



National Traveller

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Money Advice & Budgeting Service

# *It's all About Education – Making Education Work for Traveller Men*



*It's all About Education –  
Making Education Work for  
Traveller Men*

First published November 2016  
By National Traveller MABS  
Unit 2, North Park,  
North Road,  
Finglas  
Dublin 11  
[www.ntmabs.org](http://www.ntmabs.org)

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A catalogue record is available for this book from the British Library  
ISBN: 978-0-9571148-7-6

## Acknowledgement

*I would like to thank the following who participated in the research, Thomas McCann (Traveller Counselling Service), Maria Joyce (National Traveller Women's Forum, John O'Sullivan and the men from the Cork Traveller Visibility Group, John Paul Collins and the men from Pavee Point, Patsy Sweeney and the men from the Galway Traveller Movement and all other participants who took part in the initial research of 2014.*

*Finally I would like to express my appreciation to the Board and staff of National Traveller MABS and to the CIB for the support given in completing this report.*

*Dermot Sreenan*

**This report was written by Dermot Sreenan and published by  
National Traveller MABS.**



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# Foreword

National Traveller MABS seeks to end the financial exclusion of Travellers in Ireland. To achieve this, our strategy includes a commitment to develop and support community education initiatives focusing on promoting financial inclusion. Such initiatives aim to reach all sections of the Traveller community, young, old, male and female.

Adult education is deeply embedded within the Traveller community. Many Traveller women return to education after having a family. However, Traveller men are less likely to engage with education programmes- whether community based, or based in more formal institutions.

Since 2005, National Traveller MABS have found that while we work closely with Traveller women's groups, it is more difficult to engage Traveller men.

We are fortunate to have a full time National Education Worker, Dermot Sreenan, who works closely with Traveller organisations both locally and nationally to promote culturally appropriate education initiatives.

In part fulfilment of the requirements for his BA in Training and Education (2015), Dermot conducted research on Traveller men and their engagement in education. This report is an edited version of his findings. Dermot examines why Traveller men do not engage in education and puts forward recommendations on how educational establishments and programmes can better serve the needs of Traveller men.

We would like to thank Dermot for undertaking this valuable and necessary study.

We would like to thank the board of National Traveller MABS for the support given to Dermot in completing his studies, and his colleagues for their constant encouragement.

Finally we are indebted to all within the Traveller community who shared their stories with Dermot. As always the work of National Traveller MABS seeks to reflect knowledge from within the community. We hope that this report echoes this.

**Nancy Power and Nuala Ní Ghabhann**  
**Coordinators of National Traveller MABS**

# Executive Summary

National Traveller MABS has deployed community education as a means to empower Travellers with skills and knowledge to help end the financial exclusion they experience. This research, undertaken over a period of two years with various Traveller men, aims to establish why there is negligible engagement of Traveller men in lifelong learning. There is no research carried out directly with male Travellers on the subject of adult education, with the exception of one case-study detailed in the Aontas report of 2007. National Traveller MABS were in the fortunate position of being able to access and talk directly with Traveller men and hence carry out this important research.

The findings indicate the urgent need for mandatory diversity training for all staff engaged in education. We may not have segregated provision of schooling anymore, but there is a distinct cultural deficit within the Irish education system which impacts on the experience of male Travellers, causing them to self-exclude from education.

Many of the young Traveller men interviewed had been encouraged by their fathers to stay in school. There is a feeling that education might lead to opportunities. In the past fathers might have been able to bring their sons into their business but that is proving more difficult. The expectation is that education should provide an opportunity to ‘provide for the family’ which is the pre-dominant role that is self-defined by Traveller men. In this way there is a reflection that young Travellers lead different lives to their settled counterparts.

It was difficult to identify lifelong learning opportunities which had been created for, or were successful for Traveller men. There was little evidence of courses being created around needs that were identified by Traveller men themselves. For the Traveller men interviewed, having a space where they felt comfortable, meant that they knew that their culture was respected, that the initiative was Traveller led and that it happened in groups of their peers. This was reflective of the way in which gender boundaries are observed in social situations for Travellers.

Roles and identity are fluid and subject to change. There is an opportunity to examine such subjects within the adult education space once you create an appropriate safe learning environment. Travellers remain proud of their identity, but at a time when many of their cultural practices are being challenged, it is necessary to create a forum where the group can discuss what it means to be a Traveller today. Community education has a role in terms of both individual advancement and advancement for the community as a whole. The lack of community education spaces for Traveller men has led to them being excluded from this potential advancement. Community education has the potential to be a place where issues of identity, pride and diversity can be explored collectively.

Opportunity is distinctly lacking for Traveller men. The clearly identified role of ‘provider for the family’ remains constant. When one talks about adult education the question is asked- will it lead to opportunities which will allow the man to fulfil the role of



being the provider for his family? When you ask Traveller men what they want from education they talk in clear terms of being trained to be a ‘mechanic or electrician.’ They wish to see education leading to employment opportunities.

