



New Horizons

Conference Report 2013

The Traveller Movement



*'We have always held to the hope, the belief,
the conviction that there is a better life,
a better world, beyond the horizon'*

Franklin D. Roosevelt



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WHAT WAS EXPLORED AT THE 2013 CONFERENCE?

This year's conference looked at the:

- opportunities for young Gypsies and Travellers in accessing training and employment and examined what role models there were within the communities;
- investigated how Gypsies and Travellers are portrayed in the media and how we can challenge inaccurate and discriminatory coverage;
- asked whether the Government and Local Authorities understand, acknowledge and recognize Gypsy and Irish Traveller ethnicity in the planning system;
- looked at whether Gypsies and Travellers are accessing talking therapies and getting sufficient support in relation to bereavement and mental health;
- assessed the impact of insecure accommodation and the living environment on Gypsies' and Travellers' health;
- how the Government and organizations can address the high incidence of child poverty within these communities;
- what needs to be done to improve community engagement and voter registration among Gypsies and Travellers and how we can all work better together to address these issues.



KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The media is a central player in local disputes concerning Traveller sites and wider issues of community cohesion. **Gypsy and Traveller organisations and other responsible parties need to challenge local and national stories which potentially break the media's own codes of practice.** The conference heard that winning small victories has the double advantage of influencing and changing how the media report these communities, whilst also giving hope and encouragement to grass-roots campaigners who face what appears to be an overwhelming task.
2. The high levels of child poverty experienced by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma is significantly influenced by the accommodation insecurity and social deprivation many of these communities face. **The Governments' 2014 child poverty strategy should make specific reference to Gypsies, Travellers and Roma and the wider social determinates of child poverty, including housing/accommodation.**
3. **Services engaging with Gypsies Roma and Travellers need to make themselves accessible and be clear about their role and what their service can offer (and cannot offer) these communities.** There is an onus on workers from such services to educate themselves on the cultural context and to understand the historic reasons why there may be low levels of trust by community members in some services.
4. The current definition of Gypsies and Travellers for the purposes of Government planning guidance (described as 'gypsy status') promotes inequality and prejudicial treatment for many in these communities. This is especially true for community members who are women, those who are working in non-traditional practices and those living in 'bricks and mortar' housing. **The Government need to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the Gypsy and Traveller communities to effectively address this issue and develop a revised definition.**
5. Political participation amongst Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is low and has an impact on the wider social determinates experienced by these groups. **It's critical that the Electoral Commission and other funders support work to increase registration and participation.** Such work could include promoting the vote as a valuable commodity amongst the communities through following the model developed by Operation Black Vote.
6. Data from the 2011 census shows that Gypsies and Irish Travellers face particularly disadvantage in the labour market. Initiatives like the Traveller Movement internship programme show that developing employment opportunities for young community members through tailored work experience and training can be a vital stepping stone towards gainful employment. **The Government should reinstate targeted provision for such focused schemes with a proven financial return on investment.**

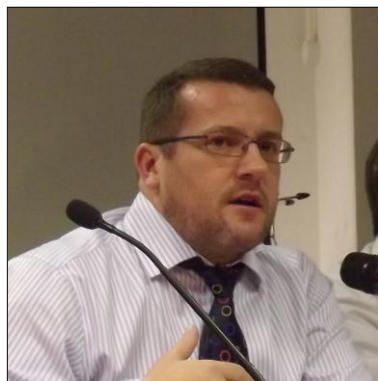
CHAIR AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER SUMMARIES

Pauline Anderson (Conference Chair) and Joseph Browne (TM Chair)

Traveller Movement Trustees

Pauline Anderson and Joe Browne welcomed people to the conference and spoke about the ongoing work of the Traveller Movement and the importance of Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, and the organisations working with them, moving forward together in solidarity and mutual support.

Joe Browne described how the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain had changed its name to the Traveller Movement to better reflect the greater inclusivity and partnership working of the organisation.



