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Nothing About Us Without Us: Core members' experience of choice and support with regard to education, training and employment, with a view of informing future service provision for L'Arche Community, Cork.

Bronagh Desmond

CARL Research Project

in collaboration with

L'Arche Community, Cork

CARL COMMUNITY - ACADEMIC RESEARCH LINKS
University College Cork, Ireland

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Name and year of course:	Master of Social Work, Year 2
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About CARL

What is Community-Academic Research Links?

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a service provided by research institutes for the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in their region which can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also well structured organisations. Researdecch for the CSOs is carried out free of financial cost as much as possible.

CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).**What is a CSO?**

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

Why is this report on the web?

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public. We are committed to the public and free dissemination of research results.

How do I reference this report?

Author (year) Project Title, [online], School of Applied Social Studies, Community-Academic Research Links/University College Cork, Available from: http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/completed/ [Accessed on: date].

How can I find out more about the Community-Academic Research Links and the Living Knowledge Network?

The UCC CARL website has further information on the background and operation of the Community-Academic Research Links at University College Cork, Ireland. http://carl.ucc.ie

CARL is part of an international network of Science Shops. You can read more about this vibrant community and its activities on this website: http://www.scienceshops.org

Disclaimer

Notwithstanding the contributions by the University and its staff, the University gives no warranty as to the accuracy of the project report or the suitability of any material contained in it for either general or specific purposes. It will be for the Client Group, or users, to ensure that any outcome from the project meets safety and other requirements. The Client Group agrees not to hold the University responsible in respect of any use of the project results. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is a matter of record that many student projects have been completed to a very high standard and to the satisfaction of the Client Group.

Declaration of Originality

I confirm that this dissertation 'Nothing About Us Without Us: Core members experience of choice and support with regard to employment, education and training, with the view of informing future service provision for L'Arche Community, Cork' is my own work. I have provided academic referencing for each piece of work that I used that is not my own. I h6 ave reviewed my submission through TurnItin and I have referred to the UCC Plagiarism Policy guidelines.

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Student Number: 117425302

Date: 24th of April 2023

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Abstract

This research project was completed under the CARL Research initiative in collaboration with L'Arche Community, Cork. L'Arche Community provides services to people with intellectual disabilities. There are almost 160 L'Arche communities around the globe, in every corner of the world. L'Arche Community Cork is based in the Togher area of Cork City. L'Arche Community Cork is made up of five supported-living residences and a Day Service/Project, Le Cheile. The overarching aim of this research study is to ascertain if the core members of L'Arche experienced choice with regard to education and training, and to elicit if they were encouraged to pursue employment. This research was conducted with a view of informing future service provision for L'Arche Community, Cork.

The epistemological perspective that was applied to this research study was social 9constructionism. The theoretical frameworks applied were interpretivism and participatory action frameworks. Three participants that had been resident of a L'Arche supported-living dwelling for at least ten years participated in this research project. Semi-structured interviews and self-made videos were facilitated to collect data and respond to the research questions. This data was transcribed and a thematic analysis was conducted. The themes that emerged from this thematic analysis are discussed, including a lack of awareness about choices available, insufficient choice of accredited education and training opportunities, employment supports by L'Arche, barriers to employment, benefits of employment and moving forward for L'Arche - Views of the participants. Several conclusions are provided and recommendations are made to inform future service provision for L'Arche Community, Cork. Recommendations include increase awareness, education and further research.

Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The first chapter of this project will introduce the reader to the title of the research. I will present the rationale for this research project. I will provide a brief background about L'Arche. L'Arche is the research partner to this project under the CARL initiative. An outline of the research aim, objectives and questions will be given. To conclude this chapter, I will provide an overview of each chapter in this study.

1.2 Research Title

Nothing About Us Without Us: Core members experiences of choice and support with regard to education, training and employment, with a view of informing future service provisions for L'Arche Community, Cork.

1.3 Research Rationale and Background

1.3.1 Research Rationale

It is noted that people are driven to conduct social research by the gaps in their knowledge about social issues (Bryman, 2016). I am very interested in the topic of disability. In particular, I am interested in how disability presents in social work practice. However, I understand that there are gaps in my knowledge about this topic. On reviewing the Research Reports that are available on the UCC CARL website, I did not feel that any of them were suitable for my dissertation. So, I decided to consider working in collaboration with L'Arche. I worked with L'Arche as a Day Service/Project assistant after graduating from my undergraduate degree, and before enrolling on the Masters of Social Work (MSW). I was motivated by hearing the voices of community members and listening to the people and their experiences. I wanted to give them an opportunity to partake in a research project. L'Arche proposed this research topic which explores service users' experiences of choice and support with regard to education, training and employment, with a view of informing future service provision. The research title was eventually developed after lengthy deliberations between the research supervisor, L'Arche management and I as 'Nothing About Us Without Us: Core members experiences of choice and support with regard to education and training, with a view of informing future service provisions for L'Arche Community Cork'.

In terms of my professional development, I believe that conducting a piece of research under the CARL initiative will strengthen my communication, teamwork and organisation skills. As a budding social worker, I hope that my future practice will be about advocating for change for people that are marginalised by society. I think that conducting this research project will help me to understand the importance of social work values like empowerment, social justice and equality in professional practice. I have envisaged that this piece of research will be very useful to informing future service provision for L'Arche. It is hoped that this research project will help L'Arche to improve the experience of choice and support with regard to employment, education and training for members. In turn, the findings of this research project will contribute to the experiences of people and professionals in the area of disability in social work practice.

1.3.2 Background

There are almost 160 L'Arche communities. Each community is extremely diverse and presents in very different contexts around the world. There are 4 L'Arche communities here in Ireland. They are located in Cork, Kilkenny, Dublin and Belfast. This research project is in partnership with the Cork community. The L'Arche community in Cork opened in 1985 with just three members and one supported accommodation service. The community has grown significantly, and now provides five supported living residences and the Le Cheile Day Service/ Project to members. Le Cheile is a space for community members to share interests through projects. Projects are available in areas such as arts, crafts, woodwork, horticulture, IT, group excursions, sports, drama, music, singing, culinary skills and life skills. The Cork community are based in Togher, Cork City.

L'Arche in Cork has envisaged new developments through a social enterprise café, which will provide members with improved working and learning opportunities. Also, a newly-developed horticulture project, including a sensory garden, will provide a therapeutic space for community members to grow produce that will be utilised by the café development. L'Arche is dedicated to providing each member with an individual needs assessment, which will advise the level of support required from person to person. The ethos of L'Arche is to provide relationship-based care to members, foster meaningful relationships, and make known the gifts of people without or without disabilities in a shared environment (Larche.ie, 2023).

1.4 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

1.4.1 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the research participants' experiences of choice with regard to education and training. It is also to elicit if the research participants were encouraged to pursue employment.