Community Education as practiced in Ireland does not really exist for Traveller men. ‘...it is about bringing learning to people in their local areas as a response to the area’s needs’ (AONTAS, 2010, p. 10). Education does not happen in their area and learning is not brought to where the people live. Traveller men who engage in community education have to travel to where the Traveller organisation is based. Such instances are good, but again the question has to be asked, why Travellers are being given a form of adult education which is not based in their communities and therefore not addressing those needs.

# Recommendations

In examining why Traveller men do not engage in education, this report sets forward the following recommendations on how barriers to education can be overcome.

1. Ethnic recognition – The Irish State should follow the UK in recognising Irish Travellers as a distinct ethnic group.
2. Government bodies should work with the Traveller community to develop a national strategy to address the lack of engagement of male Travellers in education. In developing the strategy, the negative legacy of education policies and practices in Ireland must be acknowledged and addressed.
3. To ensure that an inclusive and culturally respectful education system is available to all, it is imperative that the education sector meets the needs of all, most especially Travellers and other ethnic minorities. Therefore
  - (a) Mandatory diversity awareness training must exist for all educators
  - (b) Investment must be made in culturally appropriate learning environments
  - (c) Culturally appropriate learning materials must be developed for all sectors of the education system
4. Traveller organisations should be resourced to develop a national network committed to supporting Traveller men in engaging in culturally appropriate education initiatives. Central to this should be the learner’s needs. This includes –
  - (a) Acknowledging gender roles and the need for men to engage in relevant learning in an appropriate and safe space.
  - (b) Creating opportunities for Traveller men to “provide for their families” through employment.



# Section 1

## Background

### 1.1 The Traveller Community in Ireland

Travellers are an indigenous minority who have lived in Ireland for centuries. They share history, common ancestry, language, customs, and traditions which distinguishes them from the majority population. Being different from the majority population has led to Travellers being recognised as one of the most marginalised groups in Irish society.

*'many Travellers fare poorly on every indicator used to measure disadvantage, including educational attainment, health status, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, life expectancy, infant mortality, gender equality, political representation, accommodation, and living conditions (DES, 1996, p 4).'*

Although not officially recognised as an ethnic group, a joint Oireachtas report on Traveller ethnicity stated that *'It is no longer tenable for the State to deny Traveller Ethnicity'* (DOJ, 2014, p. 5). Travellers in Ireland represent just over half of one percent of the total population according to the Central Statistics Office, with the 2011 Census citing an Irish Traveller population of approximately 30,000 (CSO, 2012). Although in comparison to the general population, the Traveller population is comparatively small, the statistics bear out the degree of disadvantage that Travellers face in terms of outcomes –

- Unemployment in the Irish Traveller Community was just over 84% - more than four times that of the general population (19%).
- Over half of Travellers who had completed their full time education did so before the age of 15 (55%); this compares with a figure of only 11% for the general population.
- Only 3.1% of Travellers continued their education past the age of 18, compared with a figure of 41.2% for the population as a whole.

The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study conducted in 2008, provides further depth in relation to the comparative characteristics of Travellers health as compared to the population at large (AITHS, 2010). Again, the picture that emerges is a disturbing one; for example –

- The life expectancy of Travellers is significantly lower than that of the general population, with average life expectancy at birth being 61.7 years for Traveller males, compared to 76.8 years for males in the population as a whole.

- As regards infant mortality, widely considered to be a good indicator of a population's level of health and development, Traveller infants are 3.6 times more likely to die than infants in the general population (AITHS, 2010).

The All Ireland Traveller Health Study also examined Traveller education and literacy noting *'Traveller educational status has been recorded repeatedly as considerably lower than that of their general peers, to an extent unmatched by any other community in Irish society'* (AITHS, 2010, p13).

## **1.2 National Traveller MABS and Community Education**

The mission of National Traveller MABS is to end the financial exclusion of Travellers in Ireland by effecting change in policy and practice which excludes Travellers and other marginalised groups from accessing financial services.

National Traveller MABS sees education and training as key to ensuring the inclusion of Travellers in society. However, for this to happen, it must be embedded in the needs of the learner and be specific to the learners environment, where they feel comfortable in charge of the direction.

Education and in particular community education which takes place outside of the rigid mainstream education system has a focus on enhancing the learning by involving learners as equal partners in identifying needs, designing and implementing programmes, and adapting them on an on-going basis. In attempting to get culturally appropriate financial education programmes off the ground, National Traveller MABS noted the lack of Traveller men engaging with community education networks.