Joe Browne (TM Chair)



**Pauline Anderson
(Conference Chair)**



**Josie Mavromatis and Dr Nigel
Hewett**

Josie Mavromatis and Dr Nigel Hewett

Care Navigator and Medical Director, Pathway Healthcare for Homeless People

Dr Nigel Hewett described his experience setting up University College London Hospital's Pathway homeless team in 2009.

In 2010 he was a founder member of the Faculty for Homeless and Inclusion Health of the College of Medicine and in 2011 became Medical Director of Pathway – a new Charity formed to improve the health care of homeless people and support the Faculty.

Nigel was joined by his Pathway colleague Josie Mavromatis who described her experience of being homeless and how after she had recovered from tuberculosis became a volunteer working with homeless people. She talked about her journey from being homeless to becoming the lead care navigator for Pathway Healthcare for Homeless People and setting up the navigators scheme.



Ian Acheson

Chief Operating Officer at the Equality and Human Rights Commission

Ian Acheson talked about the key work the EHRC has conducted on Gypsy and Traveller issues. He cited a number of EHRC reports addressing accommodation provision and the wider inequalities experienced by these communities.

Ian went on to describe some of the EHRC's more recent engagement on Gypsy and Traveller discrimination issues in local authorities such as Chorley and Thurrock. He also described the EHRC's involvement supporting the Traveller Movement and Howe & Co solicitors' successful challenge to the Advertising Standards Agency on Channel 4's Big Fat Gypsy Wedding billboards.

Mr Acheson noted the financial limitations the EHRC was now working under, however emphasised, they were doing the best they can and highlighted their intention to work more closely with NGO's and campaign groups to uphold and challenge the human rights of Gypsies and Travellers.

Simon Woolley

Director of Operation Black Vote

Simon Woolley addressed the conference on the theme of empowerment and political participation amongst ethnic minority communities. He emphasized the need for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers to stand up and be counted and to use the power of their vote.

Simon described his experience campaigning and capacity building with Operation Black Vote in the 1990's when black communities experienced an acute disconnect with politics, similar to the current political disengagement experienced by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

Mr Woolley emphasized the importance of not sitting down and having tea and biscuits with your oppressors. Instead he encouraged Gypsies, Roma and Travellers to get politically engaged and go to policy makers with a shopping list and demand the fulfillment of rights, not to just ask for them.





Dan Allen

Senior Lecturer faculty of Health and Social Care, Edge Hill University

Social worker, Dan Allen, gave a moving account of how young Gypsy and Traveller children have been failed by the care system. He spoke about the lack of awareness of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures among social workers and other professionals in the care system, the lack of attention that is given to finding culturally appropriate placements for these children and the high emotional and cultural cost this has for children placed in families that have no

understanding of their backgrounds.

Dan raised the need for professionals who work in social care settings, such as children's services and fostering and adoption agencies, as well as policy makers, to explore the importance of the cultural component in placing young people from GRT backgrounds in families where their cultures and histories will be acknowledged and respected.

Brigid Quilligan

Irish Traveller Movement (Rep of Ireland) Director

Brigid Quilligan talked about her experience working in her local Traveller project in Kerry as a community development worker.

She described how she went on to work as a regional membership development worker with the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM), bringing Travellers and Traveller groups together in the Munster area, before becoming Assistant Director of ITM in 2010 and, then, Director in 2012.



Brigid talked about how ITM are changing their approach in that they are becoming more radical; "I feel we are being true to Travellers. If something bad happens to them we are not sitting down and having tea and biscuits with the people that are inflicting that pain on them".

Brigid went on to highlight that the national Traveller accommodation budget had been cut from €70 million to less than €4 million.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

Media: The 'last acceptable racism' is no longer acceptable!

This workshop looked at different media portrayals of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and assessed a variety of responses and strategies used to counteract discriminatory, inaccurate and generally poor coverage.

