



the Traveller  
Movement

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT NETWORK

# Women's Empowerment Network Annual Review 2024-2025

March 2025



## About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity committed to the fulfilment of Human Rights for ethnic minority Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people. The Traveller Movement's mission is to develop a platform and voice for Travellers, working in solidarity with Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities to achieve equality through self-determination and proactive participation in influencing and shaping policy.



# Contents

Foreword .....	3
WEN Member Profiles.....	5
Mary McDonagh.....	5
Rosaleen McDonagh .....	5
Tina Cooper .....	6
Denisa Gannon.....	6
Olivia Hammond.....	7
Sarah Dunne.....	8
Polly Warner.....	8
Annalise Corcoran .....	9
Crystal Grace Smith.....	9
What's next for WEN.....	10



# Foreword

Welcome to the 2024-2025 Annual Review for the Romani (Gypsy), Roma, and Irish Traveller Women's Empowerment Network (WEN). The Network was launched in 2017 as a platform for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women to raise awareness of issues affecting their respective communities with support, administration and resources provided by The Traveller Movement (TM).

## So, who are we and what are we about?



We are a group of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women from across the UK who care passionately about the empowerment of women and girls from our communities. The WEN aims to create a platform to harness these skills and hear our voices while also supporting other Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women and girls to build their skills and confidence, develop collective strategies to challenge discrimination and inequality, and fulfil their potential as leaders and activists working for the rights of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. We continue to work both independently of each other and together to improve the outcomes of our communities across the UK.

## We aim to:



- Develop and enhance the skills and capacity of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women and girls to work collectively to challenge racism and sexism and all forms of discrimination experienced by our communities.
- Identify, document and respond to the particular experience of inequality for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women and girls.
- Support Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women in their voluntary and paid roles as activists for their community.
- Provide appropriate resources and training to Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women and girls in leadership roles to respond to the issue of violence against women within their community and/or workplace.
- Facilitate discussion and debates on gender equality and sensitive topics within Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.
- Create safe spaces for open and structured dialogue.
- Become a representative authority and voice for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women and girls.

## Our achievements



It's been a productive and inspiring year for the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN)! Our members have supported The Traveller Movement to set up ambitious projects and produce high quality resources. They have also presented at conferences, delivered training and most importantly continued challenging the discrimination, stereotypes and misconceptions of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women and communities.

In 2024-2025, some of our members attended and presented at a conference organised by Kaleidoscope UK, a charitable organisation of survivors for survivors of domestic abuse. In celebration of International Women's Day, our members spoke in Parliament to launch the 2024-2025 WEN Annual Review. Alongside guest speaker opportunities, we also had representatives at various conferences in the sector, including those organised by End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW), Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) and the Harmful Practices Organisation Group.

This year, we have continued to promote the specialist resources we produced in 2023-2024 including the Healthy Relationships Toolkit, our Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment Tool, four Safety Planning videos and a video created by-and-for survivors of domestic abuse called 'The Light at the End of the Tunnel: A Message From Survivors.'

Members have also continued delivering training for service providers across the country. They were involved in the co-production and training delivery of a 4-day CPD accredited module called Specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) Training: Supporting Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller survivors. All sessions were delivered by members of each community, some of whom are also survivors of domestic abuse.



The training aims to support professionals to understand the differences between each of the communities, recognise the barriers that survivors face and ensure that they are able to advocate for the rights and needs of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller survivors.

The Women's Empowerment Network hosted a variety of events in 2024-2025 including a Beauty and Business Masterclass, a Flower Arranging and Business Start-Up Workshop, a Survivors' Coffee Morning and an International Women's Day event in Parliament. These events focused on helping WEN members develop new skills, explore different career opportunities, and connect with other women from their community.

We also held many different training sessions which many of our members attended which covered topics such as campaigns; peer research; lobbying/advocacy; media and interview skills. We hosted a two-day facilitation training and increased the number of community trainers that could go on to deliver the specialist IDVA module in the future.

Several of our members spoke at the Traveller Movement Annual Conference and hence fed into the Annual Conference report and helped steer the women's work for 2025-2026.

