NEW HORIZON

ATHLONE REFUGEE & ASYLUM SEEKERS SUPPORT GROUP

Lucht Tacaíochta do Theifigh agus Iarrthóirí Tearmainn

New Horizon Learning

This is a discussion document in preparation for an application for funding to the Engage and Educate fund.

Contents

Introduction

New Horizon is the Athlone Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support group. We have been providing services to people living on the Lissywollen Direct Provision site in Athlone for 17 years.

New Horizon aims are to:

- Welcome and support people who seek refuge in our midst
- Give information and support as necessary
- Celebrate the riches the newcomers bring to this society

New Horizon has been providing education services and contacts to education providers for many years. We want to apply for funding for the following activities:

- To expand and enrich the services offered to residents on the Athlone direct provision site

- To introduce certification to all educational programmes, not just academic ones

- To expand the existing online education gateway so that it can be used by other support groups and deprived communities

- To offer similar services to programme refugees currently arriving in Ireland

- To make the model available to other groups that wish to provide a similar service

Athlone Direct Provision

The Athlone direct provision site is in an industrial area on the outskirts of town. It consists of 100 mobile homes, an administration block and shop. Normally 300-350 people are resident there.

The asylum-seeking community is extremely diverse. Severe differences exist in:

- Language

- Culture

- English language proficiency

- Previous educational attainments

- Self confidence level

Our experience over the years is that educational, cultural and sporting opportunities are overwhelmingly taken by people with good English language skills and good previous education. It is very difficult to engage with people without these skills.

The long term nature of life in direct provision creates many problems. Life in direct provision is extremely boring with long waiting times for a decision on status. This coupled with the grinding poverty of residents' leads to frequent and severe mental and physical health problems. It can also lead to child and spouse abuse.

New Horizon educational offerings at present are:

- Refugee Online Education (ROLE)

- English Language skills

- Physical Education

- Parenting and childcare

Refugee Online Education (ROLE)

One of the unique features of New Horizon educational offerings is the use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC).

A massive open online course is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web. In addition to traditional course materials such as filmed lectures, readings, and problem sets, many MOOCs provide interactive user forums to support community interactions among students, professors, and teaching assistants.

MOOCs are a recent and widely researched development in distance education which were first introduced in 2006 and emerged as a popular mode of learning in 2012.Many world-class universities have put their learning material on line.

The learning material is in a vast range of courses and at a wide range of levels. Typically the course material is provided free of charge but some MOOC providers charge a fee for a certificate.

MOOCs are now being used to provide education to refugees and asylum seekers. The leading MOOC provider for refugees is Kiron, based in Berlin. Currently it operates in three countries, has 2700 students, 48 partner universities and 400 volunteers.

In cooperation with Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) we are implementing this model. This is the first time it has been implemented in Ireland.

AIT, as a College of Sanctuary, has committed significant resources to supporting this project as part of its social inclusion targets.
This support consists of: Use of library, classrooms and computer workshops; Volunteer mentors from staff, retired staff and students; Administration support via the Access office

Baseline studies are certified by AIT. Courses in specialist areas, such as engineering or social skills, are certified by the course providers. New Horizon pays these course fees.

At 17th March 2018, 15 learners have completed baseline studies in English, Mathematics and IT and have moved on to specialist studies. This involves MOOCs and volunteer tutors.

In-college facilities are excellent.

One serious problem is female access. Cultural issues prevent women from some communities participating in the course and most women have childcare problems. We would like to set up an on-site computer lab to enable wider access.

English Language skills

Six New Horizon volunteers provide English language learning support at beginner, intermediate and advanced level.

Some classes are women-only to meet participant's cultural requirements and there are some one-to-one sessions to help people with rudimentary English skills.

We also partner with Shannon Academy to deliver English language group sessions at their premises.
24 residents are involved in English language learning at 17th March 2018.

Some state agencies have conducted English language training with paid teachers in the past. However there is no reliable budget for this work and it is subject to intermittent shutdowns.