One of the key conclusions of the workshop was the need to carry on campaigning and challenging negative portrayals by engaging the media through discussions with editors, use of the regulatory codes and lobbying to make those codes more effective.

The workshop also agreed that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers should form a network of media activists who can support each other and possibly be involved in more direct protests and actions, like the work of Traveller activists in Ireland.



Katherine Quarmby



Three perspectives on child poverty in the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities

This workshop focused on the unacceptably high levels of child poverty experienced by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and how best the Government and third sector organisations can work together to address this issue.

Key issues discussed in the workshop included the acute exclusion faced by these communities and the need to ensure local authorities are conducting child poverty needs assessments inclusive of these groups.

Another prominent issue which arose was the impact of welfare reforms such as the benefits cap on these children, especially considering the larger family size amongst these communities.

The importance of making submissions to the Child Poverty Unit consultation on the 2014 strategy was also discussed, with participants highlighting the need for a specific reference to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, particularly in relation to the wider social determinates of child poverty on these groups.

Bereavement and Mental Health

This workshop reflected the findings of ongoing PHD research looking at the Bereavement experiences of Gypsies and Travellers.

The workshop discussed mental health implications for those experiencing multiple bereavements and the potential need for a specialist bereavement support service for both adults and children.

The key points arising from the workshop were the need for greater acknowledgement that bereavement is an issue for Gypsies and Travellers and for the development of a plan for coping, potentially through specific support service.

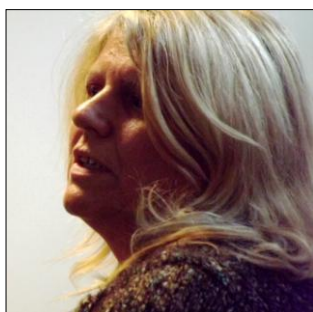
The workshop found that recognition of the diversity within Gypsy and Traveller communities in relation to gender specific services, traditions and beliefs relating to death and bereavement was required, so differentiated support may be needed. There is a specific need for health and education based support to help children cope with multiple bereavements and other associated losses.



Carol Rogers



Janie Codona



Josie O'Driscoll

Community Engagement: Building trust and respect

This workshop looked at best practice for development workers and service providers from a settled background engaging with Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers.

The workshop heard about the need for services to make themselves accessible and to be clear about their role and what they are offering communities. Likewise the workshop noted that community members should understand the reasons and benefits of engaging with services, including their rights and responsibilities.

It was emphasised that workers should approach engagement with the right attitude, not one based on fear but respect and constructive curiosity, supported by a background knowledge of these communities culture and history.

New Horizons: Education and training for the future

This workshop showcased current and former members of the Traveller Movement internship scheme who shared the experiences and challenges they faced in getting started in their careers.

The workshop heard about the importance of an individuals' determination on top of having the appropriate education and skills opportunities in breaking into professional circles that can often seem remote and inaccessible. Participants discussed the idea of promoting community role models and the creation of a peer network to support and guide Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in their career development. The workshop emphasized the importance of Government support for future targeted projects that had a proven track of getting young community members qualified and into gainful employment.



Get Voting: Increasing political engagement

This workshop addressed the low political participation of Gypsies and Travellers in terms of both voting and as elected members. It also highlighted some projects which were effectively engaging these and other marginalized groups in a bid to increase voter registration and engagement in the political system.



Key issues discussed in the workshop were the real and perceived barriers to greater political engagement, such as the negative representation of Gypsies and Travellers by many politicians, accommodation issues and the belief among many community members that voting will not bring about real change in their lives.

The workshop agreed that there needs to be increased initiatives promoting the value of political engagement, possibly through a scheme led by local councilors. It also noted how Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations should draw on the extensive knowledge and expertise of projects such as Operation Black Vote.