1.4.2 Research Objectives

- To carry out semi-structured interviews and facilitate self-made videos by three research participants to explore their experiences of choice and support with regard to education and training, and to elicit if they were encouraged to pursue employment.
- To conduct a literature review to indicate how people with disabilities are currently experiencing choice and support with regard to education and training and employment.
- To review the current efforts by L'Arche to provide choice and support to members with regard to education, training and employment opportunities.
- To develop recommendations for L'Arche to make improvements in the choices and supports that are available to members to pursue education, training and employment opportunities, with a view of informing future service provision.
- To develop recommendations for future research that is based on the findings from the literature review and the interviews conducted as part of this research project.

1.4.3 Research Questions

- What was the participant's experience of choice with regard to education and training?
- Were the participants encouraged to pursue employment?

1.5 An overview of each chapter

Chapter One – Introduction

The first chapter will outline the research title that was developed with L'Arche. It will provide the rationale for the topic and describe the reasons for my interest in this research study. There is a brief introduction to the CARL research partner and the history of L'Arche. This chapter also includes the research aims, objectives and research questions that guided this research study.

Chapter Two – Methodology

The methodology chapter describes the research methods. The chapter presents an overview of the research process. The chapter explains the epistemological framework and theoretical perspective to this research study. I will explain how I utilised the data collection methods and how I analysed the data. The chapter discusses my ethical considerations. I look at the challenges and limitations to the research. I also provide my reflexive position as the researcher to this piece of research.

Chapter Three – Literature Review

The third chapter explores the current literature that is available about the experiences of choice for people with disabilities with regard to education and training. I also examine the literature about encouraging people with disabilities to pursue employment. The chapter discusses national and international policy, legislation and the accreditation of courses for people with disabilities. This chapter highlights previous studies about the research topic.

Chapter Four – Findings

The fourth chapter presents the data that I collected from each of the semi-structured interviews during this research project. I will use a thematic analysis to explore six main themes that emerged from the data. I will discuss the findings from the data collection methods and link these findings with the previous chapter, the literature review.

Chapter Five – Conclusions and Recommendations

The final chapter of this research project will put forward a number of recommendations for further research about this topic by social researchers. I will provide a reflective journal entry about the experience of conducting this CARL research project. I will make a list of the conclusions and recommendations after a thematic analysis of the findings.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research title. I provided the rationale for this research study and a brief background to L'Arche, the research partner under the CARL initiative. The chapter discussed the research aims, objectives and the research questions. To conclude, I outlined the contents of each chapter of this research study.

Chapter Two Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the research methodology used for this study. I will explore the epistemological and theoretical perspectives that inform this research. Namely, I will consider social constructionism, participatory action and interpretivism. I will discuss how I used semi-structured interviews and visual methods to collect the data, and how I analysed the data. I will explore the ethical concerns and reflect on my position as the researcher for this study. To conclude, I will consider the challenges and limitations that have arisen during this research process.



2.2 Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

Epistemology is a subsection of philosophy that is concerned with theories of knowledge. The nature of humans is to uphold particular assumptions about their individual knowledge of the social world. So, epistemology is a way for us as humans to understand what we know and how we know it (Crotty, 2009). Social constructionism explores the ways that reality is constructed by the individual, as knowledge of the social world is most understood through the ways in which an individual can frame or represent their own experience (Onwuegbuzie, Burke Johnson and Collins, 2004). It explains lived experiences and an individual's social interactions with the world around them (Crotty, 2009). Social constructionism is applicable to this study as the participants can advise of their subjective experience of choice with regard to education and training. Also, participants can provide a subjective account of how they were encouraged to pursue employment. Social constructionism was useful in refining the research questions. Each research question explores the experience of support and choice for participants in employment, education and training. The research questions are as follows:

- What was the participant's experience of choice with regard to education and training?
- Were the participants encouraged to pursue employment?

2.2.1 Theoretical Framework

A participatory action perspective is significant to this research. This is a Community-Academic Links Research (CARL) project that seeks to inform future service provision for this organisation in terms of supporting participants to pursue employment, education and training. In order to make meaning of the experiences of people with disabilities in having a choice and being supported to pursue employment, education and training opportunities, it is important to hear from lived experiences. Kindon, Pain and Kesby (2007) define participatory action research as involving the researcher and the participants of a study working together to examine complex situations with the hope of making concrete changes for the better.

This study will utilise interpretivism as a theoretical framework to examine culture in a less critical way under a social constructionist approach (Crotty, 2009). Ryan (2018) describes interpretive theory as seeing truth and knowledge for individuals as subjective, situated in culture and history, and dependent on people's experiences and how they represent them. Therefore, Ryan (2018) states that researchers are linked to their own personal value and belief systems which informs how they collect and interpret data. This framework supports the

research questions and the objective of this study as it seeks to consider how the participants interpret the availability of choice and support with regard to employment, education and training for people with intellectual disabilities. Participants can interpret their experiences historically and in the present day.

Empowerment theory links social work theory to the theoretical framework of interpretivism for this study. Empowerment theory is constructed to link individual strengths and competencies to social policy and change. Individual wellbeing is linked with larger social and political environments (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). For this research, I was focused on exploring how participants had experienced choice with regard to education and training opportunities, and if they were encouraged to pursue employment. Empowerment theory focuses on identifying capabilities in people and explores how an individual's environment influences social problems, rather than placing blame on the individual themselves (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). In this regard, I considered if empowerment was experienced by participants, and how this was achieved by L'Arche. Empowerment theory provides opportunities for people to develop knowledge, skills and to engage with professionals in a collaborative manner (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995).

2.3 Research Methods

I chose qualitative research method as most appropriate for this study. Qualitative research focuses on developing an understanding of the research query with an idealistic approach, used to consider people's beliefs, attitudes, experiences, behaviours and interactions (Pathak, Bijayini and Kalra, 2013). I chose to utilise half hour semi-structured interviews for the research method. Semi-structured interviews are exploratory, and follow a guide that is created ahead of the interview. This guide is focused on a core topic that provides a general structure to the interview. Semi-structured interviews allow for discovery and provide the space for researchers to follow a trajectory of a particular topic (Magaldi and Berler, 2020). It was decided, through a discussion with the community liaison partner, that semi-structured interviews were most suitable to the participants due to their individual communication needs.

I used the interview guidelines during each interview but I was flexible, and I asked the questions in a non-specific order. Flexibility allowed participants to feel comfortable with me, and to feel the freedom to speak about their experiences of choice with regard to education and training and support to pursue employment. I gathered and created several resources ahead of

each interview. This includes consent forms, information sheets which outlined the purpose of the study, L'Arche owned audio recording and video equipment, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Teams, UCC credentials and a space to facilitate interviews and ensure that principles of confidentiality were applied.

