

# Gypsy/Traveller Health Trainer Partnership Project

Report to:  
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South West Health Trainer Partnership,  
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**Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council**



Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council received £11,060 in March 2009 from the South West Health Trainer Partnership to work with the Gypsy and Traveller population in Devon on 4 national outcomes:

Outcome 1: Increasing capacity and capability through building the workforce with the skills in place to tackle health inequalities

Outcome 2: Reaching the hard to reach

Outcome 3: Delivering sustained improvement to the health of the people of England through behavioural change

Outcome 4: Providing access to and encouraging the appropriate use and take-up of NHS and other local services

The project is co-ordinated by Penny Dane, a community development worker with Devon Racial Equality Council and NHS Devon, working in a specialist role with Gypsies and Travellers.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

There are an estimated 5,000 Gypsies and Travellers based in Devon, although there is no accurate way of determining exact numbers. The definition of Gypsies and Travellers used here is "people who have a nomadic heritage and/or a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle". Gypsies and Travellers is an umbrella term which includes many different groups. In Devon the largest group is Romany Gypsies, many of whom have been based in the South West for several generations. The second largest group in Devon is New Travellers, some of whom are now in their second generation. There are also Irish Travellers and Showmen.

Gypsies and Travellers are not a homogenous group – there are significant differences between the different groups, and there is a huge diversity within each group. However, one factor that they all have in common is that they experience high levels of prejudice, often fuelled by local and national media.

Nationally Gypsies and Travellers experience the worst health of any group in England (Dept of Health); 24% are homeless in that they have nowhere legal to park their living accommodation; Gypsy and Traveller children are the most at risk in the education system (Ofsted); and a reported 9 out of every 10 children and young people from a Gypsy background have suffered racial abuse and nearly two thirds have also been bullied or physically attacked (Children's Society). All these factors influence both mental and physical health and wellbeing for Gypsy and Traveller communities.

## **2. APPROACHES**

The community development worker has used a holistic approach which has included:

Looking at the wider issues affecting these communities, including access to accommodation, racist incidents, the effect of media articles etc;

Working with community members to equip them with knowledge and information so that they can be mentors within their communities;

Working with community members and service providers to address some of the inequalities, and to look at providing appropriate services;

Training service providers so there is a greater level of understanding about who Gypsies and Travellers are.

In carrying out this project, the worker has worked collaboratively with other agencies, local and national: Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT); South West Ambulance Service, Devon Carers Link, Devon County Council Gypsy/Traveller Liaison and Traveller Education Services, NHS Devon and others.

**Outcome 1:** Increasing capacity and capability through building the workforce with the skills in place to tackle health inequalities

Anecdotal evidence and local knowledge would suggest that very few members of Gypsy and Traveller communities are employed in health/welfare services in Devon. There may be many reasons for this, including a lack of formal qualifications for some communities, a belief by some Gypsies and Travellers that they would be likely to experience prejudice from employers and colleagues and for traditional Gypsies and Travellers a strong background in self-employment. There is also anecdotal evidence that members of Gypsy and Traveller communities do not identify themselves as belonging to these groups when they are employed in conventional jobs, for fear of prejudice.

This project aims to equip some members of Gypsy and Traveller communities with the skills and knowledge needed to gain employment in health care roles, such as health trainers. It also aims to equip others who may not be likely to go into formal employment to act as informal community mentors with information about health issues, the services available, and how to access them.

**Outcome 2:** Reaching the hard to reach

Gypsies and Travellers are often described as a 'hard to reach community' by statutory agencies.

As part of this project, regular site visits are made by the specialist community development worker. Visits are made to Gypsies and Travellers in all different types of accommodation – private sites, council sites, temporary road-side sites, and houses – and from this it is possible to gain an understanding of what some of the health and access issues are for families and individuals. It also means information can be disseminated, problems in accessing health care can be followed up and challenged, and people can be encouraged to get involved in projects and learning opportunities.