Male Traveller opportunities for engagement in community education are rare since the formal closure of the Senior Traveller Training centres in June of 2012. The focus groups that participated in the research were part of Traveller rights groups in Dublin (Pavee Point), Cork (Traveller Visibility Group) and Galway (Galway Traveller Movement). All participants in the focus groups had chosen to re-engage in community education and this allowed the research to explore the impact that gender roles had on that decision.

The work that National Traveller MABS has engaged with in relation to community education ensured access to these specific Traveller men's education groups. It should be noted that the inclusive nature of Travellers meeting in a Traveller rights organisation led to very open and participative focus groups on this subject. Focus groups took place in the Traveller rights organisations, Pavee Point and Cork Traveller Visibility Group (TVG). This was an important factor for the men involved, occurring as they did in a space in which they felt comfortable to come together and work collectively. One interviewee said that educational programs

*... should be Traveller led because a settled person wouldn't have a clue. Fair enough, they read a book but how would they know that is true?*

[Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015]

The need for community education to take place in an inclusive and respectful space is identified by McGregor and Mills who examined models which work for those re-engaging

marginalised young people back into education; that is where the relationship with the learner is one of *'caring, small, community, family, respectful equal, supportive, non-judgmental, mutual responsibility'* (McGregor & Mills, 2011, p. 857). The interviewees emphasised the importance of the space for learning being specifically a Traveller space, and a place where they feel that they were going to be respected and where they as Travellers are central to the learning.

### 1.3. Traveller Men and Education

Traveller men feature as a key target group in terms of Community Education, with the unemployment rate for Traveller men running at 86.6 % in the 2011 census (CSO, 2012, p33) (O'Fathartha, C., 2012).

Prior to the closure of the Senior Traveller Training Centre's in 2012, the National Association of Travellers' Centres (NATC) commissioned research in order to *'map the way forward in terms of adult education for Travellers in 21st century Ireland'* (Hourigan, N, and Campbell, M., 2010). The resulting *Teach Report* found that *'through marriage, Travellers determine their own place within the social, political and economic hierarchies of broader Traveller culture which are rooted entirely in extended family relationships'* (Hourigan, & Campbell, 2010 p.39). Whilst Travellers were interviewed for this research many of the views expressed are by stakeholders, some of whom characterised Traveller men as being obstructers of progression; *'What is holding back the whole thing is the men'* (Hourigan, & Campbell, 2010 p.42). *The Teach Report* concluded the section on gender noting that cause *'major difficulty due to the fact that women do not have a 'lot of the decision making power'* (Hourigan, & Campbell, 2010 p.42).

Even prior to the systematic dismantling of the Traveller education structures along with other services, males Travellers were under represented in the education system (Harvey, 2013).

Young male Travellers leave school earlier than their female counterparts with only 11% remaining in education until 17 years of age or more (CSO, 2011). The suicide rate amongst Traveller men is 6.6 times higher than in the general Irish population (AITHS, 2010, p94). Prior to the closure of the Senior Traveller Training Centre's, women were always in the majority, with men making up only 19% of the attendee's in 2004 (DES, 2006, p.63).

Qualitative research conducted last year pointed to a profound influence of gender and gender roles in particular in relation to the attitudes of Traveller men towards education (Sreenan, D, 2014). AONTAS found that community education with its *'strong capacity for social action, a sense of collective empowerment and an ability to tackle issues of social justice'* is not being availed of by Traveller men (AONTAS, 2000). The key question remains: Why do Traveller men not engage with community education?

Community Education or second chance education is seen as the vital link which can provide people with a pathway back into the education system and thus increasing the life chances and opportunities for that individual. Given that 90% of Travellers finish education before the age of 17, then Travellers should provide ideal candidates for the opportunity that community education presents in bringing adults back into learning (CSO, 2012). Initially adult education was created to allow opportunities to those who had been failed by

the formal education system (Lynch, 1991, Cited by Finnegan, 2008). Traveller men are at the centre of what the policy makers refer to as 'disadvantaged men.'

Traveller men and the issue of their lack of engagement in adult education is an area that remains under researched. Given the reasons that Travellers, and in particular male's, continue to leave the education system early, re-engagement in adult education should be the focus of research in terms of determining if this 'second chance' is actually that.

In spite of knowing that disadvantaged men can gain greatly from re-engaging in adult education, it has proven difficult to re-engage Traveller men. Past negative experience is something that has to be recognised and acknowledged.