2.3.1 Data Sampling

I decided after discussions with L'Arche management that the core members of the organisation were most suitable as potential participants to this research study. This meant that each potential participant had to have been resident of a L'Arche supported-living dwelling for at least ten years. Originally, twelve core members of L'Arche were considered as possible participants to this research study. However, two are deceased, two are no longer living in a L'Arche residency, and a further five members did not have the capacity to participate in this research study. It was concluded that three of these core members could potentially participate in this research study. Each of the possible participants consented to participating in this research study. This included two male and one female participant aged between fifty five and sixty years old. The Day Service Manager acted as a gatekeeper for each participant. Researchers are obliged to engage transparently when seeking access to an organisation for research purposes. Therefore, the role of a gatekeeper is to control access to an organisation such as a managing director (Singh and Wassenaar, 2016)

2.3.2 Collecting Data

I discussed the study with the participants and provided them with information sheets. Each participant signed a consent form ahead of the interview. I also provided participants with an interview guide. This was a list of questions, in a non-specific order, that would direct the interview. Information sheets, consent forms and interview guides were provided to participants in an Easy to Read format. Easy to Read formats are helpful to communicate with people who have an intellectual disability, a particular learning disability or have basic reading skills (Accessible Information Working Group, 2011). Each semi-structured interview was thirty minutes in duration and audio recorded. I encouraged each participant to avail of a movement break. A L'Arche staff member waited outside of the space and facilitated movement breaks with participants as and when they were required.

Visual data collection methods were useful, as they assisted participants to respond to the first research question. Self-made videos and photographs acted as prompts to assist the

research participant to reflect on their experiences of choice and support with regard to education and training. The use of visuals in social research is focused on empowering people to record their point of view and increase collective knowledge of issues, to provide information to professionals and their communities (Boxall and Ralph, 2009). Thus, image-based research provides a suitable medium for the involvement of people with disabilities in participatory projects (Boxall and Ralph, 2009). I facilitated self-made videos by prompting participants to utilise personal photographs that would assist them to uncover their experience of choice with regard to education and training. Videos were facilitated during the semi-structured interview process. Each self-made video was recorded using an IPad, webcam and tripod that is owned by L'Arche. I transcribed each semi-structured interview and self-made video verbatim using Microsoft Word to identify the main themes and conduct a thematic analysis.

2.3.3 Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to create research findings from the raw data that was collected from the semi-structured interviews and self-made videos conducted with the participants. Thematic analysis explores the social trends, patterns and attitudes from an individual or group that may be used to make conclusions about the experience of this individual or group (Carey, 2013). I was concerned with the trends and patterns that exist for members of L'Arche in their experience of choice and support with regard to pursuing employment, education and training opportunities. I interpreted the responses of the participants to categorise the main themes of this study. I used the main themes to conduct a thematic analysis of the data.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

I submitted an application to the MSW Research Ethics Committee in November 2022. I resubmitted to the Committee in February 2023 after considering these issues with the research partner and my tutor. This submission was granted, and this study was approved by the Committee.

2.4.1 Data protection concerns and confidentiality

I ensured compliance within the provisions of the UCC data storage guidelines when processing any of the raw data that I received from each participant. The participants documented their self-made video resources in response to the first research question using recording equipment that was owned by L'Arche. L'Arche was the owner of this raw data and

that a copy of each video could be retained to inform future provisions and direct service . I training. I transcribed all of the raw data from each video and interview using the dictate tool on Microsoft Word. I ensured that I was logged in using my UCC credentials. I maintained the confidentiality of all participants by anonymising the transcribed raw data by giving each participant a pseudonym. I returned the recording equipment with this data to the research partner. Also, I retained the transcribed data in a password-locked file on Microsoft Teams. This will be destroyed thirteen months after the examination board date in line with UCC data storage guidelines.

2.4.2 Informed consent

I clearly outlined to each participant that they did not have to take part in this research during the recruitment process. I ensured that each participant had the capacity to participate through discussion with the research partner. I reminded participants that consequences would not arise if they chose to withdraw from the research. Each participant consented to this study with a signed consent form. I provided each participant with a synopsis of how this research will be used in Easy to Read format. I took the time to discuss this further with each participant as required. Furthermore, a staff member, from each of the L'Arche residences, discussed the research with the participants ahead of the interview date. I provided each participant with enough time before and after the interview to discuss their concerns and any questions they may have had about the research. I worked collaboratively with the research partner and ensured that the research participants had received adequate information to make an informed decision and were able consent to participating in this research study.

2.4.3 Participant welfare

I ensured the welfare of each participant by using a trauma-informed approach to this study. I had an awareness that reflecting on previous experiences might be upsetting or triggering for the participants. I created a safe environment for the participants by providing them with Day Service management contact details ahead of the research. I also relayed the contact details of the Person In Charge (PIC) of the residential house of which each participant was resident. I collaborated with the research partner to display advocacy and support service contact details around the Day Service building in Easy to Read format. I ensured that each participant was aware of how to make contact with the L'Arche Safeguarding Officer ahead of the research project.

2.5 Reflexivity from the Researcher

From the beginning of this study, I acknowledged that there was a possibility that I carried bias to the research. I recognised that I have an existing working relationship with this organisation, as I was involved with them as a Day Service/Project assistant before enrolling to the MSW. Similarly, I recognised that the participants may have been more inclined to participate in this research due to the positive working relationship that we shared. Despite my best efforts to be a neutral researcher, I acknowledge that it is impossible to maintain a fully neutral position in research and I do not maintain that this is possible (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). I engaged with a reflective journal throughout the research process to consider these biases. This journal helped me to be more objective as the researcher to this study. Similarly, my social work values such as empathy, empowerment, equality and social justice are significant to my approach to this research study. Therefore, I was inspired by these values to pursue my dissertation under the CARL initiative as I had the opportunity to publicise the voices of L'Arche through this research.

2.6 Limitations and Challenges

It was originally envisaged by the research partner that I would facilitate a focus group with core members of L'Arche for this research study. However, I concluded that individual, semi-structured interviews were most suitable for the potential participants after deliberating with the research partner. In the end, a focus group was not possible due to the individual and communication needs for each participant. Individual interviews helped me to refine my relationship building skills. Each participant had enough time to explore any concerns that they had about the research. I believe that I received better responses from each participant as they had the freedom to speak directly to me, and I could allow time for movements breaks as required. Accessibility issues arose during the research process, as only three of the core members had the capacity to participate. I note that a smaller sample size was significant to my reflection on each individual experience. However, it is important to acknowledge that this sample does not reflect the views of all members of L'Arche experiences of choice and support with regard to employment, education and training.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research process and the methodology. It outlined the epistemological and theoretical framework that informed this study including social

constructionism, participatory action and interpretivism. Semi-structured interviews and visual methods were used to collect data and assist each participant to respond to the first research question. I explored thematic data analysis which produced the main themes of the study that will categorise the research findings. I addressed the ethical concerns addressed by the Committee. I reflected on the biases that I carried to this research study. Finally, I discussed the limitations that arose during this research study.

.Chapter Three Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

I conducted a thorough review of the literature that is relevant to the experiences of choice for people with disabilities with regard to education and training. I also researched the employment supports that are available for people with disabilities. The chapter provides an overview of the education and training choices, including the National Learning Network, Trinity College for People with Intellectual Disabilities and life skills learning opportunities for people with disabilities. I will explore the ways that people with disabilities are supported to pursue employment, as well as the barriers to employment for them. I will consider how L'Arche provides employment, education and training choices and supports to members. I will discuss the policy and legislation that exists around education, training and employment for people with disabilities. Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the accreditation of courses for people with disabilities.

