construction of knowledge. In this way, the relational learning that takes place within the Ardnacassa Community House aligns deeply with Freirean pedagogy, where education becomes a shared journey towards inner, collective liberation and self-determination.

Importantly, this research highlights the urgent need to centre Indigenous voices, especially those of the Traveller community, whose knowledge and cultural contributions have too often been marginalised or misrepresented. Future research should continue to engage directly with Longford Traveller families, supporting much needed grassroots developments such as a Longford Traveller Movement, and exploring how local WCE Facilities can support cultural continuity, social justice, and community empowerment. The findings also point to a broader opportunity, the much-needed development of more community houses across the county of

Longford and beyond, particularly in rural areas where social infrastructure is in decline. These houses can serve as living spaces of connection, education, and inclusion rebuilding the informal networks of care and conversation that hold communities together. Grounded in local needs and community leadership, such spaces can offer a responsive model for adult education that is culturally affirming, socially engaged, and profoundly human.

While this study was shaped in part by the limitations of being an outsider, the methodology rooted in listening and relational dialogue created space for participants to reclaim authorship of their own stories. This "curious approach" positioned community members not as subjects of research, but as knowledge holders and leaders. As Freire insists, authentic dialogue requires humility, openness, and a willingness to be transformed by the other.

Ardnacassa Community House has the potential to lay the cornerstone for something even greater for Longford, the establishment of a community-led Resource Centre that builds on the relationships, trust, and knowledge already cultivated. Designed by and for the community, this centre could provide educational programmes, cultural activities, and support services that reflect the real needs and dreams of local people especially Travellers and other marginalised groups.

Finally, in recognising the deep contributions of women in this work many of whom have carried the burdens of loss, care, and survival, this study recommends if it were to come about, the naming of a Longford Town Resource Centre should be in their honour. Such a gesture would not only acknowledge their strength and leadership but also affirm the centre's role as a space of healing, remembrance, and empowerment.

In the spirit of Freire, this research affirms that education is most powerful when it begins with people's lives, builds on community knowledge, and works toward collective liberation. Through kitchen table conversations, the sharing of meals and the open-door policy of

Ardnacassa, we see what that ideal education can truly look like: rooted in love, driven by justice, and alive with possibility.

Chapter 8 - Concluding Chapter

8.1 Researchers Reflection of the Research

As I engaged with the literature, I found myself unexpectedly overwhelmed. It became clear to me at one point, not only through the texts but through personal reflection, where my father's deeply empathetic perspective had come from. This recognition was not merely theoretical, it was felt. We had, in many ways, walked the same path as the Traveller community, transient, experiencing displacement and the quiet resilience needed to persevere.

Reflecting on this personal insight I revisit Freire's Pedagogy of the oppressed, the banking system of education is to minimise our creativity so that we conform, it changes our consciousness not the situation that oppresses us. The truth is that the oppressed are not marginals living outside of society, we have always been inside the structure which made us beings for others (Freire, 1970, pp. 46 - 47)

As a researcher and community worker, I cannot ignore the parallels between Ireland's own history of oppression and the treatment of the Traveller community today. We, as a society, should have learned that exclusion and control are not the way forward. This realisation drives my work, pushing me to question not only the structures around me, but also my own assumptions. Through this study, I am beginning to see the gaps more clearly, whose stories are missing, whose voices are kept out, and why. These insights are shaping how I move forward with the research and in my commitment to helping the development of a CH where no one is left outside the conversation. True education must do more than transfer knowledge, but it must awaken consciousness, enabling individuals to question, reflect, and act upon the

social conditions shaping their lives, aiming to develop a social consciousness, this can be achieved adult and community education inspired by Freire (1972) thoughts which inspire disadvantaged communities to claim their social status (Connolly, 2007, p. 120). WCE is more than an action, it is a catalyst that connects Travellers and non-Travellers, giving them the space and voice to co-create a vibrant, inclusive Community House.

8.2 Personal Reflection - The Power of I

As I journeyed through this research, I was deeply moved. What began as an opportunity to return to education and a study of marginalisation and local Community in need of compassion and care provided an enriching experience. The stories I heard, the conversations I shared, and the trust built along the way connected me to something I hadn't fully given time to before, that is my personal story.