*'But then nobody valued us enough to show us that it was important....And nobody invested in us, Or nobody showed us an alternative. Or nobody, nobody encouraged us to have visions or dreams or ambitions or aspirations. We were Gypsy children.'*

John (Sreenan, 2014, p.29, 30)

One experienced community educator, Claire, had this to say about how she tackled the legacy of Travellers experience within the mainstream school system (Sreenan, 2014)

*'pretty extreme examples of racism within education made it very difficult for people to come back into an educational setting...I realised after maybe two years of running those programs that actually the first week of the program had to be an induction week which just broke down the difference between schooling and education and exploring what those two words meant.'*

Building trust with the adult so that you can reintroduce the idea of learning, and create a comfortable learning environment, can only be done once you establish that this experience and space is different from the one previously experienced within the mainstream education system. This is supported in the *Back to Education Initiative Report* (AONTAS, 2007). In 2007, of the 25,860 participants in *Back to Education Initiative* (BTEI) funded programmes, only 23% were men, and of that 3% were male Travellers (AONTAS, 2007 p.9). Within that report there was an interesting case study in Bray which targeted Traveller men and drug dependent men, and it found that time is '*needed to gain trust and build up relationships with this particular group*'(AONTAS, 2007 p26). The task of building this trust falls on community groups who are actively engaged with marginalised groups.

The following it was stated were key to success; establishing trust, socialization activities (snooker, breakfast), identification of community leaders in order to encourage others to engage (AONTAS, 2007, p26-27). The report stated that a major drawback was an underestimation of the time required to bring people to a level where they could undertake additional courses (AONTAS, 2007, p26-27).

Gaining that trust is crucial and it takes time but is the essential starting point.

*'most central here is dialogue with Travellers themselves, creating some rapport which over time builds mutual trust, without which one is simply wasting one's time...'*(Breen, 2012, p.121).

In 2000, *Learning for Life*, the Government Whitepaper on adult education acknowledged, the;

*..... unique ability of those community groups to reach hard-to-reach audiences with personnel drawn from self-same areas or groups. This tended to raise the possibility of such groups taking a more orthodox provider role on behalf of statutory organisations who may have no physical presence in such communities or who simply find it hard to engage highly marginalised people in their activities. The potential contribution of such an approach is areas such as literacy provision: in engaging with disadvantaged men (DES, 2000, p71)*

*Learning for Life* identified cultural development and community building as key areas where adult education can make a contribution. The Whitepaper also placed an emphasis on employment as a key outcome;

*In addition to the economic imperative, there are a number of social concerns which are driving the Lifelong Learning agenda. Foremost amongst these is the interrelationship between employability and social inclusion and the view that access to more and better jobs is a fundamental underpinning of an inclusive society. (DOT, 2002, p. 5)*

In spite of Traveller men fitting perfectly into the criteria as benefitting from lifelong learning, and ultimately bringing them into employment, we have no evidence of this being the case.

The European Commission have stated that they are concerned about the ‘lack of data’ in relation to the impact of reductions in educational services (Crowley, 2010, p. 109). For Traveller men there are few successful models that can be pointed to in relation to community education working for them either on an educational, democratic social justice, or an economic level.

This research attempted to hear directly from Traveller men. The Traveller men, who were kind enough to share their experiences of education must be thanked. This was done with purpose; to inspire those who are interested in education and social justice to create a community education model that delivers opportunities for Traveller men and is shaped and driven by their needs.

#### **1.4 Changing perceptions of education**

Education has frequently been proposed as the avenue of opportunity for improving the lives of Travellers and there were no less than 167 recommendations in relation to education in the *Report of the Taskforce on the Travelling Community* (1995). This taskforce report and the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study documented that both Travellers and providers felt that lack of educational opportunity was ‘a major barrier to improved lifestyle and health and was in urgent need of redress by both Travellers themselves and Service Providers (AITHS, 2010, p122).’ Education has been seen and continues to be seen as an important forum in which to address some of the disadvantages experienced by Travellers.



There has been a lot of work in the area of education with the national Traveller organisations working on development of the *Report and Recommendations towards a Traveller Education Strategy* (DES, 2006). National Traveller groups worked towards putting forth recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, in which marginalisation is addressed.

*Travellers fare poorly on every indicator used to measure disadvantage, including educational attainment, health status, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, life expectancy, infant mortality, gender equality, political representation, accommodation, and living conditions.* (DES, 2006, p 4)

The message from these organisations to Traveller parents is to –

*continue to have high educational expectations for their children and encourage them to continue beyond compulsory education* (DES, 2006, pg. 94)

The important role that education can play in someone's life is recognised by Traveller parents, and it is evidenced in this research. Hegarty in her research with Traveller women stated that within the mainstream education system they, as mother's, believed there to be a lack of policy and infra-structure present to ensure either the education or well-being of the child.

*They (Traveller mother's) feel that, as in their own time they are dependent on the good nature of key individuals to provide their children with an education and for their well-being in the school situation* (Hegarty, M., 2013).

Such concerns were not allayed by the cuts to Traveller specific supports in 2011 and 2012. The Children's Rights Alliance stated

*The 2006 Traveller Education Strategy has never had a clear implementation plan. The only recommendations which have been implemented relate to moving from segregated provision to integrated provision which have involved cuts to Traveller education provision and resourcing'* (Children's Rights Alliance Report Card, p. 68 2012).