**Outcome 3:** Delivering sustained improvement to the health of the people of England through behavioural change

Experience in other areas (Sussex, Leeds, Cambridgeshire) has shown benefits in addressing health inequalities and improving health by having trained Gypsy and Traveller health workers doing outreach work with their own communities. A new project to improve the levels of health of Gypsies and Travellers on sites in South Bucks has involved training six Traveller women to become health advocates.

One way to achieve this type of health outreach work in Devon would be to recruit health trainers from Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds to work within NHS Devon.

**Outcome 4:** Providing access to and encouraging the appropriate use and take-up of NHS and other local services

A recent report on the health needs of Gypsies and Travellers by the I&DEA identified two of the major barriers to health as

*"Centuries of discrimination and fear of 'authority' means that some people will put up with enormous pain or emotional distress rather than seek help."*

and

*"Gypsies and Travellers may not be aware of existing services or that certain services are free. A lot of health information and 'choices' are not accessible to people with low literacy levels."*

This project looks at equipping Gypsies and Travellers with knowledge and information about health services, but it also looks at how to make the services more accessible and culturally appropriate. A lack of understanding of the different Gypsy and Traveller communities by some health professionals means that services are not always delivered to the most vulnerable members of these communities in the most effective and appropriate way.

### 3. PROJECTS

The following projects have been carried out between February 2009 and November 2010. Some projects have been completed, and some are ongoing and will be developed further.

#### **Traveller Information Pack**

These packs are designed and compiled by members of Gypsy and Traveller communities with Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council. They are updated annually and distributed to Gypsies and Travellers across Devon by various agencies. The packs contain information on services available and how to access them. There is a health booklet with local information about hospitals, minor injury centres, dentists, etc. Information is given about contacting PALS if people have difficulty accessing services. The packs also contain health information leaflets designed especially for Gypsies and Travellers by the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group on subjects such as diabetes, men's health and heart disease.

#### **Outcomes:**

Gypsies and Travellers involved in producing the packs gain more information about health and welfare services themselves and become more familiar with what services are available and how to access them. By designing the packs themselves they are able to present important information in an accessible and friendly way. **(Outcomes 2, 4)**

Relevant information in an appropriate format reaches up to 250 Gypsy and Traveller families in Devon each year. **(Outcomes 2, 4)**

#### **Women's Health Day**

A Romany Women's health day was organised in February 2009, following requests from several Romany women. The trainer was a health visitor who had prior experience of working with Gypsy families.

#### **Outcomes:**

10 Romany women attended and were given information about women's health problems, health screening etc and had the opportunity to ask questions and get advice in a safe environment. **(Outcomes 1, 2 and 4)**

#### **Health Bus**

South West Ambulance Service provided a health bus offering basic health checks and advice as part of a Gypsy/Roma/Traveller History Month event in Newton Abbot in June 2009.

#### **Outcomes:**

27 Gypsies and Travellers requested basic health checks and 1 had an ECG and was referred on to his GP. **(Outcomes 2, 4)**

#### **First Aid Courses**

In conjunction with South West Ambulance Service, 4 First Aid courses were delivered on, or in the vicinity of, Gypsy/Traveller sites at the request of the site residents. Several New Travellers felt that a first aid course was important as they were often on unauthorised sites in isolated areas without easy access to minor injury centres and hospitals. For those without a postcode it was not always straightforward to get an ambulance. Information was given on specific issues such as how to treat some injuries when there was no running water on site. The sessions were delivered in a safe learning environment and questions from participants were encouraged.

A joint project between the Red Cross and Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council is now being set up to carry on this work. Two courses are planned for February and March 2011, covering first aid and community resilience - practical emergency planning for Gypsy/Traveller sites.

**Outcomes:**

25 Gypsies and Travellers from 2 large unauthorised sites and one council site attended first aid sessions and were issued with certificates. More Gypsies and Travellers will be able to attend courses in 2011. **(Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4)**

**Healthy, Wealthy and Active**

A multi agency day was held at a New Traveller site in which staff from various welfare and support agencies held drop in sessions giving advice and information. A yurt for people to meet in was set up in one part of the site by one of the Travellers who helped organise the day, and a private meeting place was arranged in a converted bus nearby for confidential interviews.