3.2 An overview of education and training choices for people with disabilities

People with disabilities are significantly less likely to engage with further education and training in an Irish context (Aston, Banks and Shevlin, 2021). However, my research suggests that several education and training choices are available for people with disabilities. The National Learning Network is the largest facilitator of learning for people with disabilities in Ireland (Rehab Group, 2023). Also, Trinity College for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) offers life skills learning for people with disabilities (TCPID, 2022). The provision of adequate education and training choices is essential for people with disabilities to maintain real employment. Often, people with disabilities re-engage with education and training options to ensure that their disability does not interfere with maintaining employment (Watson, Banks and Lyons, 2015).

3.2.1 National Learning Network, TCPID and life skills learning

National Learning Network provides specific education and training opportunities that are tailored to people with disabilities. This is supported by the literature, as Shevlin, McGuckin, Bell and Devecchi (2016) suggest that post-school learning and training facilities for people with disabilities tend to be disability-specific and focused. National Learning Network is focused on providing education and training opportunities to people with

disabilities as they use flexi-skills methods to learning (Rehab Group, 2023). Flexi-skills methods personalise learning plans for people with disabilities, providing individualised learning opportunities in areas such as employment skills, horticulture, culinary and catering skills, art, crafts and design (Rehab Group, 2023). In particular, National Learning Network offers courses in Skills for Life. According to the literature, life skills learning is the most popular choice across all learning facilities for people with disabilities. People with disabilities tend to fall behind their non-disabled peers in life skills learning and development (Keenan, King, Curran and McPherson, 2013). Learning about life skills for people with disabilities is associated with increased independence, confidence and social inclusion (Keenan et al., 2013). TCPID facilitates the Certificate for Learning (CCL) course, which is a two-year life skills course for students with intellectual disabilities (TCPID, 2022). This is a higher education programme that is disability-specific by meeting the individual needs and capacity of people with intellectual disabilities (TCPID, 2022). CCL is also offered by University College Cork (UCC). CCL courses force educators to acknowledge the disparities in the education and training choices that are offered to people with intellectual disabilities. Educators in life skills must review their supportive role and find improved methods to facilitate this learning for people with intellectual disabilities (Kubiak, Fortune, Shields, Power, Murphy, Baird and Lacey, 2013). Gaining knowledge about the experiences of life skills learning for people with disabilities should be achieved through inclusive research, that includes an input from CCL students (Kubiak et al., 2013). The participants did not engage with learning opportunities outside of L'Arche. I will explore this in more detail in the next chapter.

3.3 Supporting people with disabilities to pursue employment

Embarking on the transition to employment for people with disabilities can be an incredibly daunting experience, and it is essential that education, training and disability services offer adequate support during this transition (Nolan and Gleeson, 2016). Employment supports must address the complex reasons that inhibit people with disabilities from pursuing employment, including education levels, skills, loss of benefits and incidences of ill-health (GOI, 2015, p.5). Studies suggest that 47% percent of working age people with disabilities, that are not in employment, would only be willing to work if adequate support structures were available (Watson, Banks and Lyons, 2015).

3.3.1 Services and barriers to employment

From my research, it is clear that people with disabilities are not adequately supported to pursue employment, and are faced with barriers like needing to be 'job ready' (Citizens Information, 2023). Despite recent shifts in disability policy in Ireland from a medical model towards a social model, employment supports for people with disabilities tend to remain focused on 'fixing' the individual, rather than challenging the wider social structures that inhibit employment. An individual's experience of difficulty in ascertaining employment reinforces low self-esteem, poor aspirations and negative messages (Scanlon, Kamp and Cochrane, 2019). According to the literature, EmployAbility provides a range of supports to people with disabilities that are open to the labour market. However, EmployAbility makes assumptions with regard to a person's job readiness (Citizens Information, 2023). People with disabilities must be job ready and have the necessary training and education to utilise this service. EmployAbility helps people with disabilities to apply for jobs, match their skills to the needs of employers, and offers advice on employment benefits (Citizens Information, 2023). The participants of this research study did not describe any experiences with specific employment support services. Instead, they discussed a number of barriers to employment which I will explore in the findings chapter. The literature echoes that external barriers to employment for people with disabilities can exist, including a lack of adequate supports, employment opportunities and discrimination (Trembath, Balandin, Stancliffe and Togher, 2010).

3.4 An overview of education, training and employment efforts by L'Arche

Education and training opportunities are provided to members of L'Arche through the Le Cheile Day Service/Project. L'Arche provides learning opportunities like arts, crafts, woodwork, culinary skills, life skills and horticulture. In terms of employment, I had difficulty ascertaining the current efforts by L'Arche to encourage members to pursue employment from the literature. In 2022, L'Arche facilitated the Go Green project which was designed to develop the on-site horticulture project. It is envisaged that this project will assist the upcoming café development by L'Arche. This will social and financial enterprise opportunities for members of L'Arche (Larche.ie, 2023).

3.5 Policy and legislation: employment, education and training

3.5.1 Education and training

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) forms a legislative basis for the human rights of people with disabilities in Ireland. The

ratification of this Convention by Ireland constitutes a paradigm shift in the views of society towards people with disabilities. In particular, Article 24 of the UNCRPD ensures that Ireland commits to an inclusive education system that acknowledges lifelong learning and all levels of education for people with disabilities (Lombardi, Vandenbussche, Claes, Schalock, De Maeyer and Vandevelde, 2019). Despite this legislation and the changes in societal views towards education, challenges still exist with regard to funding to create inclusive education spaces for people with disabilities. In order to fully comply with Article 24, the Convention requires Irish governments to allocate greater resources to educating and training people with disabilities (Lombardi et al., 2022). Similarly, challenges exist to education policies for adults with disabilities who attend day services. There is no evidence of a legislative policy or framework that guides the provision of education for adults in day services on an international or national level (NCSE, 2021). However, it is necessary to mention the New Directions policy that introduced the mobilisation of twelve supports for people with disabilities to have choice and options around how they spend their time in day services in Ireland (HSE, 2015).

3.5.2 Employment

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (2015-2024) aims to assist people with disabilities to ascertain employment, earn a living, make contributions and reduce their risk of poverty. This is extended to a range of people with different disabilities and does not prioritise job-readiness. The Strategy is a cross-governmental approach that is dedicated to addressing the barriers to employment for people with disabilities. It is focused on a person's capacity and offering employment supports required for people with disabilities (GOI, 2015). The National Disability Authority (NDA) works to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy by providing advice to departments, and conducting research that informs policy work. The latest NDA Review on the Comprehensive Employment Strategy suggests that despite slow progression, developments are evident in accessibility to transport infrastructure and systems. However, the employment gap is still high and low engagement levels in training and further education is worrying with regard to the effectiveness of this policy (NDA, 2022).