Maria Joyce of the National Traveller Women's Forum, said that in her area there was '*as much Traveller young fellows who have completed 2nd level as there is Traveller girls'* (NTWF, 27th Jan. 2015). The disappearance of past trades has led to a greater emphasis being placed on education by Traveller fathers who would have kept boys from school in the past

*...years ago you would listen to your father, your father was learning you the trick of the trade. That was then, but all that has been taken from us now, it's all about education, bring it up and up and over and over, education is everything now.*

(TVG, Cork, 18th Feb. 2015)

## *Section 1 – Background*

Education has increased in importance among Traveller men as there is a growing realisation that the ability to provide for the family through traditional work models has disappeared. One young man said *'90% of the way of our fathers, the way they do things is gone'* (Pavee Point, Dublin, 26th Feb. 2015). Education has to be seen to deliver in this area. A key question for Traveller men is will education lead to work or opportunities? As Lynch et al points out *'Like the rest of humanity, the oppressed too are interested in personal social mobility and a well-paid job'* (Lynch, 1999, Cited by King, P., O'Driscoll, S., Holden, S., 2002, p.17).

It is important that education delivers and is seen to deliver opportunities for men. Securing the Leaving certificate today still leaves a young Traveller man competing for jobs in a recession and in a society which discriminates against Travellers.

## Section 2

### Terms of Reference and Research Methodology

The primary purpose of this research was to document the impact of the gender role of Traveller men on education and how this shapes their attitudes and perceptions of the social institution of education.

The research was undertaken using the ‘Grounded Theory’ approach as detailed by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss 1967). This is an approach which holds that theories or concepts emerge from data which is gathered during the course of the research (Glaser & Strauss 1967). There is a distinct absence of existing literature in relation to Traveller men in general and none that I could find in relation to an exploration of gender roles for men within the Traveller community. There is substantial research outlining that Traveller boys/men often have poor educational outcomes and lack progress within the formal education system, and that there is a prevalence of early school leaving (AITHS, 2008) (CSO, 2012) (DES, 2006)(DES, 2011).

A mixed method approach was adopted in the design of this research. Quantitative data was gathered from the participants in relation to specific questions concerning, age, school leaving age, self-assessment of literacy skills, age when they re-engaged with education. This was completed in order to triangulate the data, and to give context to the qualitative data. Two interviews and two focus groups took place all of which were recorded and transcribed. A ‘purposive sampling’ method was used (NUIG, 2011, p.146). The nature of my work as a community education worker directly engaged in Traveller adult education, means that I have some experience in this area. Male Traveller opportunities for engagement in community education are rare since the formal closure of the Senior Traveller Training centres in June of 2012. The focus groups were chosen from two Traveller organisations that are actively engaged in this area- Pavee Point in Dublin and Cork Traveller Visibility Group (TVG). Therefore, all participants had chosen to re-engage in community education and this allowed for the research to explore the impact that gender roles had on that decision.

Added to this, I undertook two interviews with experienced Traveller activists, Maria Joyce and Thomas Mc Cann. They have knowledge and experience in this area, and have considered the question of gender previously and how it applies to their work.

Maria Joyce is a Traveller woman who works for the National Traveller Women’s Forum (NTWF). Maria has vast experience as a committed Traveller rights activist and her views greatly informed the research. Maria and the National Traveller Women’s Forum developed a position paper on Gender in 2010 (NTWF, 2010). Maria was interviewed in her office on the morning of the 27th January 2015.

## *Section 2 – Terms of Reference and Research Methodology*

Thomas McCann is the director of the Traveller Counselling Service, a psychotherapist, and a community development worker, a Traveller man and long-time campaigner and activist for Traveller rights. He left school at an early age and is self-taught. He became director of the Traveller Counselling Service, and is currently undertaking a doctorate.

Having had the experience of conducting similar research last year, I was aware of the need to approach the subject with a degree of sensitivity and ensure that the participants were comfortable, and had a clear understanding of what engagement in the focus group might entail. Phone calls and emails were exchanged to the main contacts at both Cork Traveller Visibility Group (TVG) and Pavee Point to explain the nature of the research, and its purpose.

The Focus Groups were able to take place as there is a working relationship between the researcher and both of the organisations. The venue and time was chosen on the basis that it suited the Traveller men and it was a space where they felt comfortable and were used to working in. The group numbers were less than ten in each instance which helped in terms of managing the group. A format was established that I would seek permission to conduct the research by reading out the letter of consent and the form that follows it so that each participant knew what would happen and what they were agreeing to. It was expressly stated that at if any time a participant was unhappy with the focus group that they could leave the room. Interviews were recorded by audio device. In total the data was collected from 16 individual men, ranging in age from 18 – 55.