I came to see how my father's deep empathy was rooted in a profound understanding of Ireland's history, a history marked by displacement, judgement, and resilience. His compassion was shaped by the knowledge of what it means to be made invisible or less-than, to feel the sting of exclusion passed down through generations. Through him, I inherited a quiet strength and a sensitivity to others' pain and dignity. I carry that legacy with me.

This recognition brought me closer to understanding my own experience as an Irish woman. From childhood to womanhood, I have navigated feelings of belonging and exclusion shaped by Ireland's difficult past the colonisation, poverty, emigration, and class divides that ripple through our collective memory. In many ways, my story intersects with the stories of the Traveller community, bound together by endurance and the need to be heard.

Camilla Fitzsimons' work on reflexivity and situated knowledge offered me essential encouragement throughout this process. She reminded me that who I am, my history, my

position, my feelings, all this matters deeply in community-based research. Reflexivity is not just a method; it is an ethical practice that honours lived experience. It gave me permission to embrace my voice and presence in this work.

Paulo Freire's pedagogy further illuminated this path. He taught me that education and understanding emerge not from detachment, but through dialogue rooted in lived realities. Freire emphasised that true knowledge is forged when we recognise oppression within our own narratives, not just study it from afar. This perspective empowered me to bring my full self, the "*I*," into the research.

I now understand how powerful it is to reclaim the use of "*I*." In earlier studies, I was discouraged from speaking personally; the "*I*" it was seen as unprofessional or biased. But in this work, saying "*I* felt," "*I* saw," and "*I* listened" it was radical and necessary. It acknowledges that research is not just about others, it is also about who we are and how we come to work.

Through this journey from childhood to womanhood, I have come to appreciate the strength in my own story and the importance of sharing it. The power of *I* is the power to name, to witness, and to connect. It is the power to transform silence into speech, exclusion into belonging.

8.3 The next chapter - LWL WCE Outreach Programme developed - Ardnacassa Community House - Grassroots Seven Sisters Supportive Women's Group Programme



PROGRAMME PLAN

March 19th
Social Media Awareness workshop

March 26th & April 2nd, 9th
Paper Flowers and Easter Basket workshop

April 16th & 23rd
Holidays

April 30th
Diverse Communities of Longford - Sweet Tasting morning

May 7th, 14th & 21st
Sewing workshop

May 28th & June 4th, 11th
Hair Styling workshop

June 18th, 25th & July 2nd
Creative Art workshop

July 9th
Summertime Celebration

April 30th, May 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th
Community Growth workshop

29/01/25 - 09/07/25 (EVERY WEDNESDAY)
FROM 10:30 AM TO 12:00 PM

REFRESHMENTS AND TEA & COMMUNITY GROWTH WORKSHOP
START AT 10:00 AM

EMPOWER

ENGAGE

ENHANCE

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT
INFO@LWL.IE OR 0433341511

MISSION STATEMENT

The Seven Sisters is a dynamic women's group dedicated to the arts, heritage, and traditions. Its mission is to foster cultural connections, nurture shared interests, develop valuable skills, and enhance self-awareness. These efforts cultivate a deeper appreciation for space, the environment, and community bonds, ultimately empowering the community as a whole.

VALUES



EMPATHY



SOCIAL JUSTICE



COLLECTIVE ACTION



CRITICAL THINKING

The aim of the Connecting Communities Program is to provide a platform for individuals who are often excluded from decision-making processes to share their voices and opinions.

The primary goal of Connecting Communities is to create a space that is holistic, nonjudgmental, and fosters autonomy and mutual respect. It is a place where individuals can exchange experiences, knowledge, and stories, while also collaborating to develop future programs.

This program is grounded in Feminist Community Education Principles, and thus, the Connecting Communities Program is guided by the values and direction of The Seven Sisters women's group.

The title 'Seven Sisters' is derived from Aboriginal folklore, symbolizing the bravery of women united together.



LONGFORD WOMEN'S LINK
ARDNACASSA COMMUNITY HOUSE
N39 A4W9

7 Sisters Women's Group







Research Study Information Sheet

Purpose of the study.

I am Kathleen Dowd, a master's student, in the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University, as part of the IMAESC programme.

From observation the absentees particularly of the Traveller Community from conversations about the development of a Community in Ardnacassa Area.

The study is concerned with marginalised community voices having a part in the development of a Community House.

