



# We are Community, We are Society

Conference Report 2015

The Traveller Movement



***“We are one community- the Travellers and our settled neighbours. We've all got something in common: we want our children to be healthy and educated.”***

**- Gloria Buckley MBE, Romany Gypsy and manager of three authorised sites.**

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# WHAT WAS EXPLORED AT THE 2015 CONFERENCE?

## **This year's conference looked at:**

- Why Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are too often perceived and treated as not being part of local communities and the impact this has on their access to services, political engagement and culture.
- Community engagement and challenge to ensure that the unacceptable inequalities and discrimination GTR groups continue to face becomes a thing of the past.
- The experiences of GRT officers and staff in police forces up and down the country, as well as the experiences of community members being policed, with input from members of the GRTPA.
- How discrimination impacts on people's everyday lives and what responsible bodies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission are doing to address this issue.
- The short-term challenges and long-term implications of the Government's new housing planning policy, including definition changes for Gypsies and Travellers who are not currently travelling.
- Why many Gypsy, Traveller and Roma pupils, parents and families feel misunderstood and excluded from the education system and what is being done to address this.
- The unique challenges faced by Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children living in care away from their families and communities, as well as the opportunities and barriers for GTR families in becoming foster carers and adoptive parents.

## KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Legally challenging discrimination is a key factor in reducing the amount of racism experienced by Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, a positive example being the Wetherspoons case. ***When direct discrimination is experienced, community members should have access to channels to legally challenge both public and private bodies; the Public Sector Equality Duty and Race Equality Duty are vital when bringing forward complaints.***
2. GTR pupils are frequently excluded both formally and informally from schools in Britain, due to a lack of understanding and awareness within schools and 'low standards' held by teachers. ***Work must be done to build relationships between schools and families, encouraging schools to learn more about GTR communities and empowering parents to work with their schools.***
3. The changes to housing policy will make it significantly harder for Gypsies and Travellers to obtain planning permission, adding to the existing chronic shortage of Traveller sites in England. ***Local councils need to engage with local GTR communities in order to understand the accommodation issues faced and work to plan appropriate provision.***
4. Within the Police there is a widely held view that Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are criminal, leading to a situation where Gypsies, Travellers and Roma communities are 'over-policed and under-helped'. ***Existing equality policies need to be enforced, challenging institutional racism within the police force that affects GTR police officers and local communities.***
5. In recent years there has been a disproportionate increase in the number of GTR children living in care. Often this means living outside of GTR communities, with families who may not understand the child's background and experiences, resulting in children feeling that they are cut off from their culture. ***By developing opportunities for community social work that includes allied agencies and community links, social services can create a model of best practises when working alongside GTR families.***



# CHAIR AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER SUMMARIES

## **Pauline Anderson**

*Conference Chair and TM Trustee*

Pauline welcomed everyone from far and wide to the 2016 Traveller Movement Annual Conference.

Pauline highlighted that the past year had been an important one, yet again, for the TM, after a landmark victory in the Wetherspoon's case and, although not yet resolved, they were found to be guilty of discrimination against a large number of we Travellers and our associates. She continued to say that the case goes on and has gained a huge interest in this and other anti-discriminatory issues. Taking positive action is a growing theme as the community has now set up reporting hate crime pages on Facebook which I predict will gain momentum and help to bring more cases to the courts if of course people are prepared to pursue them. "Our theme could be, 'don't get mad...LITIGATE!'"



Pauline Anderson



## **Rebecca Hilsenrath**

*(Chief Legal Officer, Equality & Human Rights Commission)*

Rebecca spoke about the work of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and how they address some of inequalities and discrimination Gypsies, Travellers and Roma experience, while tackling the underlining attitudes and other barriers which challenge this.

Rebecca talked about the findings from 'Is Britain Fairer', a comprehensive EHRC's review of equality and human rights protection in relation to the current situation for Gypsies and Travellers in Britain.

Rebecca provided an overview on the significant legal cases and other regulatory work EHRC have undertaken which affects Gypsies and Travellers. Success of a recent case, in which EHRC helped to challenge a Government policy, will ensure that Traveller planning applications are treated like any other application and not unfairly delayed in order to allow the Secretary of State to review them himself.

Rebecca also spoke about the Government's change to the definition within planning law of Travellers, so that it is now restricted only to those who still actually travel. She continued to say that the Commission's view, being a Gypsy, a Romani a Traveller is a question of ethnicity and cultural identity, under the universal right of self-identification. EHRC have written to the Government, and responded to the consultation to say that the

amendment to the definition is very likely to be in breach of the UK's obligations under international law.

Rebecca talked about the EHRC's plans and how they can change prejudiced attitudes on a wider basis, rather than merely reacting to individual acts of discrimination.