3.6 Accreditation of courses for people with disabilities

The absence of formal accreditation for education and training programmes tailored to students with disabilities is problematic. The literature suggests that this is due to the fact that

potential employers cannot ascertain the level of qualification of people with disabilities who have completed unaccredited programmes (Aston, 2019). However, the majority of inclusive education and training initiatives have progressed significantly, as some organisations and institutions have created their own accredited programmes to in order to tackle this dilemma (Hurst, 2014). The CCL course has abolished completion certification for students and instead, introduced formal accreditation by way of a level five National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (TCPID, 2022). The Irish National Framework of Qualifications is a system of ten levels which is used to describe qualifications that are ascertained within the education and training system in Ireland, including General Education Awards, Further Education and Training and Higher Education Awards (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2023). My research suggests that the formal accreditation of education and training programmes for people with disabilities is important for both students and employers. In order to develop within the education system, a formal qualification is significant to students with disabilities. For employers, formal accreditation means that concrete evidence exists about the capabilities of each graduate or new employee (Aston, 2019).

Despite the advantages to formal accreditation for people with disabilities, the literature suggests that limitations also exist to accredited courses. Several studies have drawn attention to the fact that the provision of formal qualifications that are mapped to NFQ level can be geographically restricted (Scanlon and Doyle, 2018). For example, the reconceptualised Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice is only offered by inclusive education initiatives in Dublin and Cork. Naturally, this does not account for the practicalities of being a person with a disability in Ireland. Accessibility issues arise for the broad range of people with disabilities that are encouraged to attend and complete further education and training courses like this Certificate (Scanlon and Doyle, 2018). In order to facilitate a national transition for people with disabilities towards formal and accredited programmes of learning, the literature suggests that a dedication transition facility should exist in Adult Disability Services. This facility should recognise other aspects to learning such as workplace experiences, in order to facilitate the development of people with disabilities in the education system in Ireland. Also, this will allow for the progression of people with disabilities towards real and permanent employment opportunities (Scanlon and Doyle, 2018). Interestingly, the participants to this research study did not describe any experiences of choice with regard to

formally accredited education and training programmes. Also, they did not portray an understanding of the importance of formal accreditation for people with disabilities. Instead, the participants referred to their receipt of certificates of completion at the end of education and training programmes, which is an institutional certificate and is not mapped to a formal qualification of NFQ level (Aston, 2019). I will explore this further in the next chapter.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the education and training choices that are available to people with disabilities. It outlines employment supports and the barriers to employment for people with disabilities. I considered how L'Arche supports members to pursue education, training and employment. I discussed policy and legislation in education, training and employment for people with disabilities. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the formal accreditation of education and training programmes for people with disabilities.

Chapter Four Findings

4.1 Introduction

I will introduce the findings of this research study in this chapter. This chapter provides a thematic analysis of the data that I collected from each of the participants. I will identify six main themes that emerged from my analysis of the data. I will use direct quotes from each of the research participants to highlight these themes. Each research participant will remain entirely anonymous, and will be alluded to as Participant A, B and C. The themes that emerged from my analysis are:

First Theme	***Lack of awareness about choices available***
Second Theme	***Insufficient choice of accredited education and training opportunities***
Third Theme	***Employment supports by L'Arche***
Fourth Theme	***Barriers to employment***
Fifth Theme	***Benefits of employment***
Sixth Theme	***Moving forward for L'Arche – Views of the participants***

4.2 First Theme: Lack of awareness about choices available

Each of the participants acknowledged that they had experienced choice with regard to education and training. However, the choices that were offered to each participant were the same or very similar and mostly in arts, crafts and life skills learning.

Participant A: *"I started in the art room. I did candle-making and weaving and I did life skills. That's all. That was the choice. I loved art. I loved the weaving and I enjoyed being out. I did go to Mayfield to do art for a while. I did do learning about getting a job outside L'Arche, life*

skills like handling money I suppose. Things about food, life skills, how to buy clothes, hygiene and how to clean a carpet"

Participant B: *"No. Not really. Not much choice. I did art but they used to only help the best people that are good at art. In Mayfield too. I preferred working in the day service but it was very boring. I used to be sitting down all the time with the same people and things. I enjoyed it but it wasn't really my kind of thing. I said I'd retire, I rather be here with the retired women"*

Participant C: *"Just the different courses in L'Arche. I did all my learning and courses in L'Arche. I did life skills but I didn't enjoy it. I learned about money and stuff. I did one course on Tramore Road but I don't know if that was outside of L'Arche"*

Discussion

This theme emerges from the first research question, *'what was the participant's experience of choice with regard to education and training?'*. The participants acknowledged that they were mostly offered choices in education and training through the L'Arche Day Service/Projects in art, crafts or life skills. On review of the literature, education and training for people with disabilities is focused on the acquisition of life skills, that supports people with disabilities to live a better life and bridge the gap between capability and basic functioning (Prajapati, Sharma and Sharma, 2017). The participants did refer to their experiences of learning in 'Mayfield' and 'Tramore Road'. However, they could not differentiate if this was a further education or training initiative, or simply an extension to the L'Arche Day Service/Projects. While they had experienced some choice, the participants did not seem to be aware of other education and training choices that are available to people with disabilities. Seemingly, they did not experience choice with regard to education and training outside of what was on offer from L'Arche.

4.3 Second Theme: Insufficient choice of accredited education and training opportunities

Each of the participants spoke fondly about receiving certificates of completion after education and training courses. However, none of the participants mentioned their experience of choice with regard to formal accreditation in education or training.

Participant A: *"I would have liked to do a course. I'd like to do college. It would be important for me to get a certificate or a qualification. I got a certificate for my art course. I had a presentation with tea and cakes. I loved that part"*

Participant B: *"I got a cert I'm sure in Mayfield one time. It was important for me. I think college would be too hard for someone like me"*

Participant C: *"I liked getting a cert. I do have a cert in the Green projects. I would've liked to go to college. I would've studied anything but probably politics. I am interested in politics. I never went to college. No one ever supported me to go"*

Discussion

Formal accreditation was explored in response to the first research question. Each of the participants had received at least one certificate of completion in art or horticulture. None of the participants mentioned their experience of choice with regard to formal accreditation in education or training. However, the participants did express an understanding about formal qualifications from higher education institutions or college. One of the participants expressed their desire to study in an area of their choice. In this case, the participant wished that they were supported to attend college and study politics. The importance of choice and support with regard to higher education and training for people with disabilities is noted by the literature. Yssel, Pak and Beilke (2016) note that choices and support services have contributed to the increase of students with disabilities attending higher education institutions. There is a lack of formally accredited courses available to members of L'Arche in areas of interest. Structural supports are required to provide members with choices with regard to formal accreditation in education and training. Perhaps, further consultation and documentation of interests is required by L'Arche to enable members to pursue formal accreditation in specific skills or areas of their choice.

4.4 Third Theme: Employment supports by L'Arche

Each of the participants had experienced some encouragement to pursue employment during their time with L'Arche. The participants persistently mentioned that their only encouragement to pursue employment came from L'Arche staff and management. Most of the participants had engaged with either voluntary or paid employment since coming to L'Arche. Each of these participants were able to differentiate between paid and voluntary work, but struggled to differentiate between paid employment and 'working' or attending Day Service/Projects.