We also campaigned for #OperationTravellerVote, encouraging our communities to register to vote and informing them about the importance of voting.

Many of our members expressed interest in more events and skill development with an emphasis placed on domestic abuse advocacy, upskilling community members to be able to be helpline workers and to deliver training, more skill-based workshops that encourage financial independence and employment opportunities. This will be our focus for the coming year.

As part of the specialist IDVA module, we explored mental health within Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities, laying the groundwork for important conversations. In 2025-2026, we will build on this work, addressing and tackling critical issues like online abuse, shame pages and deep fakes, which deeply impacts mental wellbeing.

We recruited several new members to the network; strong and inspirational women who will bring their expertise and experience in various different areas to the network.

Some of our members are working in frontline services, challenging stereotypes and trying to break down barriers between professionals and Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people from the inside.

**This Annual Review will introduce the individual and collective achievements of WEN members between April 2024– March 2025.**





# WEN Member Profiles

## Mary McDonagh

My name is Mary McDonagh and as an Irish Traveller woman, my life has been shaped by both my cultural heritage and the challenges it brings. At just 16, I was married—far too young to understand my own needs or have the courage to stand up for what I truly wanted. All I ever desired was to be loved and treated like a wife, like a human being, not an object for violence, control, and manipulation.

Instead, I found myself trapped in a marriage defined by fear and abuse.

When children became involved, the weight of the situation grew even heavier.

I wasn't just trying to survive for myself anymore; I had my children's safety and well-being to consider. The thought of them growing up in such an environment haunted me, yet breaking free felt impossible. The shame, stigma, and fear of leaving were overwhelming, but I knew that staying was no longer an option—for me or my children. They deserved better, and so did I.

The Women's Empowerment Network became a lifeline, providing the strength and resources I needed to escape and rebuild my life. Through them, I found a community of women who understood my pain and struggles. They helped me find my voice again, empowering me not just to survive, but to protect my children and carve out a better future for us all.

As I reflect on my journey, I believe the Women's Empowerment Network can continue to make a difference by expanding culturally sensitive support, especially for women like me, who are part of marginalised communities like the Irish Travellers. When children are involved, the stakes are even higher, and the resources, outreach, and advocacy efforts must be tailored to meet the complex needs of these families.

Empowerment isn't just about breaking free—it's about building a future where we and our children can thrive, free from fear. Together, through sharing our stories and supporting one another, we can create that future for every woman and child.



## Rosaleen McDonagh

My name is Rosaleen McDonagh. I'm 32 years old, an Irish Traveller and a mother to three beautiful daughters. I first heard of the Traveller Movement back in 2016 while I faced some difficulties. After a recommendation, I attended the annual conference that year and a short few weeks later I was welcomed as an intern at TM. We went full swing into advocacy training, women and children's educational work etc. and the rest they say is history.

I've maintained a relationship with the Traveller Movement throughout the years despite having moved away. Most recently I have been trained by TM to deliver Specialised Domestic Violence training to front line workers. It's a very humbling experience to co-deliver the training to professionals, knowing that it will help women from my community and other ethnic groups.

At the moment I'm studying GCSE English and Maths. I must admit it's a struggle at times to balance full-time parenting and studying, but it's not impossible. Although I have no formal education and no degrees, parenting has taught me a lot.

Empowerment can seem like a big word to a woman like me. Almost scary, but what I have learned is to empower someone is not to put them in a rocket and shoot them into outer space. To empower someone is to have a gentle and patient approach. To go to the people that are living on the fringes of society, isolated by fear and prejudice. To help them wipe the shame and pain away, slowly and step by step. My passion lays with compassion. My next step would be to become a domestic violence advocate and continue to support my children's education and well-being.



## Tina Cooper

My name is Tina, and I am a proud Irish Traveller woman. I am a Women's Worker with the Traveller Movement and a member of the Women's Empowerment Network. I first joined the Traveller Movement in 2008 as a volunteer, before joining the staff team in 2010. Since then, I have been involved in the development of a number of projects. I have worked on Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month, Travellers Got Talent and numerous other health and wellbeing/economic inclusion projects. I also sit on a local independent advisory group with the Metropolitan police in my local borough.