Siobhan Spencer MBE



Simon Ruston

Planning and Ethnicity: Challenging non recognition of ethnic status in planning law

The workshop focussed on the definition of 'gypsy status' in Government planning guidance as a barrier to equality for many ethnic Gypsies and Travellers.

The workshop discussed how 'gypsy status' is not the same as being an ethnic Gypsy or Irish Traveller, nor as defined in cultural terms under the 2004 Housing Act.

The workshop also noted that the definition confines Gypsies and Travellers to limited, traditional, insecure types of work and is prejudicial against women, young people, and housed Travellers under Articles 8 and 14 of the Human Rights Act.

Participants in the workshop observed that the definition makes it harder to get planning permission. They also agreed that there is a need for a new definition to bring clarity on this issue in the planning system and that this was most likely to come about through the courts.

Impact of insecure accommodation on Gypsies' and Travellers' health

This workshop gave participants the background and initial findings of a study being carried out by the Traveller Movement and funded by the Department of Health (DH) into the impact of insecure accommodation and the living environment on Gypsies' and Travellers' health.

The workshop heard about the DH Inclusion Health Board's (IHB) interest in improving their understanding of the social determinates of Gypsies' and Travellers' health, especially in the context of their accommodation.

This was followed by a general update on the study and the conditions on sites that many community members were living on.

Participants in the workshop also raised a number of key questions, including whether local authorities are using Government guidance for developing Traveller sites? Why are housed Travellers not being engaged by health services and in policy development? How will the study translate into changes on the ground? The report is due to be published by the IHB next year.



EVALUATION AND COMMENTS

"Workshops should continue to be led by the Traveller people"

This was the best most inspiring conference I have attended on this theme of Gypsy Roma and Traveller inclusion. Excellent that so many community members of all ages worked with us!

"I found the whole day fantastic, especially listening to the young role models who spoke so well"

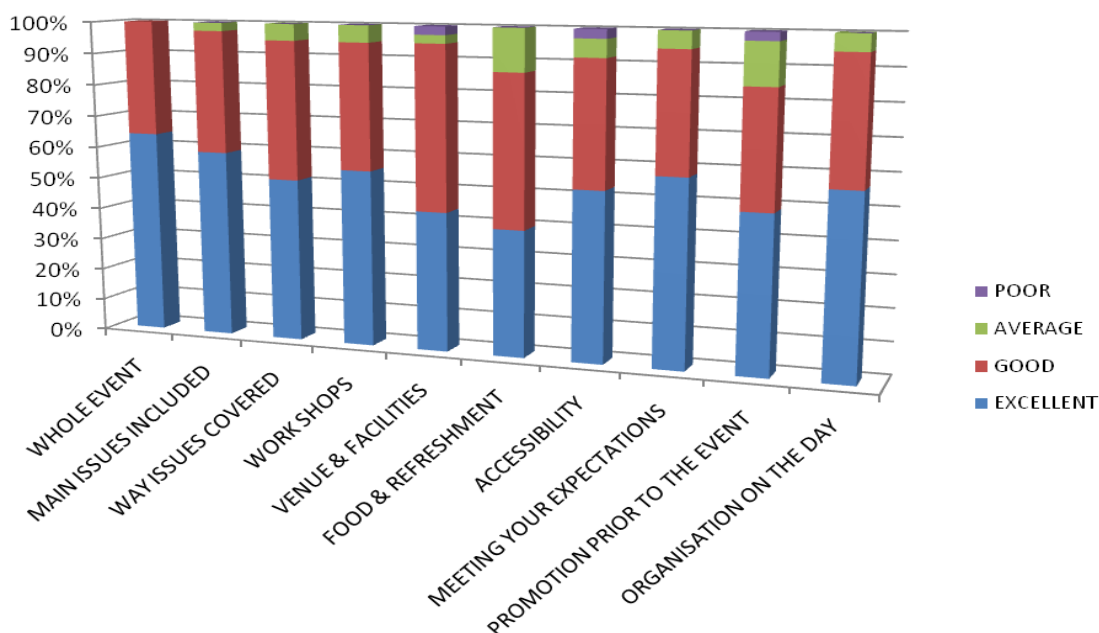
Rating of the main aspects

Once again, the conference was a great success, according to the feedback by delegates. Overall, the event was rated 'Excellent' by over sixty per cent of the participants. Please see the chart below for more details.