Participant A: *"I was working doing housekeeping, cleaning and things. I was a cleaning woman. When herself went away, I was able to get her job in the Day Service/Projects. I said I would try it out. I worked in a shop too. I would have liked to work somewhere else. I never did because I was not well and fearful"*

Participant B: *"I was working in the day service, I used to do woodwork, weaving, life skills. All those things are not there now no more. I would like to go and get my own money by myself every Friday, Monday or Thursday to go those days down to the post office in Wilton. I think someone would help me, maybe my house leader. I've a nice house leader. I worked in a hairdressers and in a voluntary shop"*

Participant C: *"I got one job myself. I just heard about it in L'Arche. I was looking after the fire exits in a theatre. I wasn't paid, that was voluntary. At least I loved it. I worked in a hotel too. I would have preferred my theatre job. I was doing laundry and I worked in Day Service. I don't know the difference, I was kind of retired but I came back because I like meeting people"*

Discussion

This theme emerges from the second research question, *"Were the participants encouraged to pursue employment?"*. The participants repeatedly explained how they were encouraged to pursue employment by L'Arche. They did not seem to have any awareness of employment support services that are available outside of L'Arche. On reviewing the literature, it is suggested that although people with intellectual disabilities make valuable contributions to the workplace, they usually do not succeed in long-term paid employment opportunities, and experience much lower rates of employment. Improved structural supports are necessary to encourage people with disabilities to pursue employment (Lysaght, Ouellette-Kuntz and Cheng-Jung, 2017). It is evident that further supports are required by L'Arche to make members aware of the employment supports that are available to them outside of L'Arche. Further support is required to assist members to transition from 'working' or attending Day Service/Projects to paid employment. It is necessary that L'Arche encourages members to pursue employment by providing improved supports for the transition from 'working' in the Day Service/Projects to paid employment.

4.5 Fourth Theme: Barriers to employment

All participants expressed that there were barriers to their pursuit of employment, despite the encouragement that they received from L'Arche. During the interviews, it was apparent that each of the participants had been impacted by costs, workplace attitudes and stigma. Communication issues also arose as a barrier to employment.

Participant A: *"I got taxis up and down to work and it cost a lot. I started to get the bus because it was too much then. One day it was 25 euros. We can try working and if we don't like it we can give it up. The manager for my job wasn't great. I was supposed to clean the toilet but then I was cleaning ovens, washing floors and hoovering as well for them"*

Participant B: *" The old house leaders in L'Arche got me those jobs. They gave me too much work and I always had to be in first. The supervisor wasn't very nice to me. He worked me for hours and one time he said I didn't put everything back the right way, I don't like when people speak to me like that. It was a bit much getting the bus and expensive. L'Arche wouldn't bring me that time"*

Participant C: *"I found one job myself. L'Arche did help too. The people were mostly nice but the job in the hotel was gone, I was fired. I suppose my disability probably didn't help"*

Discussion

Each of the participants experienced very similar barriers to employment. Two of the participants expressed that the cost of travelling to workplaces was an issue. They noted that the cost of travelling from their supported-living residences to the workplace was detrimental to their pursuit of employment. All three of the participants commented on their experience of workplace attitudes. Stigma around disability was also an issue for them. The literature suggests that stigma and workplace attitudes are the biggest barriers to employment for people with disabilities (Rashid and Nicholas, 2017). Furthermore, Shier and Jones (2009) suggest that stigma and attitudes are significant to people with disabilities as concerns arise about labelling and discrimination by employers. In particular, Participant C made reference to their disability, stating that this may have been the reason that their employment ceased. They also commented on the fact that their disability did not help or encourage them to pursue further employment. Communication issues also arose, as two of the participants stated that they felt overworked by the employer. A breakdown in communication causes problems in the workplace for people with disabilities (Riesen and Morgan, 2018). The participants stated that issues with communication meant that they were given extra responsibilities, that were not

outlined to them when they accepted the employment. The participants acknowledged the barriers to employment, and identified a need for improved supports from L'Arche to encourage members to pursue employment, including proper transport arrangements. Also, it is clear that further supports are required for members of L'Arche to increase their awareness of employment support services that are available to them besides L'Arche staff and management.

4.6 Fifth Theme: Benefits to employment

During the interviews and self-made videos, all three of the participants mentioned the benefits of being encouraged to pursue employment. In particular, all of the participants mentioned that they enjoyed the independence that they experienced while they were employed. Two of the participants also mentioned that they benefitted from the financial gain that is associated with employment.

Participant A: *"If you pay me, I'll take it of course. We all love money. I'm not married, so I'll be happy with my pension now. Even if it was 20 or 30 euro I don't need loads. I liked the money"*

Participant B: *"I wanted to get a job so I could get an apartment of my own. I'm quite independent. I was very independent working. I used to get the bus to the hairdressers on my own. It's a pure pity that the owner is dead because I would have loved to have kept going there. She was just too sick. I liked the money too"*

Participant C: *" I got the hotel job through somebody in Dublin. I had to be trained for that in Dublin. I was independent in that way"*

Discussion

All participants to this research study spoke of the benefits of being encouraged to pursue employment. They repeatedly mentioned the independence and financial gain that they experienced during employment. It was clear that each of the participants had a good understanding about their experience of paid employment. They also made it clear that they were encouraged by L'Arche staff and management to pursue paid employment. In particular, each of the participants mentioned that the house leaders, or People In Charge (PIC) of each supported-living residence, were most encouraging in their pursuit of employment. The benefits of encouraging employment for people with disabilities are supported by the literature,

as McCausland, McCallion, Brennan and McCarron (2019) note that employment is associated with better quality of life for people with disabilities, as well as personal meaning, a sense of purpose and satisfaction. However, the participants did not mention that they had experienced the benefits of being encouraged to pursue employment through employment support services. There is a lack of understanding about external supports for people with disabilities by members of L'Arche. It is clear that efforts must be made by L'Arche to increase this awareness. This would improve service provision for L'Arche and provide members with better choice and supports with regard to employment, education and training.

4.7 Sixth Theme: Moving forward

Each participant discussed what they felt would have enabled them to make choices about education and training, or encouraged them to pursue employment. The participants mentioned that communication, funding, transport arrangements and being able to search for opportunities on the internet as factors to be considered moving forward.

Participant A: *"Communication, keep talking and helping us. Funding is very important"*

Participant B: *"L'Arche should tell them to go to college if they want and then get a job. Be patient and talk to them. They could bring them in the van. They should bring people in their car, not on the bus"*

Participant C: *" They could sit them down and talk to them, show them what is out there. They should teach them to use the internet because that's where all the jobs are. No one here really can use the internet and L'Arche should be doing more to teach them"*

Discussion

The participants made several suggestions about how to provide better choices and supports to members of L'Arche with regard to education, training and employment, which could inform future service provision. Two of the participants suggested that consistent communication between members and L'Arche would be beneficial. One of the participants made specific reference to the importance of funding to allow members to pursue education and training opportunities of their choice. The literature suggests that individualised funding allows people with disabilities to decide how money is used to meet their individual needs and desires (Fleming, McGilloway and Barry, 2016). One of the participants suggested that teaching members about the internet and how to search for education, employment and training

opportunities would be significant for future practice. The ability to use the internet would provide members with the opportunity to pursue their education and training choices and to find external employment supports.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and self-made videos. Each of the participants spoke openly about their experience of choice and support with regard to education, training and employment. Subsequently, six main themes emerged from my analysis of the data. The themes that arose are:

- Lack of awareness about education and training choices
- Employment supports by L'Arche
- Barriers to employment
- Benefits of employment
- Insufficient choice in accreditation
- Moving forward

I was provided with a very good understanding about the participants experience of choice in education and training, and their experience of being encouraged to pursue employment. The participants were open about their feelings, and how they would have liked to have experienced choice and support with regard to education, training and employment. The participants made suggestions about what L'Arche could do for members to improve their experience of choice and support to inform future service provision.