Attention was given to ensuring that all voices in the conversation were heard. One Traveller man's experience was used as a comparator in order to explore if it was possible to establish common experiences (NUIG, 2011, p.143). Fortunately, there was no conflict of opinions expressed and the only difficulty encountered was ensuring that the participants did not talk over one another. Data has been anonymised in accordance with the guidelines prepared by the Irish Qualitative Data Archive<sup>1</sup>.

The process of conducting the interviews helped to shape the focus groups with specific themes emerging that were worthy of further exploration in the group setting. The coding was conducted in a cyclical manner with the researcher returning to the data time and again to note the common themes that emerged directly from experience of the Traveller men.

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<sup>1</sup>*IQDA Anonymisation Protocol*, <http://www.iqda.ie/sites/default/files/AnonymisationProtocolV5.pdf> Accessed 10th March 2015

## Section 3

### Findings

#### 3.1 Why do Young Male Travellers Leave Education?

Traveller boys continue to leave school earlier than their peers from the majority population. The experience for Travellers in mainstream education is one in which their educational attainment remains lower than their settled peers in both reading and mathematics (DES, 2011 Cited in Pavee Point, 2014). 28.8% of Travellers have expressed difficulties in relation to being able to read (AITHS, 2010). Of the 16 Traveller men who participated in this project, 30% of them had attained the Leaving Certificate. Of that 30%, none of the Traveller men were employed. The researcher found it impossible to look at the question of education and community education in particular without first acknowledging and exploring the experiences of male Travellers in the mainstream education system. Thomas McCann, subject matter expert, states that the research must begin with the experience of Traveller men,

*‘...the starting point for me, Traveller men in this case, is their experience, what is their experience, the reality of everyday life...We need to get into that.’*

(Thomas McCann)

Previous research had found that some older Traveller men had a limited experience of attending school except prior to receiving communion or confirmation; this is referred to as being there *‘for the sacraments’* (Sreenan, 2014). Only one Traveller man reported this here.

The focus groups put forward a number of reasons why male Travellers leave the education system. They can be classified as follows –

1. Non recognition of Traveller Ethnicity
2. Gender roles
3. Education outcomes do not match expectations

##### 3.1.1 Non Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity

Irish Travellers are an indigenous ethnic group that make up 0.8% of the general population of the Republic (AITHS, 2010) (CSO, 2011). Ethnic identity refers to the feelings toward and a sense of belonging to an ethnic group and tends to be more salient among minority youth than those in the dominant group (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001, Cited by Darling et al.,2006).

### Section 3 – Findings

Often Travellers' first experience of being treated differently is based on both their culture and ethnicity. Education is often the setting for this first experience of being considered different. Mainstream education for many Travellers was one of segregation from other pupils. The legacy of this negative experience of exclusion within the mainstream education system is something which has to be overcome if there is to be a re-engagement by Traveller men in Education.

*[there was] an unused prefab, probably in the school that no one used, and all the Traveller children were put in there. And there was a nun that was doing the reading and writing. But most of the time you were there you were colouring, that is all you were doing, you were given a page and you were colouring or drawing a horse.<sup>2</sup>*

(TVG, Cork, 18th Feb. 2015)

This pattern of exclusion appears to have continued within mainstream education. An 18 year old Traveller in Dublin told of being taken out of class even though he was in the top three academically performing children; he was sent instead to the Traveller specific class run by a different teacher. This only stopped when a new teacher came to the school and stopped sending him to the Traveller specific class.

Another Traveller man had this to say in relation to his 9 year old son.

*And he is fearing the teacher in the school. There is 3 teachers that comes in on different days, and one of the teachers beats him down, like you'd beat a dog.*

(TVG, Cork, 18th Feb. 2015)

Discrimination features as part of the school experience. When asked if students or teachers were more inclined to discriminate against them, participants universally stated that the teachers were a larger source of discrimination' (Pavee Point, 2015, p. 14),

Ethnicity matters. It is important that this is understood as a critical factor in terms of success of mentoring and educational programs (Darling, Et al, 2006) (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993 cited by Darling, 2006). Understanding how important being a Traveller is to Travellers and appreciating the cultural differences of this group is important for all who engage with or work directly with this ethnic group. Lynch and Feely argue that there is a need for systematic policy in the area of mainstream education to address the alienation of boys (and girls) from low income and ethnic minority backgrounds (2009, p.14). There is evidence of significantly lower educational attainment in literacy and numeracy for Travellers, in comparison to their settled peers in DEIS schools (DES, 2011).

International data concurs with this. In the United States 'black children represent 18 per cent of preschool enrolment but make up 48 per cent of preschool children receiving one or more than one out-of-school suspension...' (EDOOCR, March 2014). Boys and members of ethnic minorities have increased chances of receiving 'exclusionary discipline' (Justice Centre, 2014).