We have received useful suggestions regarding subject areas for future conferences, such as 'issues of gender' and 'injustice to Roma and Travellers in hate crime'.

A number of delegates suggested that more time for discussions should be allowed. While we appreciate that the discussions are often the most interesting part of the conference, it would be impossible to address so many subjects in a one-day event.

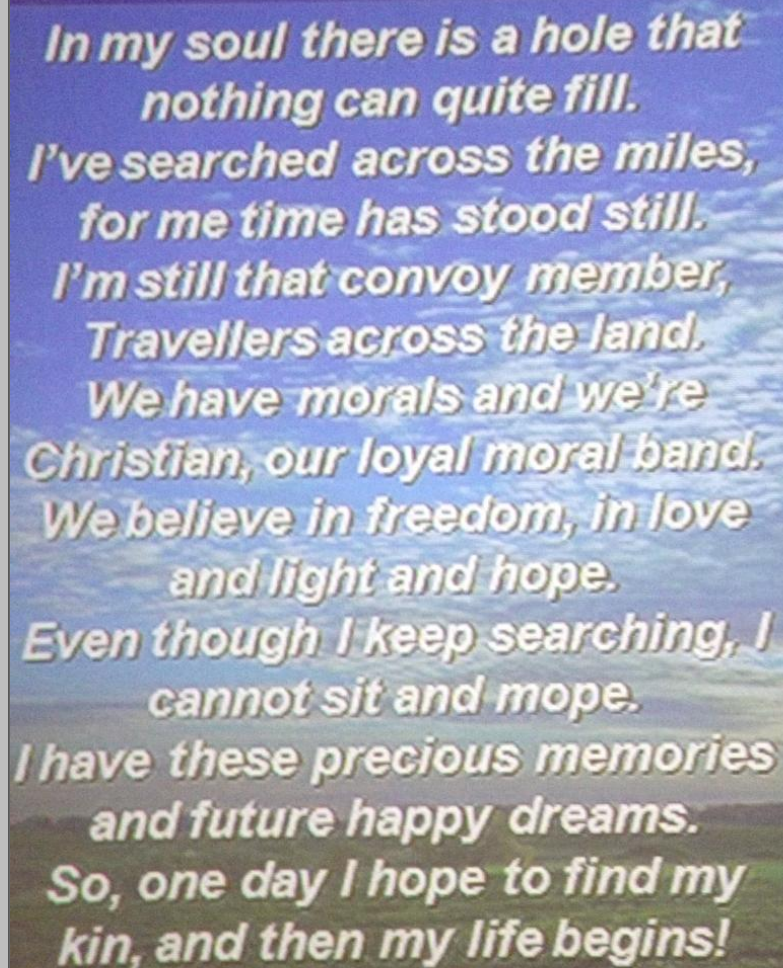
We will strive to take into consideration all comments in planning in next year conference.



The Traveller Movement would like to thank all participants for their contribution in making yet another excellent event.

Please ensure you book us into your diary for attending the 2014 conference on November 13th 2014.

Thank you. I found the day very inspirational



*In my soul there is a hole that
nothing can quite fill.
I've searched across the miles,
for me time has stood still.
I'm still that convoy member,
Travellers across the land.
We have morals and we're
Christian, our loyal moral band.
We believe in freedom, in love
and light and hope.
Even though I keep searching, I
cannot sit and mope.
I have these precious memories
and future happy dreams.
So, one day I hope to find my
kin, and then my life begins!*

Poem by Dan Allen

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