Chapter Five Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on the conclusions drawn from the findings chapter of this research study. Also, this chapter outlines the recommendations that were drawn from my research and the views of the research participants. To conclude, I will reflect on the process of conducting this research study under the CARL initiative with L'Arche.

5.2 Conclusions

The aim of this research study was to explore the participants experience of choice with regard to education and training, and to elicit if the research participants were encouraged to pursue employment. I conducted primary research in the form of semi-structured interviews. I also facilitated self-made videos for the research participants by encouraging them to use visual data and photographs as prompts to their response to the research questions. This study set out to respond to two main research questions. I conducted a thematic analysis which identified six main themes from the participants responses. After this analysis, I was able to make conclusions from the participants responses to the research questions:

In response to the first research question, "*What was the participants experience of choice with regard to education and training?",* the participants did report that they had experienced some choice with regard to education and training. But, choices were only offered to them through the Day Service/Projects and were very similar and focused on arts, crafts and life skills. The participants did refer to their experiences of learning outside of L'Arche, but they could not comment on whether this was facilitated as an extension to the L'Arche Day Service/ Projects or by an external educator or trainer. The participants expressed that their experience of choice with regard to formal or accredited education and training opportunities was insufficient. Each participant did mention their experience of receiving certificates of completion after attending education and training courses, but they did not suggest that they had received formal accreditation or qualifications. The participants had a good understanding about formal accreditation and qualifications from higher education institutions or colleges. They expressed a desire to have been given the choice to pursue higher education or training opportunities in an area of their interest, and described what they think L'Arche could do to improve the experience of choice for members with regard to education or training.

In response to the second question, *"Were the participants encouraged to pursue employment?",* each of the participants had been encouraged to pursue employment, but only by L'Arche staff members and management. The participants had been encouraged to pursue paid employment opportunities, and were able to differentiate between paid and voluntary employment. However, the participants struggled to differentiate between paid employment and attending or 'working' in the L'Arche Day Service/Projects. The participants did not seem to be aware of services that are available to encourage and support employment for people with disabilities. Further supports are required to help members of L'Arche to transition from 'working' in the Day Service/Projects to paid employment. The participants discussed the barriers they faced to employment and also the benefits of being encouraged to pursue employment. The barriers discussed include costs, workplace attitudes, stigma and communication issues. The benefits to being encouraged to pursue employment included independence and financial gain. None of the participants mentioned the benefits of engaging with employment services, and expressed little understanding about the external supports that are available to encourage people with disabilities to pursue employment.

Each of the participants were very open about what they think is required by L'Arche moving forward, to improve members experience of choice with regard to education and training. They also made suggestions about how L'Arche can encourage members to pursue employment. The participants noted that funding is required, and that members should be taught about using the internet, as this will encourage participants to refine their interests in education and training opportunities and to find employment. Internet usage would also allow the participants to find external education, training and employment supports. From doing this project, I have learned that suggestions that are provided by the participants are extremely important to informing future service provision for L'Arche. I realise that conducting primary research is advantageous because the data that I collected was first-hand and an accurate representation of the views of the participants. I have learned that I enjoy conducting research that is highly focused and responds to a specific research dilemma.

5.3 Recommendations

Increase awareness

- Increase awareness for management and staff about the individual choice and interests of members. Experiential sampling methods by L'Arche management and staff would

be beneficial to members experiences of choice with regard to education and training. This method would allow members to discuss their thoughts, feelings and individual perceptions about education and training.

- Consultation and documentation of individual interests and choice with regard to education and training by L'Arche staff and management. This would inform future service provision by improving the awareness of L'Arche staff and management about individual choices and interests.
- Increase awareness about the education and training facilities that are available for people with disabilities outside of the L'Arche Day Service/Projects, including the availability of formal accreditation and qualifications from higher education and training institution to improve members experience of choice.
- There is a need for increased awareness for members of L'Arche around the employment support services that are available for people with disabilities outside of the L'Arche Day Service/Projects. This awareness would be valuable to encouraging members to pursue employment.

Education

- Support for members of L'Arche around using the internet was suggested by one of the research participants as beneficial for members of L'Arche to identify education, training and employment opportunities and choices.
- Education for staff around how to support members of L'Arche to make choices with regard to education and training and how to encourage members to pursue paid employment.
- Education for members of L'Arche about the difference between attending or 'working' at L'Arche Day Service/Projects and paid employment. Also, further education is required for members to be able to identify their attendance at L'Arche Day Service/Projects or external education and training facilities.

Further Research

- Further research would be beneficial for L'Arche to ascertain the voices of other members. The participants to this research study must have been resident in a L'Arche supported-living dwelling for at least ten years. Hearing the voices of other members of L'Arche who have experienced choice and support with regard to employment,

education and training opportunities would offer further insight into the improvements that are required for L'Arche. This is essential to informing future service provision.

- Conducting further research with L'Arche staff and management to ascertain their perceptions of the experience of choice and support for members of L'Arche with regard to employment, education and training would be useful to informing future service provision.
- This research study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, due to the individual needs of each of the research participants. Perhaps, conducting research with a larger sample and collecting data through focus groups would be beneficial and interesting to future researchers to ascertain the experience of choice with regard to education and training and to elicit if members were encouraged to pursue employment.

5.4 My reflection on this research study

I have thoroughly enjoyed this research process and I am very satisfied with the outcome of this project. It has been a pleasure to reconnect with L'Arche Community Cork through research. I have always been interested in disabilities and the area of disability in social work practice. So, I have thoroughly enjoyed completing my dissertation within this sector. I feel very honoured to have been given the opportunity to collaborate with L'Arche, and to support this organisation with my research. L'Arche has embraced the opportunity to conduct research under the CARL initiative, and I am hopeful that this collaboration will continue with future social work students for many years in the future. I want to commend each member of this organisation, particular my community liaison person Meadhbh Furlong, for making my first experience of a primary research study so pleasant. Undoubtedly, I experienced some anxieties and frustrations during this research process. I was determined that this research project would do the research participants the justice that they deserved. I became frustrated, and I felt the significant pressure that I had placed on myself. At times, I was overwhelmed and worried about the quality of this research. Thankfully, dedication, resilience and relentless support from my tutor, tutorial group, family and friends helped me to complete this research project.