“In what ways can Women's Community Education Programmes support both Traveller and Non-Traveller women to shape and maximise the use of a dedicated Community House?”

What will the study involve?

The study will involve a 2.5-hour focus group session held in the Community house involving the creation of a collaborative/Individual art piece as a discussion around the development of a Community House.

Or

Individual Semi Structured Interview at your choice of location Community House/LWL or location chosen by the interviewee.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Department of Adult and Community Education. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked to take part as you are a member of the Traveller Community and a Non-Traveller who has demonstrated interest in the development of the Community House within the area you learn, work, pray, play and live and your view on this topic is valuable it will inform the research and provide direction if needed for further research.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. However, we hope that you will agree to give us some of your time to participate in focus group session - as outlined in your ethical protocol. It is entirely up to you to decide whether you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such a time as the research findings are analysed/published/anonymised May 31st, 2025. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationship with Maynooth University.

What information will be collected? The type of data collected will be a creative piece photo and a qualitative conversation through audio and then transcribed, the personal data required is name, gender, age, contact details telephone and email.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time unless you give explicit consent to allow this. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers place of work, electronic information will be encrypted and securely on MU PC or servers and will only be accessed by Maynooth University lecturers Michael Murray, Angela Mc Ginn, Margaret Nugent, and Camilla Fitzsimons.

No information will be distributed to any other authorised individual or third party. If you wish, the data you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

‘It must be recognised that in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or during investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the university will take all reasonable steps within the law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.’

What will happen to the information that you give?

The research will be written up and presented as a thesis or additional summary report, discussed at internal group meetings, presented at National and International conferences and maybe be published in Scientific journals, a copy of the research findings may be made available to you on request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part or it is possible that talking about your experience may cause some distress.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of the focus group session I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. You may contact my supervisor Camilla Fitzsimons Camilla.Fitzsimons@mu.ie if you feel the research is not carried out as described above.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me; Kathleen Dowd, Longford Women’s Link, 086 413 6764, KATHLEEN.DOWD.2025@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking time to read this.

Consent Form

I agree to participate in Kathleen Dowd's research study drawn from the working closely with the Ardnacassa Community developing a grassroots Community House in the area and from observation of absentees of local communities voices, the research concerns with reaching out to the community to hear "In what ways can Women's community education Programmes support both Traveller and Non Traveller Women to shape and maximise the use of a dedicated Community House? "

The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me verbally and in writing. I have been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

☐

I am participating voluntary.

☐

I give permission for my participation in a focus group/semi structured interview with Kathleen Dowd to be audio recorded.

☐

I understand that I can from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.

☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data up to May 31st, 2025

☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I can access it on request.

I understand the limits of confidentiality a described in the information form.

☐

I understand my data, in an anonymous format, used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

☐
☐

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.

☐

I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects.

☐

Signed..... Date.....

Participant Name in block capitals

Bibliography

- A. Gramsci, 1971. *Antonia Gramsci Selections from Prison Notebooks*. New York: NY International, P.57.
- A. Bryman, E. Bell et al. (2022). *Social Research Methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- A. Gramsci. (1971). *Antonia Gramsci Selections from Prison Notebooks*. (S. G. Hoare, Ed.) New York, USA: NY International.
- A. Gramsci. (1971). *Gramsci, A. Selections from the prison notebooks*. (G. Hoare, Ed.) New York.
- Aontas. (2021). *The Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education 2021*. Dublin: Aontas.
- Aontas. (2024). *Transforming Education Community Education Framework*. Dublin: Aontas.
- B. Connolly, 2007. Beyond the third way; New challenges for Critical Adult and Community Education. In: *Radical learning for Liberation 2*. Maynooth: NUI Maynooth, p. 120.
- Boyle. A, Flynn. M & Hanfin.J, 2020. Optimism despite disappointed; Irish Traveller Parents Reports of their own School Experiences and their views on Education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.
- Brydon - Miller et al, 2003. Why action research? In: *Action Research*. s.l.: s.n., pp. 9 - 28.
- Brydon - Miller et al, 2003. Why action research? In: *Action Research*. s.l.: s.n., pp. 13 - 15.
- Bergin. M, Boyle. .M & Prellwitz.M. (2023). Irish Traveller Children's Play: A Scooping Review. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 3860 - 3875.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T., 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of*. s.l.: s.n.
- Bourdieu. (1986). *Distinction: A Social Critique of Judgment and Taste*. USA: Routledge.
- Boyle et al. (2018). Parental involvement: Irish Travellers and Early Years Education. *Encounters in Theory and History of Education*.
- Boyle. A, Flynn. M & Hanfin.J. (2020). Optimism despite disappointed; Irish Traveller Parents Reports of their own School Experiences and their views on Education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.
- Crotty, 1998. *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin. Sydney Allen & Unwin: s.n.
- Crowley. (2009). Outside in Dublin: Travellers, Society, and the State 1963 - 1985. *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 35, 17 - 24. Retrieved June 19, 2025, from <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/3025>.