On-site facilities are poor, the education room is uncomfortable and there is no reliable internet access. Volunteers frequently pay for photocopying and purchasing working materials.

These courses are not normally certified. New Horizon would like to be able to offer QQI level 1 and 2 certificates for them. We plan to:
- Run programs or facilitate online programs leading to QQI NFQ level 1General Learning. This includes components related to reading, writing, listening and speaking, personal safety, personal decision making and Life science.
- Run programs or facilitate online programs leading to QQI NFQ level 2 General Learning. This includes components related to Non-verbal communications, Pattern and relationship, Data handing and problem solving

Physical Education

New Horizon runs the Gym and Swim programme. This provides low cost access to Athlone Regional Sports centre. This is very beneficial to the physical and mental health of asylum seekers.

50 residents have benefited from this project in 2016-2017.

This has been funded by the Health Service Executive for four years. Funding has not been made available for 2018 so there is the danger that it may have to be shut down.
There is also the standard difficulty of enabling female access to these programmes.

New Horizon would like to be able to continue to offer this program. They would also like to convert it to a training course format and offer QQI level 1 and 2 certificates.

Parenting and childcare

New Horizon periodically offers childcare and parenting courses in cooperation with Westmeath County Childcare committee. Funding is a problem due to inconsistent budget.

New Horizon would like to set up a young women's and young mother's group. They want to add resources and certify these courses.

Certification

Certification is an important component of any refugee education programme. It provides the following benefits:
- Helps ensure quality of course
- It's useful to participants in the asylum application process
- It's useful in job hunting
- International certification is very useful if you do not remain in Ireland
- Increases participation
- Reduces dropout rate

New Horizon would like to introduce certification to all educational programmes, not just the traditional academic ones. We would like to offer certificate credit for participation in programmes such as these:
- Community garden
- About Ireland
  - History and Culture
  - Irish language for parents
- Cherish your culture programmes
  - Skill sharing in cooking, hairdressing, music etc.
  - Language swop – learn or improve your Arabic, Xhosa or Urdu
  - Storytelling from home
  - Cookbook recipes

New Horizon does not plan on becoming a certification provider. Instead they will use external qualification providers.

Possible certification providers are:
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) accredited centres
- Education and Training board
- City & Guilds of London
- Leaving certificate from Department of Education

Future Development

Methods and tools developed by New Horizon have the potential to improve educational access to a range of deprived communities. We would see the potential for organic growth into the following locations:

- United Nations programme refugees in Athlone and Mullingar

- Other direct provision sites such as Ballyhaunis

An expansion of course materials available on the New Horizon learning portal would enable it to be very useful to other deprived communities. These include:

- Travellers

- Geographically remote communities

- Socially remote communities

Budget

Discussion

Gerry Callaghan <gerry.callaghan@gmail.com> 17 Mar (1 day ago)
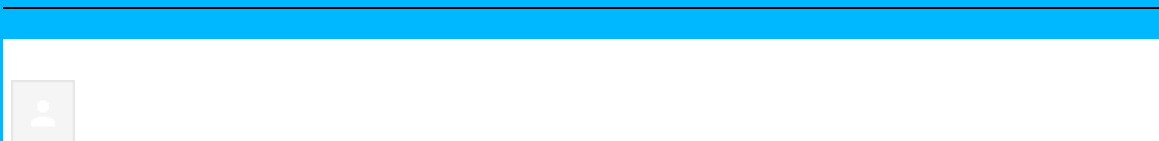
to Alison, Mary, veronica, Hubert, Marie

Hi all,

We did a pile of work on Friday and then, at the last minute the deadline was extended until next Friday 23.

In the depths of the panic I realised that I did not know what I was doing! The structure of the online application form certainly did not help either. This did not bode well for the success of an application!

So I've spent a while writing a discussion document today and at least I know what I'm proposing now.

Can you tear it apart and give me your comments please? We can write the application from that during the week.