**Marc Willers QC**  
(*Garden Court Chambers*)

Marc discussed the various complexities and challenges presented by the Government's new Planning Policy for Traveller Sites and planned changes afoot in the Housing and Planning Bill.



**Damian Le Bas**  
(*Writer, Filmmaker and Former Editor of Travellers' Times Magazine*)

Damian spoke about the large number of Romani and Traveller people who are now achieving advanced qualifications in academia and careers, compared to when he was younger.

Damian said that people use to routinely talk about how the university degrees of people like him and others were 'exceptional' in the community, whereas this is much less the case now, which he is proud of. He highlighted that this is not an indication that all is well in terms of GRT people, education and the workplace, but it is testament of the ability of Romani and Traveller people to overcome adversity and fulfil their potential.

Damian mentioned the GRTPA, which not long ago would have seemed unthinkable even to some serving GRT police officers. He also spoke about the Traveller Movement and its partners Howe & Co in terms of achievements in bringing about change through lobbying and legal action.

Damian congratulated Mike Doherty on his appointment the post as editor of Travellers' Times.

## **Helena Kiely**

*Youth and Community Worker*

Helena's speech was described as highly inspirational, by many participants at the conference.

Coming from Traveller community herself, Helena described her own experience of going through the education system, from experiencing discrimination which led her to leave school to engaging back in education and attending university but hiding her ethnicity, thinking 'this would be easier'.



Helena also talked about her new role at the ReallyNEET Project, where she supports young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities, age 18-24, to get back into education, employment or training. All of whom have experienced the issues like drugs, homelessness, low mental health, care system, young motherhood or learning difficulties.



## **Mark Watson**

*Member of the National Police Chiefs' Council working group on Gypsy, Roma, Traveller issues*

Mark Watson spoke on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) which is the new name for the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) from April 2015 onwards.

Mark outlined some of the historical background of relations between Gypsy / Roma / Traveller communities and others, particularly talking about relations between GRT communities and the Police. He then spoke about what the NPCC were doing now and what was planned for the future, including talking about the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association (GRTPA), the first organisation of its kind in the UK, is making great strides in improving relations between the Police and GRT communities.

Mark illustrated how many issues remain the same by quoting from a Government Publication, "Gypsies and Other Travellers", which showed how the provision of suitable accommodation was still the biggest single issue that needed addressing. "Gypsies and Other Travellers" was published in September, 1967 and many of the quotes Mark gave from it are just as relevant now as they were then.

Mark outlined how there was previously a lack of positive engagement between GRT communities and the Police. Police responses to GRT communities had often been

inadequate or insensitive, but much effort has gone in over the last 20 years to try and change that.

In summary, Mark advocated that the Police should treat Gypsies and Travellers, both when they are victims and suspects, as members of the local community, and in ways that strengthen their trust and confidence in the force. Everyone can play a role in doing that. Good policies on this subject are great things to have, but people, not policies, make the difference in the end.

### **James Carver MEP**

*UKIP Member of the European Parliament for the West Midlands*

James is the only elected British Parliamentarian from a Romany background. In his own words, James is 'proud to use [his] unique position to highlight and challenge the public misconceptions surrounding the very real problems facing Traveller communities in Modern day Britain.'

James talked about his background and his own experience of racial discrimination since it was made public.



James highlighted that Traveller communities are most discriminated against in Britain today and his determination to challenge and do more to help raise this issue. He stated that it is time for national debate about the simple fact that local authorities spend more money on enforcement, than provision for Travellers.



## WORKSHOP REPORTS

### **“The last respectable form of racism”: Understanding and challenging acts of racial discrimination**

(Chaired by Martin Howe, Howe & Co Solicitors)



This workshop talked participants through the process of complaining and challenging racism and discrimination, using lessons from previous experiences. The Wetherspoons case was used as an example of the benefits of challenging- it brought a feeling of power to those who were a part of the legal case.

The workshop was told how to challenge both, public and private bodies, and that the EHRC would be keen to hear from anyone who has experienced discrimination. Police were mentioned throughout the workshop with specific examples given such as collusion with pubs, over family funerals, where Travellers have not been welcomed.

Recommendations were made around the use of a new website ‘Report Racism’ as well as learning from the experiences of other minority groups that are victim to discrimination. Education was seen as a tool to reduce discrimination by including GTR cultures within school curriculum.

### **“Always someone else’s problem”: Inclusion and exclusion of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children in school**

(Chaired by Brian Foster, Education Consultant and TM Trustee)

Participants in this workshop agreed that Gypsy, Traveller and Roma families want their children to receive the same standard of education that is offered to other children, but that there are challenges in accessing an equal education.