The aim of the day was partly to enable Travellers to access advice and information, but also to educate staff from different agencies about Traveller sites and therefore enable them to be in a better position to deliver culturally appropriate services.

Feedback:

"Today has been great, I've got more sorted today than I have in the last 18 months!" (Traveller)

"The event was really well organised and the host venue was welcoming, friendly and non-confrontational. The people I spoke to were pleased to be able to get some support and it broadened my agency's research and case work in this field. We also met with and worked in partnership with some key agencies and supported them in broadening their social inclusion work into the New Traveller community. A day well spent." (Agency)

**Outcomes:**

25 Travellers accessed one or more of the agencies for advice or information. **(Outcomes 2, 4)**

Agencies which would not normally be involved in outreach work on a Traveller site had the opportunity to be on site and to use the opportunity to consider alternative ways of delivering services. **(Outcomes 2, 4)**

**Domestic Violence**

Violence against women has serious consequences for their mental and physical health. Within the Romany Gypsy community, domestic violence occurs as with any other community but there is evidence that there are huge barriers to women accessing support services – cultural barriers, safety issues, lack of suitable alternative accommodation for those used to living in mobile accommodation and a lack of understanding and knowledge about Gypsy/Traveller communities from service providers. Domestic violence as an issue is rarely discussed even with trusted workers who have built up strong relationships with families.

In January and February 2010, 2 Romany Gypsy and 2 New Traveller women attended the ADVA Level 1 course in Understanding Domestic Violence.

Feedback from the course participants:

"The course was good, actually a bit disturbing too. I recognised so much in Gypsy men in particular. Good for me as I feel I could broach the subject and talk about help that would be available to some women. I felt that domestic abuse is more likely to happen in the Romany community where the man is the head of the household and the woman has to be submissive. "

"Thanks so much for offering me a place on the course. The day was very powerful...We thought about how we would approach the subject with someone we suspected of having DV in their lives and given a list of services contacts available to help. It seemed to include everything and I learned a lot.."

#### **Outcomes:**

Having done the course, these four women are equipped with knowledge of the main issues, the support services available and how to access them. **(Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4)**

The women will be working on a programme to train service providers in Devon about Gypsies and Travellers, **(Outcome 4)**

They will start looking at ways to address the issue within their own communities. **(Outcomes 2, 3 and 4)**

The contact numbers for local and national domestic violence organisations have now been included in the Traveller Information Packs which are distributed widely to Gypsies and Travellers across Devon. In the past, Gypsies and Travellers contributing to the production of the packs felt that this information was sensitive and should not be included. **(Outcome 4)**

#### **Drugs/Alcohol**

Drug and Alcohol misuse affect Gypsy and Traveller communities as with any other community. However, feedback from New Travellers suggested that there was suspicion amongst some New Travellers of service providers, and a concern that if help was asked for then their communities would be labelled as 'having a drug problem'. Feedback from Romany Gypsies also showed suspicion of service providers, a lack of willingness to engage with them and lack of knowledge about what help was out there. There was also a feeling that any problems with drugs or alcohol should be dealt with within the family and not by outsiders as it would bring shame to a Romany family.

Working with EDP and Devon County Council, two courses were set up in autumn 2009 covering information and advice about drug and alcohol misuse and information about support services available. One course was for Romany Gypsies and the other for New Travellers in recognition of the fact that the issues were different for each community, and in order to enable participants to feel comfortable in their learning environment.

Feedback from the course participants:

"I found it particularly useful to find out about the role of EDP and how they deliver their support. There are so many myths and misconceptions surrounding the New Traveller community and drugs that it was really refreshing to all get together and discuss the realities of drug misuse and seek to see what we can do to alleviate the issues involved."

"The things I took from the course were the ease and casualness of access to EDP services, I like the way they listened to some of our hardened 'experts' and advised them differently of ways of doing things too."