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<sup>2</sup>In this boy's case, his mother and sister showed up one day to the school and saw him down the back of the prefab drawing pictures and took decisive action. A week after that he was withdrawn from that school and enrolled in another school and he went on to sit his leaving certificate.

Young Travellers experience institutional racism which is defined as –

*The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people, because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.*

(Macpherson, 1999, p 28 Stephen Lawrence Enquiry)

What emerges from this research is a persistent pattern of Travellers not getting the same education due to their ethnic status. Boys within the education system who directly challenge discrimination are likely to be suspended.

Often Travellers' first experience of being treated differently is based on both their culture and ethnicity. Maria Joyce from the National Traveller Women's forum noted in her interview

*I mean school is a challenging place for any Traveller child and it is a challenging place in its way for Traveller girls but I think in some instances it can even be more challenging for young boys.* (Maria Joyce, NTWF, 27th Jan. 2015)

The first place where you are identified as being different is in school and the implications of this experience cannot be underestimated. It appears to lead to Travellers in school hiding their identity, dropping out and internalising oppression. By showing your ethnic identity, you are making yourself a target.

*I hid my identity the whole way through secondary school. And I wouldn't have been in college only for it.* (TVG, Cork, 18th Feb. 2015)

Cultural deficits appear regularly in the statements made by internal stakeholders within the educational institutions, in particular where they fail to identify with the cultural differences, make cultural based assumptions, and identify deficiencies as being associated with membership of a minority group (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998) (Salkind, 2008). Here a home school liaison officer speaks of dealing with young Travellers leaving education after confirmation.

*....male Travellers don't go through adolescence – once they go into second year, they become a man. They think that they can speak with the teachers from this perspective. They want to show their identity and they don't have that much interest in exams as such* (Forkan C., 2006, p. 88).

Traveller men appear to be constantly judged or labelled even by those who work within educational institutions. For example, the *Teach Report* reported this view from an adult education tutor

*The men holding on to their old sense of values.. I mean, that's a hard thing for men. They'd be obstinate...Y'know they've kind of lost a role*

(Hourigan & Campbell p. 42).

The experience of being a Traveller has implications for a Traveller boy in mainstream education. Belonging to a minority culture may mark you out for different treatment. This is why hiding identity is seen as a solution for some who wish to stay on in mainstream education. It also explains why dropping out of school can be such a tempting option for young Traveller men.

### **3.1.2 Gender Roles and the strong influence in this space**

Gender roles within the Traveller community also contribute to Traveller males leaving the education system. Education is an area that has been experienced differently by Traveller men. The gender dimension will '*draw attention to the fact that women and men have different experiences of that issue*' (NTWF, 2010, p.2). Traveller men's experience of mainstream education inevitably fed into their attitudes and perceptions of education in general. Previous research in this area had shown that there was a gender dimension in terms of this experience for Traveller men which left a residual feeling that '*the mentality is still out there, that this [Education] type of work IS women's work and it is not recognised as something a man should be doing*' (Sreenan, 2014, p. 22). But how did education come to be seen as outside the boundary of what was expected or accepted within the male Traveller gender role?

Gender is '*the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men*' (Council of Europe, 2011, Article 3c). Brown explains that '*a gender role is a pattern of behaviour and activity which society expects from individuals of either sex - how a boy/man or girl/woman should behave in society*' (Browne 2011, p.19). We learn what kind of behaviour is expected from us through socialisation, as Brown relates, '*gender identities are primarily constructed through socialisation, rather than simply a result of the biological differences between men and women*' (Browne, 2011, p.19). Culture has been described as '*the collective programming of the mind*' and it is from within Traveller culture that gender identities are built for young Travellers (Hofstede, 2001).

It has been found that there is '*more communication within cultures than between them*' (Guirdham, 2005). In Traveller culture, the majority of socialisation occurs within the community. Socialisation is the process whereby other influencers help to shape how you see and define yourself and the world. This is true and applies to Traveller men, and the importance of culture in that process should not be underestimated

*....If you look at any culture, cultures tells us how to be a man and how to be a woman and what is expected of us in the culture. So we are born into that. (Thomas McCann 30th Jan 2015)*

Tightly controlled gender boundaries are in existence in Traveller society. These are not transgressed easily. Therefore a major part of socialisation takes place within groups of the



same gender. Both the extended family and the father figure will have a significant influence on the development of the gender role for Traveller boys.

McDonagh highlights how Traveller culture shapes Traveller perceptions and understandings of the world,

*The very way we think about things is different from settled peoples view of the world.....again don't look upon us with romantic eyes as some exotic people. No, see us as a people that are different because of our culture*

*(McDonagh, M., 1993, p.18-19).*

So we see that socialisation is different for Travellers in that it works along tightly controlled and observed gender boundaries and at the same time - 'culture tells us how to be a man' (Thomas McCann 30th Jan 2015). What it is to be a Traveller man is a complicated and multi-layer identity which is made up of varying influences.