Commission on Itineracy. (1963). *Report of the commission on Itineracy*. Dublin Stationary Office.
Retrieved May 28, 2025, from www.: <https://catalogue.nli.ie/record/vtls000075594>

Connolly. (2008). *Adult Learning in groups*. New York: McGraw - Hil Education.

Connolly. (2008). *Adult learning in Groups*. Dublin: Mc Ghraw-Hill Education.

Connolly, Fleming, Mc Cormack. D & Ryan. A. (2007). *Radical Learning for Liberation2*. Maynooth:
National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland.

Darder.A, 2021. Introduction: Pedagogy of the Hearth. In: *Pedagogy of the Hearth*. London. New York
and Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, p. 20.

Department of Rural and Community Development with Pobal, 2023. *A Guide for Inclusive
Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision making*. Dublin: Department of Rural and
Community Development with Pobal Community Work Ireland and Irish Local development
Network.

European Commission. (2024, Oct 30). [eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news/ireland-details-eu118-
billion-education-funding-budget-2025](https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news/ireland-details-eu118-billion-education-funding-budget-2025). Retrieved from Eurydice:
<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news/ireland>.

Department of Education and Science. (2024). *Transforming Learning Community Education
Framework*. Dublin: Aontas.

Department of Education and Science. (2000). *Learning for Life White Paper on adult Education*.
Dublin: Stationary Office.

Femia. (1981). *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary
Process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fitzsimons.' (2023). Concept. *Towards an inclusive, critical feminist pedagogy*, 14, 1.

Forgacs, D. (2000). *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*. New York: New York
University Press.

Fitzsimons, 2015. *Re-Kindling Community Education in Neoliberal Times*, p. 185.

Fitzsimons, C., 2025. *Rethinking Feminism in Ireland*. Dublin: Bloomsbury.

Freire, 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 018 ed. s.l. Penguin classics.

Freire. P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.

Freire. P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Translated by M. B. Ramos. New York:
Continuum.

Freire. P. (2021). *Pedagogy Of Hope*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury Academy.

Fryer, 2020. *A short guide to ontology and epistemology; Why everyone should be a critical realist*.
Manchester: Research gate.

- F. Murphy. (2023). *Traveller Culture and History in Modern Ireland; Continuity & Change*. Dublin: Cultural Heritage.
- Fanning. (2014). *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*. Dublin: University College Dublin pressed, pp45 – 55.
- Gmelch, S.B & Gmelch. G, 1976. The emergence of an ethnic group: The Irish Tinkers. In: *The Irish Tinkers*. s.l.: Anthropological Quarterly, pp. 225 - 238.
- Grint.K, 2005. *Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership.'* Human. s.l.: s.n.
- Grummel, B., 2023. Maintaining deep roots; the transformative possibilities of adult literacy education. *European Journal for Research on the Education and learning of Adults*, 14(1), pp. 145 - 161.
- Gilbert. E et al. (2017). *Genomic insights into the population structure and history of the Irish Travellers*. Scientific Reports.
- Gmelch. (1986). *The Irish Tinkers: The urbanisation of the itinerant people*. Long Grove: Waveland press.
- Gmelch, S.B & Gmelch. G. (1976). The emergence of an ethnic group: The Irish Tinkers. In S. & Gmelch, *The Irish Tinkers* (pp. 10). Anthropological Quarterly.
- Gmelch, S.B & Gmelch. G. (1976). The emergence of an ethnic group: The Irish Tinkers. In S. & Gmelch, *The Irish Tinkers* (pp. 225 - 238). Anthropological Quarterly.
- Gmelch. Bohn S & Gmelch. G. (2014). *Irish Travellers the Unsettled Life*. Indiana, USA: Indiana Press.
- Government of Ireland. (1995). *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community*. Dublin: Stationary Press.
- Gramsci. A. (1971). *Selection from The Prison Notebooks*. New York City: International Publisher. s.l.: s.n.
- Grummel.B. (2023). maintaining deep roots: The transformative possibilities of adult literacy education. *Research on Education and Learning of Adults*, 14, 145 - 161.
- Hayes, N., 2013. *Early Years Practice - Getting It Right from The Start*. Dublin: Gill & Mac Millan.
- Heidegger, 1962. *Being and Time*. s.l.: Blackwell publisher.
- Hayes. M. (2006). *The Traveller Community and Homelessness*. Dublin: Liffey Press.
- Helleiner, J. (2000). *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hill, M. (2003). *Women In Ireland*. Belfast, Ulster, Ireland: Blackstaff Press Limited.

- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress as a practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, pp.15.
- I. Mosca; R. Wright, 2020. The Long- term Consequences of the Irish Marriage Bar. *The Economic and Social Review*, Volume 51, pp. 1-34.
- Joyce.S, 2019. *Mincéirs Siúladh: An ethnographic study of young Travellers' experiences of racism in an Irish city.*, Limerick: Limerick University.
- KIRYLO, J. D., 2011. It began in Recife. In: *The man from Recife*. s.l.: JSTOR, Accessed 17 July 2025., pp. 3 - 23.
- Kumar.R, 2005. *Research Methodology*. 2nd ed. London, California, & New Delhi: Sage.
- L. Peake & M. Mikhail, 2025. Feminist methodologies and methods. *Feminist Approaches to field work*, pp. 176 - 203.
- Letherby, 2003. *Feminist Research in theory and practise*. s.l.: Mc Graw Hill Publication.
- Longford County Council, 2022. *Slaintecare Healthy Communities in Longford Launched*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.longfordcoco.ie-community Development>
- Longford County Council, 2014. *County Longford Socio-Economic Baseline*, s.l.: Future analytics.
- Longford County Council, 2023 - 2029. *Local Economic and Community Plan*, Longford: Longford Community Development Committee (LCDC).
- Longford Womens Link, 2025. www.lwl.ie. [Online] Available at: <https://www.lwl.ie/> [Accessed July 2025].
- Luke.S, 2005. *A Radical View*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p.27.
- McDonagh. D. (2001). *Women and Community Education in Ireland*. . Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 45 – 46.
- M. Norris & D. Coates, 2014. How Housing Killed the Celtic Tiger: anatomy and consequences of Ireland's housing boom and bust. *Journal of Housing and the built Environment*, June, pp. 219 - 315.
- M. Norris & N. Winston, 2005. Housing and Accommodation of Irish Travellers: From Assimilation to Multiculturalism and Back Again. *Social Policy & Administration*, 9 November, 39(7), pp. 802 - 821.
- M. Norris & N. Winston, 2005. Housing and Accommodation of Irish Travellers: From Assimilation to Multiculturalism and Back Again. *Social Policy & Administration*, 9 November, 39(7), pp. 205.
- MacLaughlin, J., 2007. *A social history of the Irish Traveller community*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Maslow, A., 1943. *A Theory of Human Motivation*. s.l. psychological review.
- Mason, 1993. *Qualitative Researching second edition*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