The workshop discussed good and bad practise, highlighting things that work for families, such as flexibility and factors that result in GTR pupils leaving school. Participants discussed their only experiences with school exclusions and just accessing education while moving around the country.



The workshop heard from an education charity about work with other minority groups in challenging discrimination around school exclusions.

Recommendations looked at ways to empower parents and make schools more inclusive, building better relationships and holding schools accountable.

## **New Planning Policy for Traveller sites: Understanding the challenges and complexities**

(Chaired by Mike Doherty, TM Policy and Campaigns Officer)



The workshop was attended by fifty people including LPA planners, planning consultants for Gypsies and Travellers, Gypsies and Travellers themselves – many with a lot of experience in planning issues.

The workshop critically outlined the new government planning policy, stating that the policy, which includes the planning definition change, was extremely vulnerable to legal challenges. The new policy could reverse progress with private site provision.

The discussion afterwards included many examples of unfair planning decisions. Several participants suggested placing temporary sites for negotiated stopping in areas earmarked for long term future development such as the HS2 link.

Questions were raised over how the success or failure of applying the new policy to Gypsies and Travellers would be assessed at a national level.

## **Policing for a better future: Challenging discrimination and promoting inclusion in the Police**

(Chaired by Jim Davies, Executive Director, Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association)

Participants were a mixture of police officers, Travellers & Gypsies and those working for the community who predominantly agreed that ‘there is a problem between Travellers & Gypsies and the police’. The workshop acknowledged that there are areas of good practise however more change is needed to improve relationships between communities and police.



The workshop discussed how Travellers & Gypsies are disproportionately affected as victims of hate crime in the UK and Ireland.

Participants agreed that cultural awareness training would not be enough to tackle racism within the police against Gypsies, Travelers and Roma, more would need to be done. Discussion around recommendations concluded that the negative narrative of GTR communities being a ‘problem’ needed to be disrupted and challenged on an institutional level, the change has to come from within the police.

## **Meeting the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children living in foster care**

(Chaired by Josie O'Driscoll, Chair of Herts Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment and TM Advisory Group member)



The workshop focussed on identifying a series of comprehensive recommendations to improve the lives of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in care. Participants were saddened to hear news of the significantly disproportionate increase in the number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children living in care.

Participants discussed the practicalities of developing a network of social workers to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups, trained to engage effectively with communities.

It was also agreed that an increase in the number of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma social workers would be beneficial. This would require information and guidance on higher education opportunities and funding being distributed within the community.

The workshop stated that more research into the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children living in public care would need to be funded in order to explore lived experiences and improve services.

## EVALUATION AND COMMENTS

This was our best attended conference in the past five years, with over 150 delegates and excellent speakers. According to the feedback received, once again, the conference was a great success.

Overall event has been rated 'Excellent' by eighty per cent of the participants that provided their feedback. Considering the highest volume of feedback received, in comparison to previous conferences, the same proportion of overall positive opinion shows that high standard of our conferences has been consistent.

We received a number of suggestions from the participants, which we will take in to consideration when planning future events and conferences. Some of the suggested subject areas include: 'Mental and emotional health in Traveller community ties, particularly amongst youth', 'Capacity, building session around specially identified issues by the organisations or individuals. For example - strategy development, working with the media, campaigning methodology and fund raising skills', 'Positive aspects of traveller sites as part of solving the housing crisis.

Following users' feedback, from previous conferences, TM adopted the structure of workshops running simultaneously, where delegates can select one workshop instead of two, to allow more time for discussions. While, this proved to be well accepted by the delegates in the previous conference, this time, some participants felt that there was still insufficient time for discussions. Some delegates suggested different locations and a number of similar events in a year.

The less positive feedback was in relation to space and time limitation at some workshops. Whilst TM were happy to welcome such a high number of participants and to hear that some of them felt that more time should be provided for discussions, we understand that the space and time at some workshops was too limited and we will make sure our delegates feel more comfortable at future events.

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 2016 conference on November 24<sup>th</sup> 2016.

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"I thought it was brilliantly organised, and so refreshing to have a mix of voices from people active in the field at so many levels, including (vitaly) hearing from those living out realities on the ground."

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"I think it was the best ever conference and I look forward to even better still next year. An extremely professionally organised, well attended and energised conference."

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"Good to see so many Gypsy and Travellers attending"

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"As ever it is a great event and really unmissable!"

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"Many thanks to the organisers for a very smoothly run & informative event."

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"Lots of new positive ideas. Thanks!"

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"I just wish the conference was longer. People were so participatory and the TM have really created a safe place for discussion. Excellent facilitation and speakers."

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"It really is the 'don't miss' event of the year - a major leading conference."

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