



Our Rights. Our Entitlements. Your Duty!

Conference Report 2016

The Traveller Movement



Standing together we are stronger

Introduction

The 2016 Conference was one of the biggest we've had and brought together Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, politician's and members of Government, leading academics and service providers.

2016 was an exciting year for The Traveller Movement as we launched the Equality & Social Justice Unit (ESJU). The ESJU is a centre of excellence, which aims to improve Gypsy, Traveller and Roma access to justice and to work with individuals and communities to challenge unlawful discrimination and human rights abuses.

To inform the work of ESJU and raise aware off the issues the Unit will be working on, this years' conference focussed on the rights and entitlements of the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities and the duties on public bodies and institutions in carrying out those rights.

The Traveller Movement would like to send a special thanks to our Chair Pauline Anderson, all the keynote speakers, workshop participants, Ben Bennett and his family, and all those who attended and contributed to the conference.



Keynote speakers: Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children steal the show

The morning session was split into two sections, Education and Hate Crime.

The topic of the education section explored “how can we create a more inclusive education system for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children”. The keynote speakers were:

- Lisa Smith, Romani Traveller from Worcestershire, Qualified GRT education consultant
- Vicki Stewart, Head of the Achievement and Disadvantage Unit at DfE
- Jo Luhman, Deputy Head Teacher at Ash Manor School
- Graham Ritchie, Head of Policy at the Children’s Commissioner for England

Vicki Stewart from the Department for Education ran through the Department’s strategy for tackling disadvantage and very briefly spoke about the disproportionate exclusions of GTR pupils. Graham from the Children Commissioner for England’s office said that GTR communities continue to experience discrimination and that we need a much more inclusive education system.



The highlight of the education discussion however, came from Ash Manor School and Lisa Smith.

Qualified GRT education consultant Lisa Smith, a Romani Traveller and current employee of the Travellers’ Times told the conference passionately that as she was growing up she could no longer see “a relevance in learning from an education system that saw no relevance in learning about me”.

Lisa concluded by urging the Government to work with the community to develop appropriate policies and only then would we see an improvement in the attainment of GTR pupils.

Jo Luhman, the Deputy Head Teacher from Ash Manor School in Surrey told the Conference of the phenomenal success the school has had in improving the attainment rates of GTR children.

Jo was clear, she explained that the school is not driven by Government and if that means the school doesn’t receive ‘Outstanding’ from Ofsted then “so be it!”. Ash Manor School’s approach was seen as a breath of fresh air by those in the audience.

But the success of the school was best told by two pupils that Jo brought with her, Ruby and Ethan. Both of whom received a rapturous applause when they spoke about their time at the school and how they felt respected and valued by teachers and pupils alike.

The next session focussed on “Hate Crime and the effect on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community”. The keynote speakers were:

- **Kate Green, Labour MP for Stretford and Urmston.**
- **PC Jim Davies, Former Chair of the Gypsy, Roma Traveller Police Association.**
- **Paul Giannasi, Cross-Government Hate Crime Programme manager.**
- **Lord Herman Ouseley.**

Paul Giannasi, who is also responsible for running the National Police Chiefs' Council hate crime website True Vision outlined steps that had been taken to reduce hate crime towards GTR communities.

PC Jim Davies, a Romani Gypsy police officer, gave a powerful presentation of the Police's role in fuelling discrimination and hate crimes against GTR communities. Jim said "along with the media, the Police Services are one of the biggest stimulators of hate crimes against GTR communities".

Jim explained that until this is acknowledged and ultimately dealt with, it is difficult to see relations between GTR communities and the police improving.



Labour MP and staunch GTR community campaigner in parliament, Kate Green explained that these are difficult times and the fallout from Brexit will mean less money will be available to support GTR communities as EU funding disappears.

This means, Kate explained, that we need to develop strategies to tackle hate crimes in cooperation with the community because unfortunately the government does not presently seem able to address the issue alone.

Kate concluded, with firm agreement from the audience that we must do much more in acknowledging the positive contribution GTR communities make to our society.

Lord Herman Ouseley, a world renowned equality expert was a welcome keynote speaker at the conference. Lord Ouseley explained that we must do much more to educate children and tackle prejudice from an early age. He explained that hatred toward people stems out of ignorance, and it is usually a consequence of hearing negative attitudes from parents.



As amazing as Jim, Kate and Lord Ouseley were it became quickly clear who the star of this section was going to be. Ben Bennett, a 13

year old English Romany Gypsy and the youngest keynote speaker in The Traveller Movement's history read a speech he had written on discrimination.

Traveller Movement (@GypsyTravellerM)
@BenBennett26 a standing ovation for Ben. What a brilliant speech #TMconference



Ben received a standing ovation, and his parents were very proud as they cheered him on from the front row.

"The inclusion of the young people was inspiring - said SO much in so few words. Well done to all."

Workshops

There were four workshops this year: hate crime, education, access to justice and media.