- Mc Cormack, O Neil. J et al, 2020. *Eavesdropping on a conversation*. [Online]
[Accessed 22 June 2025].
- McVeigh, R. (2008). The 'Final Solution': Reformism, ethnicity denial and the politics of anti-Travellerism in Ireland. *Social Policy and Society*. 7(1). pp.91-102.
- Morphy, 1991. *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge*. Chicago: Chicago Press.
- NCCA, 2023. *Traveller culture and History Research Report*, Dublin: NCCA.
- O Halloran & O Regan, 2017. *Kenny announces formal recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority Taoiseach says 'it is a proud day for Ireland' as community gains new status*, Dublin: The Irish Times DAC.
- O. Kelly, 2019. *A century of housing: How the State built Ireland's homes*. Dublin: The Irish Times.
- Oakley, 1981. *Subject Women*. Oxford: Robertson, pp.3.
- Pavee Piont, 2018. *Research Project: Traveller Ownership*, Dublin: Paveen Point and Roma Publications, pp.22 -29.
- Rogers, 2020. *Client Centred Therapy*. London: Robinson, pp.184 -188
- Tew, 2006. Understanding Power and Powerlessness. *Towards a Framework for emancipatory Practice in Social Work*, pp. 40 - 44.
- Tunstall, 2024. *Trap Civics: Amalgamation Critical Conscious Learning with Joy for critical Civic Education and Beyond*. pp. 17.
- Crowley, 2009. Outside in Dublin: Travellers, Society, and the State 1963 - 1985. *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Volume 35, pp. 4.
- Crowley, 2009. Outside in Dublin: Travellers, Society, and the State 1963 - 1985. *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Volume 35, pp. 17 - 24.
- Wigginton, 2019. Learning critical feminism research. A brief introduction to feminist epistemologies and methodologies. *Feminism & Psychology*, pp. 4.
- WWW.CSO.ie, 2025. *Central Statistics Office*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2022>
- www.legislation.ie, 2025. *Housing Act 1966 (No. 21 of 1966)*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.legislation.ie/eli/1966/act/21/enacted/en/html>
- www.longfordcoco.ie, 2025. *Longford Community Safety Partnership*. [Online]
Available at:
<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.longfordco.co.ie/services/community-development/longford-local-community-safety-partnership>

- www.maruku.com.au, 2024. *www.maruku.com.au*. [Online]
Available at: <https://maruku.com.au/>
[Accessed 8 30 Aug].
- www.onemillionstars.ie, 2025. *One Million Stars Ireland*. [Online]
Available at: <https://onemillionstarsireland.ie>
[Accessed 22 July 2025].
- www.positivism.org, 2012. *www.positivism.org*. [Online]
Available at: <https://positivism.org/blog/ant-positivism>
[Accessed 20 July 2025].
- <https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Decorative-Arts-History>. (2025, 04 20). Retrieved from
Irish country Life: <https://www.museum.ie>.
- Irish Government, Dept of Social Welfare. (1963). *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*. Dublin:
Stationary Office.
- Irish Times. (2025, May 23). *LGBT+ Travellers: 'A lot of the community are ignorant towards the trans issue.'* Retrieved from WWW.Irish times.ie: <https://www.irish times.com>.
- Joyce.S. (2019). *Mincéirs Siúladh: An ethnographic study of young Travellers' experiences of racism in an Irish city*. Limerick: Limerick University.
- L. Peake & M. Mikhail. (2025). Feminist methodologies and methods. *Feminist Approaches to field work*, 176 - 203. doi:10.4324/9781032668727-16
- Longford County Council. (2023 - 2029). *Local Economic and Community Plan*. Longford: Longford
Community Development Committee (LCDC).
- Luke.S. (2005). *A Radical View*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- M. OHalloran; M. O'Regan. (2017). *Kenny announces formal recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority Taoiseach says 'it is a proud day for Ireland' as community gains new status*. Dublin:
The Irish Times DAC. Retrieved June 19, 2025, from
<https://www.proquest.com/newspaper/kenny-announces-formal>.
- M. Norris & D. Coates. (2014, June). How Housing Killed the Celtic Tiger: anatomy and
consequences of Ireland's housing boom and bust. *Journal of Housing and the built
Environment*, 299 - 315.
- M. Norris & N. Winston. (2005, November 9). Housing and Accommodation of Irish Travellers: From
Assimilation to Multiculturalism and Back Again. *Social Policy & Administration*, 39(7), 802 -
821. Retrieved June 19, 2025, from <https://doi-org.may.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2005000470.x>.
- Mason. (1993). *Qualitative Researching second edition*. London: sage publications,p.1.
- Mason, J. (n.d.). Finding a focus and knowing where you stand. In J. Mason, *Qualitative researching*
(pp. 14 - 15). London: sage publication.