Alison Hough via studentait.onmicrosoft.com 16:37 (23 hours ago)

to me, Mary, veronica, Hubert, Marie

Hi Gerry,

I have done some editing to the attached document using Track Changes, and also put some comments in red on the document.

I have also attached the Copy and Paste of the Online funding application so everyone can see where this information has to fit into.

I suggest you bring Chris and the other ROLE people in on this discussion as they will have a greater understanding of the ROLE program.

The document omits many of the other great programs you run that come under the heading of Education, such as Art, and Homework Club, so I have added them in but I may have missed some.

Regarding the document, it is a great discussion document and I anticipate that it will provide a very useful basis for future applications as well as this one.

For the purposes of this application it is far too long.

Most of the fields on the application form are limited to 100 words.
Most of the fields in this document run to several hundred.
Therefore I think the starting point will be from "New Horizons Learning Program" and you will list existing activities and the budget number on which they run.
Then move on to say what additional funds will be spent on in very concise, specific and practical detail.

Regarding fleshing out the discussion document generally for this or other applications:

I think the ideas of :

1. Providing a computer lab onsite.
2. Providing childcare on site or otherwise.
3. Providing certification.
4. Possibly a new classroom for existing classes.

Are potentially large elements of the budget as well as important in the success of any such projects.
As such we really need to flesh these aspects out as they are just nice ideas in the current document. We need practical proposals as to how they would translate into reality and costings of these proposals that are detailed and realistic.
For example:
Where would a computer lab be sited - an existing room on the site or a new prefab, what are the costs of this, how many computers and what size room, how would the necessary electricity, internet access etc be provided for.
Or:
How is it envisaged childcare would be provided, what place on the site or else where, who would staff it, how would it be paid for. Could it be run in conjunction with the nearby childcare facility for public servants?
Regarding Certification:
Who has the power to award QQI Level certs ? Have we spoken to them etc.

And we need to be able to show that the certification aspects we are talking about are realistic as these are not currently in place. So exactly who will certify what and have they expressed willingness to do so and what are the costs associated with certification.
Some aspects are a bit loose - in the certification section you talk about the Department of Education certifying Leaving Certs.

This is not reflected anywhere else in the document, and currently looks like it is an afterthought (I am not saying it is just saying that's how it looks). Are you proposing to run or facilitate people from the site sitting the leaving cert? How? Where?
Would they attend local schools or register for the State exam with a local school but hold classes on the site? Where would the teachers come from, what space is there on the site to run this?

Sorry I feel like I have raised more questions than answers. Probably not very helpful!

Kind Regards,

Alison

Mary Carolan   20:16 (19 hours ago)

to me, Alison, veronica, Hubert, Marie

Hi Gerry,
Your discussion document is a great help as we now have a format. I'm better on the Education stuff as I don't have any knowledge of the budget.
You asked for comments so these are my observations.
You mention certification of all education courses. I think this may be too ambitious and maybe not even appropriate for all groups so if we could just change the wording to some?

There is just 1 class of women only. (In fact while it's lovely I'm a bit uncomfortable about continuing to advertise it as women only.)
I don't think the Education Room is uncomfortable. They've made an effort to improve the look of it replacing seating etc. The problem is lack of suitable resources for teaching.
It's very difficult to run English courses without sets of books, audio material, access to photocopying, a suitable whiteboard, no projector, a lack of general teaching aids e.g white board markers, student folders, student writing material. Many of our students have not been recently in formal education and need motivation which could be improved by using more modern technology. We are teaching disadvantaged students using inferior teaching aids to the normal Irish classroom.
As you stated teachers have no budget for ink cartridges for printing material, or photocopying which is often done at the teacher's own expense and therefore kept to a minimum.
As you say computers for residents would be of great use for practising language skills and would be a useful tool for self-motivation.
In relation to certification in language could we mention the possibility of working towards international certification with Shannon Academy? (I know they have such a programme in existence for their paying students) If you like I could contact them for the relevant information . Just let me know if this is a path you want to explore.
Hope this is of some help,
Mary