"very good course, let me know lots of things I didn't know".

#### **Outcomes:**

13 members of the Gypsy/Traveller community attended the course and felt equipped with knowledge about the issues, about what support services were available and how they operated. They felt able to pass this advice on within their communities. **(Outcome 1)**

EDP staff were able to learn about Romany Gypsy and New Traveller communities, their lifestyles and their cultures, therefore enabling them to consider how to deliver culturally appropriate services. **(Outcome 2)**

EDP now has greater access to, and trust from, local New Traveller communities and now has clients from that community. **(Outcome 4)**

Two of the course participants are now training as volunteers with EDP. As of November 2011 one course participant is now working full time with Devon Drug Service (formerly EDP) **(Outcome 1)**

Drug and Alcohol information and information about accessing services is now included in the Traveller Information Pack. **(Outcomes 4, 2)**

### **Health Trainers**

8 Gypsy and Traveller women completed the RSPH Understanding Health Improvement Level 2 course in September 2010. More have expressed an interest in attending the course in 2011.

Feedback from the course:

"I thought that the role play was useful in action planning and changing behaviour. The alcohol exercise putting units in order was informative."

"I think there was a lot of good info for people to take back to sites as there are some v unhealthy behaviours going on and people often set themselves unrealistic goals with food, exercise, drugs, smoking & alcohol."

"Important to have first hand knowledge available for travellers as there are a lot of inaccurate made up health myths that people actually believe."

#### **Outcomes:**

8 Gypsy and Traveller women equipped to apply for Health Trainer or other relevant posts, or to become community mentors working within their own communities. **(Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4)**

### **Cultural Awareness Training for Service providers**

Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council has a team of 7 Gypsy/Traveller trainers who deliver cultural awareness training to statutory agencies, voluntary agencies, school and colleges together with the specialist community development worker. Each training session is tailored to the specific agency it is delivered to. Sessions include an exercise looking at preconceptions about Gypsies and Travellers, a DVD made by Romany Gypsies in Devon, and a presentation about the main issues affecting the communities. In the past year training sessions have been delivered to the equality group at the RD&E hospital, LINK, CAMHS, Rethink, Peninsula Medical School, and Plymouth University Clinical Psychologist trainees.

Feedback:

"the trainees rated your presentation as excellent; they commented on it as thought provoking and challenging for them in thinking about their own stereotypes and prejudices...." Consultant clinical psychologist.

Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council was commissioned by Friends, Families and Travellers (a national Gypsy/Traveller organisation) to design and deliver a 'Training the Trainers Course' for Romany Gypsies in the South West to enable them to train health providers and others in Gypsy/Traveller cultural awareness. This took place in March 2010.

#### **Outcomes:**

More insight into issues affecting Gypsies and Travellers, therefore helping service providers to reach these communities and deliver culturally appropriate services **(Outcomes 2, 4)**

More capacity within Gypsy/Traveller communities to deliver training **(Outcome 1)**

## **Health Improvement Day for Gypsy Carers and Their Families**

A Health Improvement Day was held for 11 Romany Gypsy carers in June 2010. The day was planned by Plymouth & Devon REC/NHS Devon, Romany Gypsies, Devon Carers Link and Devon County Council's Gypsy/Traveller Liaison Service. Local information and anecdotal evidence show that many Gypsies in Devon, both adults and children, are carers. The community development worker and the Gypsy/Traveller liaison worker have, for the past 2 years, been encouraging those who are carers to join Devon Carers Link and access the benefits and services offered. The Health Improvement Day included pampering sessions and advice/information for carers.

### **Outcomes:**

**(Outcomes 2, 3 and 4.)**

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**" The work done by Penny Dane on this pilot evidences considerable development work with a range of individuals and communities from the Gypsy and Traveller population of Devon using Health Trainer approaches to developing capacity and engagement with health and well being. It is hoped that the capacity and interest so far developed will manifest in some of these individuals applying for Health Trainer posts with the local service. "**

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