As a mother of five and one of the first divorced women in the Irish Traveller community, I know firsthand the challenges many women face. I am a strong advocate against domestic violence. One of my proudest achievements has been leading Never Going to Beat You, a drama project based on Irish Traveller women's real experiences of domestic violence. In 2018, the play was made into a film, and I was the lead actor, which was an amazing experience.

This year, I have attended community trainers' training, spoken in Parliament, participated in survivors' coffee mornings and provided feedback on domestic abuse training and resources. I have also previously delivered safety planning videos, hosted screenings of Never Going to Beat You at events such as the Irish Embassy and led women's groups in southeast London. In 2024-2025, as part of my work for the Traveller Movement, I delivered four-day specialist training sessions to Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs), helping to improve support for survivors. These experiences have equipped me with the skills and confidence to advocate for my community and inspire other women to find their voices.

I am proud of the work I've done so far and look forward to continuing this journey- for myself, my family and my community.

## Denisa Gannon

My name is Denisa Gannon, and I am a qualified solicitor. I am a European Roma woman originally from the Czech Republic. I am the first qualified solicitor of European Roma origins in the UK, and I qualified in 2018. I am working as an immigration lawyer specialising in the EU Settlement Scheme. Part of my work is to help vulnerable EU citizens gain legal status in the UK. I work with the Roma community, homeless, care leavers, children in care, elderly, people with physical and mental disabilities and people that lack mental capacity.



## Olivia Hammond

I'm Olivia Hammond, a Romani (Gypsy) woman from Lancashire. I grew up very traditionally, living in a trailer on and off on different camps with my family, but decided to get back into education when I was 15. Since completing my studies, I've been busy building my career. I've come a long way from helping my dad sell Christmas trees and cleaning up for my mam.



I became a teacher a few years back, teaching business and marketing at my local college – the one I studied at. A very full circle moment!

I've also worked in marketing, sales and business development. But eventually I had to follow my true passion – supporting my community. Since a young age, I've worked with groups of young Romani (Gypsy) and Irish Traveller girls – lots of them being my own family, on community projects. The joy of seeing them learn and experience new things made me incredibly driven to want to support more people.

I've always told people the same thing: if you want to follow the traditional Gypsy lifestyle then you absolutely can, there's no problem with that. As long as you know that there are other options, other paths – you can do whatever you want to do in life, whilst still being a proud Gypsy woman. The thing I'm most proud of is when someone tells me that I've inspired them to do what they really want to do – whether that's education, work, etc. That's what it's all about, showing people that there isn't only one way to be a Romani (Gypsy) or an Irish Traveller and that your voice MATTERS.

There will be lots of Romani (Gypsy)/Irish Traveller women reading this thinking that it's all well and good saying this, but it's almost impossible in reality. Trust me, I've been in your shoes, worrying about what might happen if I take a different path, what my friends and family might think, but you are responsible for your own happiness and that matters more than anything.

The Traveller Movement has been a huge part of my life in terms of my advocacy work and feeling empowered to support others. Before I worked at TM, I worked with them on a peer research project and would often give my input into work to ensure that it was as useful and relevant to the communities as possible. Now that I'm the Community Advocacy Caseworker at The Traveller Movement, I support people every single day. In 2024-2025, I facilitated a flower arranging workshop for women and girls, spoke in Parliament about the Healthy Relationships Toolkit and delivered a 4-day specialist IDVA training course.

Organisations like The Traveller Movement change lives. People who have been supported by them in the past tell me this all the time. But I already know, because I was one of those people who had their life changed.

I would love more women and girls to get involved with The Traveller Movement through the Women's Empowerment Network. Come along to an event or even just phone us up for a chat. No matter who you are, you're welcome here.