Mary Carolan   20:42 (18 hours ago)

to Alison, me, veronica, Hubert, Marie

Hi again, I just read Alison's comments. I also see a problem with the suggestion of Leaving Cert. While this might apply to some students as most of our classes are for adult Education I think the L.Cert exam would be far too difficult for most of the students taking English classes. While their comprehension skills are good their level of literacy would pose a huge difficulty. Leaving Cert English for example requires previous study in literature and poetry is a huge component. I think certification in language skills might be of more practical use and also internationally recognised.
Also the volunteers who teach at present only commit during their spare time. If we were following a L.Cert programme this would require a full time commitment by people during the school term . (As a retired teacher I would not be prepared to commit to this.)
If you're budgeting for a computer lab for language etc this would require teacher training. (I used a new one in a secondary school and even people with computer skills needed specific training. However this is often included in the cost of purchasing equipment e.g. headphones which need to be constantly maintained)
Let me know if I can help you with anything else specific.
I can see this this all very complicated.
Mary

Gerry Callaghan <gerry.callaghan@gmail.com>   13:16 (2 hours ago)

to Mary, Alison, veronica, Hubert, Marie

Hi Mary, Alison,   info:All

Many thanks for the great feedback. I really appreciate it as I've never worked in the education world so I'm likely to come up with all sorts of daft ideas. It's really good to get feedback from the experts.

Some points:

- **Funding** I think that the bones of the funding application should be as follows:
  - ○ Learning resources for English language and literacy courses. Books, workbooks, stationery, audio and video equipment, art materials etc Mary, can you do up your wishlist for learning material?
  - ○ Computer lab. I'd really like to have this mobile lab but it's not very likely! See below for some more realistic ideas!
  - ○ Certification OK let's move from **All** courses certified to **Most** courses certified. English language via Shannon academy, European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) via Dr. Steven's
  - ○ Childcare for course attendees. The new right to work regulations allow people to be self employed while their applications are being processed. Some residents on site have FETAC level 5 in childcare so they could run operations in the mother and toddler room while classes are going on. I doubt if we can afford to use the chatterboxes creche next door but it might be worth seeing if we would get a special rate.
  - ○ Funding for certified courses for ROLE for next year. (We are funded for all of 2018.) 50 learners * 1 course each @ 50 EUR = 2500 EUR
- **Computer Lab To be used for English and ROLE courses**

I've given up on RIA providing a lab. We have been pushing for a year now and they don't even reply to emails. This is a spec for a stand alone operation only requiring mains electricity.

  - ○ Runs in current education room or other suitable location
  - ○ Lockable computer cart 130 EUR

    containing

    - 10 notebook computers Asus VivoBook E200HA or similar 250 EUR
    - 1 laser printer HP Laserjet Pro or similar 250 EUR
    - 1 data projector **Viewsonic PA503X Desktop projector** or similar 330 EUR
    - Mobile wireless internet router 200 EUR
    - Power cables and extension sockets 4@ 10 = 40 EUR
    - 10 mice * 13 EUR = 130 EUR
  - ○ Capital cost 3580 EUR
  - ○ Consumables
    - Mobile broadband contract EIR or similar 30 EUR/month
    - Printer paper 5 * 4.50 = EUR 22.5 EU
    - Earphones 20 * 10 = EUR 200 EUR
  - ○ Consumables per year 582 EUR

Leaving cert. My thinking about this was as follows. DOE allows adult learners to sit leaving cert examinations every year. I know that this is very culture dependent for example with Irish poetry and literature appearing in the English paper. I thought it would be low hanging fruit for someone with a degree from a British style university in Pakistan. However the numbers who would benefit are very small so let's forget it.

OK, that some more info added to the pile. I'll take a break and come back later.
Again, thanks for the great work
Gerry