If I was to complete this research study again, I might approach the research method differently. I would have liked to experience conducting a focus group as I am interested in group dynamics. However, it was decided that semi-structured interviews and self-made videos were most efficient for this research due to the individual needs and requirements of each

research participant. I have learned thar I really enjoy conducting future research. I think that this would guide my involvement with future research opportunities. In terms of my professional development, I think that I need to refine my organisation and time management skills to guide future research studies. Next time, I would complete the MSW Research Ethics Committee form for ethical approval in a more timely manner. This would prevent delays in conducting primary research and collecting data. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to refine my research skills. I have learned that being organised, having the ability to analyse data and rapport-building skills are quintessential to conducting an impressive primary research project. Going forward, I will continue to apply rapport-building skills in my future practice as a social worker. I will always remember to actively listen to the voice of the participant and to be flexible in my approach to professional practice. I will remember that disability services are determined to providing choice and supports to service users as they embark on their journey to employment, education and training. Although challenging, I think that I have become more confident in my personal and professional abilities since conducting this research project. I look forward to a long and distinguished role of support and advocacy for people through social work.

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Appendices

Appendix One – Ethical Approval

MSW Research Ethics Committee

School of Applied Social Studies

Applicant:	Bronagh Desmond, 2022/23
Committee Date:	3rd February 2023
Tutor(s):	[redacted]
Reference:	2022-1

Dear Bronagh

Thank you for your resubmission to the MSW research ethics committee.

Your application is **approved**.

We wish you all the best with your research project. If you have questions, please contact your MSW tutor.

Best wishes,

[redacted]
On behalf of the MSW Research Ethics Committee

Appendix Two – Information Sheet

Information sheet



I am looking for core members of L'Arche to take part in a research study.

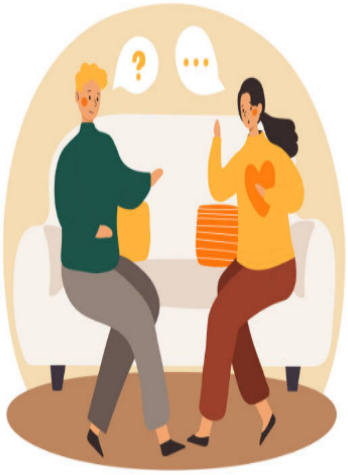
The study is called 'Nothing About Us Without Us: Core members' experiences of choice and support with regard to employment, education and training, with a view of informing future service provision for L'Arche Cork'.



It is a study about how you were supported and given a choice to engage with employment, education and training opportunities.

I must complete a research study as part of my Master of Social Work degree in UCC.





Participation involves a video-recording and a 30 minute interview.



You are invited to take part because you are a core member of L'Arche.

Your feedback on your experiences will help to inform L'Arche of what is needed to improve services.



You must give your consent if you wish to take part.

Taking part is voluntary.

Your name will not be given.



Your interview will be recorded.

This recording will be viewed by me and day service management.

The recording will be stored in a locked file.

I will keep the recording for 13 months after the UCC examination board date.

Videos will be stored on L'Arche recording equipment. The recording will be kept by L'Arche to improve future services.



This study will be viewed by my supervisor, another marker and an external examiner.

Other students may read this study.

I will present the results to L'Arche.

This study will be published on the Community-Academic Links Research UCC website.



I do not think that there will be any disadvantages to participating in this study.

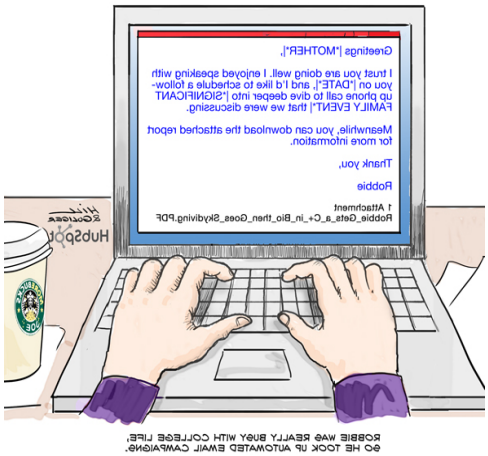
Talking about your experiences in the past might be upsetting.

I will ask how you are feeling at the end of the interview.



If you are feeling upset, you should contact day service management or the safeguarding officer.

You can find contact details displayed in the day service building.



If you change your mind about participating during the first two weeks after the interview, please email:

Bronagh Desmond

117425302@umail.ucc.ie



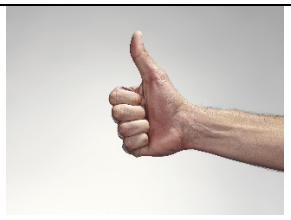
Please email me at 117425302@umail.ucc.ie if you have any questions.



This study has been approved by the UCC MSW Research Ethics Committee.

Appendix Three – Consent Forms

Consent form

		
I agree to participate in Bronagh Desmond's research study.		
I understand what this research study is about.		
I have received information about this study.		
I give permission for my interview with Bronagh Desmond to be recorded.		
I understand that I can change my mind about participating in this research until 2 weeks after the interview		
I understand that this study will be published on the Community Academic Research Links UCC website.		

I understand that my name will not be given in this research study.		

Write your **name** _____

Write the **date** _____

Video consent form



I agree to being video recorded.



The information in my video will be transcribed (written).

The video will be stored safely in my file on the day service co-ordinator computer.

I can get a copy of the interview if I wish.



My video is confidential and will not be published.

Some information that I give will be published.

My name will not be given.

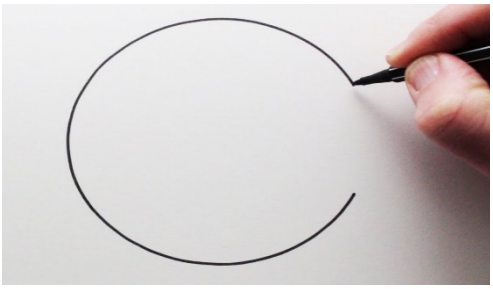
My information can help managers to improve services for core members in L'Arche around learning, working or getting a job.

If I give any information that may mean that someone is being hurt or in danger of being hurt, it will be shared with the safeguarding officer.



Write your name

_____



Please circle yes or no.



Yes, you **can** record and use a video of me.



No, you can **not** record and use a video of me.

Appendix Four – Interview Guidelines

- Do you have any questions before we start?
- Do you know that you can take a movement break at any time during this interview?
- Did you have a choice of different learning providers, like colleges/schools/universities, and courses?
- Did you pursue an education or learning?
- What did you learn about?
- Did you enjoy it?
- Did you ever attend training in a specific skill/area such as candle making or weaving?
- Did you enjoy learning about that skill/area?
- Do you have a job?
- Did you ever have a job?
- Were you supported to get a job by L'Arche?
- How does L'Arche support members to get a job?
- If you could choose a job, what kind of job would this be?
- Were you ever encouraged to get that job, or did you get any job that was available to you?
- What stopped you from getting working?
- Did transport ever stop you from learning or working?
- Was it important that you got a training certificate when completed a course?
- Would you have liked to have gotten a qualification from a university, working or learning?
- Do you understand the difference between a paid job and working in L'Arche?

- What do you think that L'Arche could do to support members to get an education, training or a job?
- How are you feeling after those questions?