## Sarah Dunne

My name is Sarah Dunne and I am an Irish Traveller. I moved to the UK from my home in Ireland ten years ago. I was the first and only family member to progress to third level education after I finished my Leaving Certificate. I secured my undergraduate degree in English and Theology, and my post graduate degree in Education (English and Religious Studies). Here I obtained an honours degree from Trinity College Dublin, before moving to the UK to begin my career as a secondary school teacher.



My determination to become an educator stemmed from my own experiences in school as a pupil. I wanted a strong educational background as I wanted to achieve something that would help develop my independence.

I also wanted to provide children with an educational environment in which they could feel happy, safe and secure. I recently made the transition from the classroom to the Traveller Movement office, where I am now working as the Senior Women's Worker. I am looking forward to working within the organisation to help affect positive change within the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.

I am a recent addition to the WEN community; I joined because I believe it is paramount for women to encourage and support one another. I also believe that we should encourage more of our women to become engaged in academics and studying as this is something that can provide a wealth of opportunities. I am a proud Irish Traveller with strong pride and knowledge of my heritage. I strongly reject the idea that our identity can be reduced to something as simple as what we sound like, or how we dress. Our identity is reflected through our language, music, stories and song. Although I am new to the Network, I am excited to get started and to meet other likeminded Traveller women; to learn from them and to support them with their goals.

## Polly Warner

My name is Polly and I am a proud Romani (Gypsy) from Somerset. I am a survivor of domestic violence, and my own experiences have driven me to support and empower other women who are experiencing domestic abuse. Six years ago, I fled domestic violence and arrived at a refuge with nothing but a black carrier bag of clothes. When I asked a key worker if there was any financial support available, I was told there wasn't. I have always felt deeply for other women who have fled domestic violence, especially those who have fled with only the clothes on their backs. I strongly believe that financial support should be available to women as soon as they arrive at a refuge. Because of my experiences, I am now setting up my own organisation to provide financial support to Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women who are fleeing domestic violence. Through this organisation, I want to set up a starter fund that women can access immediately after fleeing and it will not need to be repaid.



This year, I attended the Traveller Movement's Annual Conference and I found it very informative. It was a great opportunity to connect with others and learn about the resources available to support women experiencing domestic abuse, as where I come from, these are non-existent. I have attended peer research training with TM. I am also part of the survivor's coffee mornings; these consist of a strong group of women who share their experiences of domestic violence. For me, this kind of platform is essential for survivors.

The Women's Empowerment Network provides a vital platform for Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller women to connect, share their experiences and advocate for their rights. It fosters a supportive environment where women can build resilience, and empower each other to overcome challenges, while celebrating their culture and heritage. I was overwhelmed with my first visit to the Traveller Movement in November, because back in Somerset, we have no services like this available. I think the Traveller Movement is amazing in the work that they do for the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities.



## Annalise Corcoran

My name is Annalise Corcoran, and I am an Irish Traveller. I have been the Women's Equality Intern at the Traveller Movement for almost a year now and have gained so much experience whilst being here. Coming from a strong, traditional family, I have always loved and respected my culture, however, I felt that I was called to more than what was typically expected from me.

Over the years I have found myself interested in many different career paths, such as dance, health and social care, and counselling. Since deciding that counselling was the path I was called to, I joined a course, and am currently in my second year of my studies. Since working for TM, I have participated in many different events and trainings. In September, I participated in the community trainers training, which really helped and prepared me to co-deliver specialist training to IDVA frontline workers. I have also attended and participated in some of the WEN's events, such as the flower arranging workshop and the Beauty and Business Masterclass. Some other training I completed was media and campaign training, which I feel I have benefited a lot from.

Currently, we are working on a project focusing on mental health within the Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller communities. This project is something that is very close to my heart, as there is a crisis within the Traveller community at the moment. With suicide rates skyrocketing right now, I feel there is no better way to be spending my time than finding ways to help and support people within these communities, who may be suffering with the hopelessness and isolation that comes from mental health illnesses. Even though we are only at the beginning of this project, I feel extremely excited to see where this path will lead, and I believe my counselling studies will really benefit and contribute to the outcome of this project.