- MacLaughlin, J. (2007). *A social history of the Irish Traveller community*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- McCarthy, D & McCarthy, P. (1998). *Market Economics: Trading in the Traveller Economy*. Dublin: Pavee Point.
- Mc Cormack, O Neil et al. (2020, May 14). *Eavesdropping on a conversation*.
doi:10.1163/9789004420755_007
- McDonagh, D. (2001). *Women and Community Education in Ireland*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- McPartland. (2020). *A Journey of Enquiry. a historical, legal, and economic analysis of further education in Ireland from 1800 to 2020.*, 160 - 178.
- McPartland. (2020). *A Journey of Enquiry. a historical, legal, and economic analysis of further education in Ireland from 1800 to 2020.*, pp. 80 - 83.
- Moran, Matt. (2020). *The Theology of Integral Human Development*. Cork: letterteck IRL Ltd.
- NCCA. (2019). *Traveller Culture and history in the curriculum a curriculum audit*. Dublin: NCCA.
- NCCA. (2023). *Traveller Culture and History Research Report*. Dublin: NCCA.
- NCCA. (2023). *Traveller culture and History Research Report*. Dublin: NCCA.
- Ó hAodha, M. (2011). *Insubordinate Irish': Travellers in the Text*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Office of Attorney General. (2025, May 28). *Housing Act 1980*. Retrieved from
<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/>
<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1980/act28/enacted/en/html> (accessed 28 May 2025)
- Patterson, L & Dowd. (2010). Using the Women's Community Education Approach to Deliver Community Employment Training: a case study from Longford Women's Link. In Aontas, *AONTAS Diary 2010* (p. 127). Dublin: AONTAS.
- Pavee Piont. (2013). *Travelling with Austerity: Impacts on Cuts on Travellers, Traveller Services, and projects*. Dublin: Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre.
- Pavee Piont. (2018). *Research Project: Traveller Ownership*. Dublin: Pavee Point and Roma Publications.
- Pobal. (2024, 11 24). *Pobal*. Retrieved from Pobal: <http://www.pobal.ie>
- Smith. (2005). *Irish Land Reform*. Dublin: Irish Press.
- Smyth, D. (2013). *Personal Centred Therapy with Children and Young People*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: Sage.
- TEW.J. (2006). Understanding Power and Powerless. *Journal of Social Works*, 33 -51.

- Walsh. (2016). The National System of Education 1831 - 2000. *Essay in the History of Irish Education*, 67 - 72.
- Walsh. (2016). The National System of Education 1831 - 2000. In Walsh, *Essays in History of Irish Education* (pp. 7 - 30). Maynooth: University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland.
- Winter & Guildings (2002) A Handbook of action Research in health and Social Care, pp 68 – 69
- Wigginton (2019) Learning critical Feminist Research, A brief introduction to feminism epistemologies and methodologies, p.4.
- www. St Patricks, Seminary Maynooth College. (2025, April 25). *St Patricks Pontifical University, Maynooth*. Retrieved from St Patrick's Seminary Maynooth: <https://www.seminarymaynoothcollege.ie>
- www.anchology.com. (2025, February 22). *The knowledge Hub - Wisdom for Life Jean Piaget*. Retrieved from anchology: <https://anchology.com>.
- www.CSO.ie. (2022, Nov 23). *Central Statistics Office*. Retrieved from www.CSO.ie: [Http://www.CSO.ie](http://www.CSO.ie)
- WWW.CSO.ie. (2025, May 28). *Central Statistics Office*. Retrieved from Central Statistics Office (2023): <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2022>
- www.earlychildhoodireland.ie. (2025, April 15). *How to achieve a high-quality Early Years system*. Retrieved from Early Childhood Ireland: <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie>.
- www.irishstatutebook.ie. (2025, May 28). *Local Government Reform Act 2014 - Irish Statute Book*. Retrieved from Irish Statute Book: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie>.
- www.irishtimes.ie. (2019, February 8). *A century of housing: How the State built Ireland's homes*. Retrieved from The Irish Times: <https://www.irishtimes.com>.
- www.legislation.ie. (2025, May 28). *Housing Act 1966 (No. 21 of 1966)*. Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.ie/eli/1966/act/21/enacted/en/html>: <https://www.legislation.ie/eli/1966/act/21/enacted/en/html>
- www.longfordcoco.ie. (2025, May 4). *Longford Community Safety Partnership*. Retrieved from Longford County Council: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.longfordcoco.ie/services/community-development/longford-local-community-safety-partnership>.
- www.mercyworld.org. (2025, April 25). *Welcome to Catherine's House*. Retrieved from Mercy World: <https://www.mercyworld.org/our-centre>.