#OperationReportHate: Recognising and responding to hate crimes against the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities

Chair: Jim Davies (**GRTPA**); Bridget McCarthy (**TM Trustee**) Josie O'Driscoll & Sherrie Smith (**Herts GATE/Report Racism GRT**); Mark Healey (**National Hate Crime Awareness Week**); Alan Anstead (**UKREN**); Mia Hasenson-Gross (**Rene Cassin**)



The Hate Crime workshop acknowledged that the levels for reporting of hate crime within GTR communities' remains too low, but praised the brilliant work of Herts GATE 'Report Racism GRT' website and The Traveller Movement's #OperationReportHate public awareness campaign.

The workshop recommended:

- Promoting greater awareness of rights amongst to communities to increase self-reporting
- That GTR organisations should build stronger relationships and partnership with other third sector organisations such as Rene Cassin, CST and the National Hate Crime Awareness Week.
- Strategic legislation to ensure the police and judiciary take racially motivated attacks against GTR communities more seriously.

'Never giving up on them' – education workshop

Chair: Brian Foster (**TM Trustee**); Tina Purcell (**TM Women's Worker**); Andrew Mellor (**Headteacher of St Nicholas Primary School**); Rose McCarthy (**ACERT**)



The education workshop agreed that although there some good practice from individual schools, not enough is being doing to share and implement this good practice more widely. The negative stereotypes was raised as a significant barrier, especially the misconception held by many teachers that GTR children do not want education. It was agreed that there are legal avenues to take to tackle prejudice in education and they should be encouraged where

appropriate.

The workshop recommended:

- The workshop said the Traveller Movement should develop a good practice resource that is fully accessible for parents and schools.
- DfE should focus more on inclusion of GTR pupils, as judging schools only on attendance and attainment targets overshadows some excellent work.
- There should be research into Elective Home Education and its impact on the GTR communities.

Taking the law into your own hands: Empowering individuals to secure their rights

Chair: Louise Whitfield (**Disability Justice Project**); Sabrina Stewart (**TM Legal Development Intern**); Larry Harvey (**Prison Chaplain and community member**); Justine Compton (**Barrister, Garden Court Chambers**)



This workshop looked at how to tackle the barriers that Gypsies, Travellers and Roma people face in using the law to tackle problems like hate crime, discrimination and difficulties accessing education.

The group discussed the need for better engagement between the GTR communities on the one hand, and service providers/decision makers on the other, with both sides having a responsibility to work together.

Obstacles limiting communities members' access to justice include a mistrust (sometimes justified, sometimes not) of authority figures, a fear of being excluded from the community if they engaged with non-GTR services, and a lack of understanding of the law.

The workshop recommended:

- Any education aimed at improving community members' understanding of rights must be accessible, e.g. through face-to-face training at a convenient location.
- Service providers/decision makers must take responsibility for educating themselves about GTR cultures (ideally through training provided community members, who are the experts) in order to avoid inadvertent discrimination and to ensure that the services they provide are appropriate.
- Work must be done on increasing GTR representation in professions such as law and social work.

“Changing the narrative” – media workshop

Chair: Mike Doherty (**Travellers' Times Editor**); Betty Smith-Billington & Sylvia Harrison (**Kushti Bok**); Alex Khann (**Community Channel**)



The media workshop explored what community members, organisations and the lay public can do to “change the narrative” in the media which continually runs headline and stories that perpetuate negative stereotypes of GTR communities.

Examples were provided of successful engagement from local, GTR led, organisations engaging with their local paper to reduce the number of negative stories. The participants agreed that more needs to be done to encourage young Gypsies, Travellers and Roma to use their smart phones and produce their own material.

The workshop recommended:

- Social media needs to be utilised to tell positive stories about the communities, with targeted training for young people.
- Local organisations and groups should be supported and encouraged to improve the reporting of GTR communities by local media.
- The GTR sector should be proactive and not just reactive when it comes to engagement with the media.

Evaluation and comments

“Each of the last three conferences has been better than its predecessor and this one is going to be a hard act to follow. I was there to hear Ben talk mainly and feel there should be more young and school age speakers.”

“Found becoming educated and inspired the most useful.”

“Enjoyed the GRT speakers best.”

“I really enjoyed it and I am becoming more knowledgeable on what was available.”

“Always an amazing event which is much needed.”

“Excellent event. Let's take the issue out to the others who don't care to listen/attend/engage?”

“Well done! Feel inspired!”

“Thoroughly enjoyable and useful.”

This was our best attended conference in the past six years, with over 160 delegates and excellent speakers. Fifty five delegates were from Gypsy, Traveller or Roma communities, which is more than one third of all attendees. According to the feedback received, once again, the conference was a great success.

The two young speakers received standing ovations and fantastic feedback. 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 subject areas suggested by the attendees include: 'domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health', 'accommodation and health', 'Mental health, caring, needs of disabled GRT, alternative accommodation models' and 'homosexuality'.

The delegates voted for a Christmas card design, which was later used by TM. Competition was open to all young persons from GRT communities. We received a number of impressive designs. The winner was Jim Varey, a 9 year old, who attends weekly homework sessions organised by GRT Education Team in County Durham.

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 our next conference on **November 24th 2017**.



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