In conclusion, I am extremely grateful to TM for the help they have offered me and feel I have really been supported throughout my journey. It gives me great pleasure to offer my support to other women and young girls within these communities, encouraging them that there is no one way of being a Romani (Gypsy), Roma or Irish Traveller woman. I believe the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN) offers a safe space for community support, strong friendships and some amazing opportunities! I encourage women from these communities to join the WEN and find out for themselves the great opportunities that are being offered!



## Crystal Grace Smith

My name is Crystal Grace Smith. I possess a diploma in law & legal professions and I am currently pursuing my bachelor's degree in criminology & criminal law. I am certified in mental health first aid and operate a helpline for Traveller women encountering domestic abuse, assisting with matters like education, housing, legal advice, and mental health. I am profoundly passionate about aiding women in my community to achieve their objectives, providing them with the tools needed to exit harmful situations, and establishing an action plan to ensure safety and an improved quality of life.



# What's next for WEN...

2024-2025 was a very busy year for our members, and this year will be no different. While each member will undoubtedly be tackling their respective area of work, we will also work together to co-produce a plan of action to take forward into 2025-2026.

The insights from the women's workshop at our annual conference will guide our plans for 2025-2026. Many members want more workshops on domestic abuse advocacy, financial independence, and employment skills, as well as training to support helpline roles and community-led services. We have several events this year that will focus on some of these key areas that our members have expressed interest in.

We will also build on our partnership with City Bridge throughout 2025-2026 to address mental health, focusing on issues like suicide, shame and online abuse. These topics were highlighted in the specialist IDVA training module this year and will remain a key area of work moving forward.

We've also welcomed many new members to the network this year. Together, we will continue to challenge stereotypes, break down barriers and create positive change for women in our communities.

If you would like to join the WEN, please email: [women@travellermovement.org.uk](mailto:women@travellermovement.org.uk) or give us a call on 020 7607 2002.

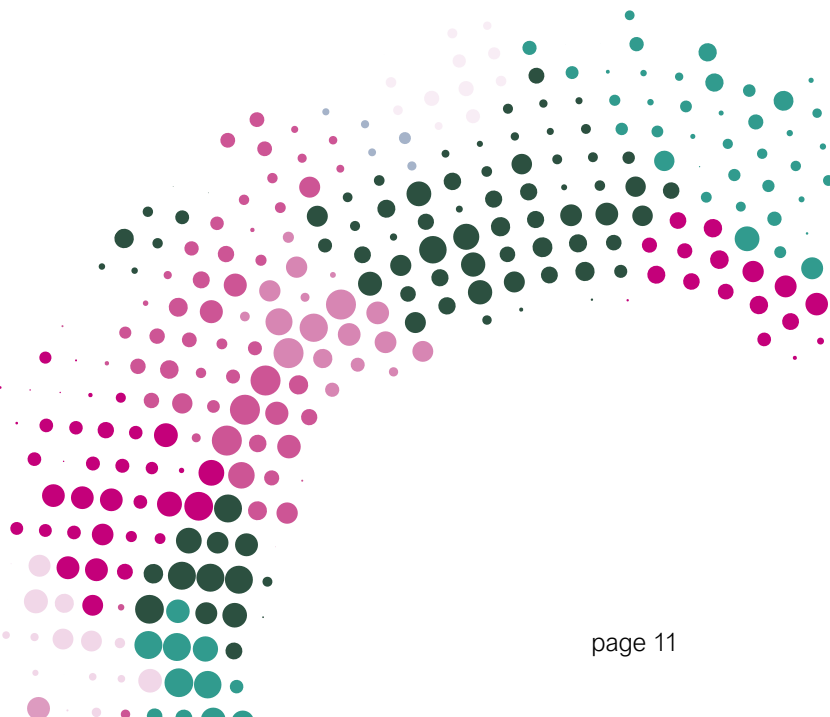
**Thank you. We would like to thank all our funders who contribute in various ways to the development and delivery of this important project, but especially the London Community Foundation and their support through the MOPAC Violence Against Women and Girls Grassroots Fund.**

**The London  
Community  
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 The Traveller Movement

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