*There is a growing recognition that there are multiple masculinities and femininities that change over time, and that these interact with other identities including social class, age, ethnicity, religion and sexuality (Lynch & Feeley, 2009, p.57).*

### **3.1.3 Education outcomes do not match expectations**

Traveller males leave education because they do not see the system being relevant to their needs. Born into the culture, and socialised in groups of the same gender, the significance of the cultural figure of the father cannot be underestimated. The dynamic development of the gender role for Traveller men is made up of various influences. But when you ask Traveller men directly what they see **their role as being** you invariably get the same answer in chorus, about being the provider for the family.

When asked directly what is **expected from them** as a Traveller man, the answer was consistently to be a provider for your family.

*Provide for my family. The way I look at it is, I think it is for most Traveller men, the only life that your family have is the life that you give them and the only way of giving them a life is just going out and getting a job and earning money and that is just the way most of us are reared up (Pavee Point, 26th Feb. 2015).*

Gender roles are being passed on to Traveller boys by their fathers. There are differing and conflicting messages aimed at young Traveller boys.

*Traveller lads moved up,...13,14,15, but none of them is at school, they don't want to go to school, they don't believe in school.....These lads have dogs, they are trying to rear dogs, selling and buying them.....these lads going out to the industrial estates looking for scrap and they are all 14 and 15. It is how you are reared up I think.*

*[Pavee Point, 26th Jan. 2015]*

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Indeed it is how you are ‘reared up’ that determines how you will be socialised into the role of Traveller man. Other Travellers argued that education should open up new work opportunities.

*...why did they drop out in the first place? Because they didn't want to sit in front of a book and pencil. It is going back to what do you want to do? ....Travellers want to be mechanics, they want to electrician or apprenticeship. I think them opportunities should be there for young Travellers. [Pavee Point, 26th Jan. 2015]*

This is how Traveller men are ‘reared up’. This young Traveller man was also kept out of school regularly

*... some days he needed an extra hand.....just throw some rubbish into the back of the pick-up, that would be it, he would say, ‘you are not going to school today, I need you to do...’ That might happen once a week. (Pavee Point, 26th Feb. 2015).*

Education appears to have been a battleground with its importance being contested between the genders. Rather than it being seen as a route to allow males provide for their family, some men viewed it as an obstacle to this.

*I remember my father arguing with my mother like that.....He wanted my brother to go to the dump to carry back scrap with him because he was doing it on his own and I remember my father arguing, he had no value on education. He thought how am I going to make a few pounds? I am going to make it at the dump. I can't go alone, I need you to go with me (TVG, Cork, 18th Feb. 2015).*

The seeking of work is not unique to Travellers but the pressures to fulfil the economic role appear quickly on the horizon for young Traveller boys. Amongst certain Traveller families there is an expectation that young Traveller men are able to do some work and help support the family in that way.

*....some of the thinking might be different for some families, thinking the young fellows go out and do a bit of work or whatever and there isn't the same, I don't suppose need, but there isn't the same wish or whatever for them to stay on in education.*

(Maria Joyce, NTWF, 27th Jan. 2015)

Being pushed into the role of provider for the family at an earlier stage than the majority population can lead to them disengaging from education

*..A young fellow of 17 or 18 and getting married and is inside in the school, sure the first thing they come back and say ‘I'm not going to any school, they think I am a playboy.. .’ So they just pull out, they don't want education that is the way it is going.*

(TVG, Cork, 18th Feb. 2015)

There is recognition that ability to provide for the family through traditional work models for Travellers is gone.

*...90% of the way of our fathers, the way they do things is gone (Pavee Point, Dublin, 26th Feb. 2015).*

This has led to some attitudinal changes with Traveller fathers. Patrick's father works in landscaping but he still insisted that Patrick stayed on in school despite the boy wanting to leave.

*I wanted to leave in 3rd year but my father kept busting my ass so I stayed there until 6th year and did my leaving cert.....I am glad I did it, yes. At least I have some sort of an option like CE scheme or whatever. (Pavee Point, Dublin, 26th Feb. 2015)*

Traveller's work practices are changing, but their identity as Travellers has remained constant. An increasing number of laws directly impact and constrain traditional Traveller life and work practices, such as those on Criminal Trespass (Section 19A The Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act, 1994), Control of Horses (Control of Horses Act, 1996) and trading (Casual Trading Act, 1995). This has led to a sense, among Traveller men that '*they are taking all the Traveller's living off them*' (Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015). There is also a sense of excessive supervision and control with comments such as '*you need permits for everything*' and this is preventing people from doing what they did in the past (Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015) (Pavee Point, 26th Feb. 2015).

The question 'Who am I as a Traveller man?' in a challenging environment where you see the old ways of 'providing for your family' being eroded, attacked, controlled and regulated, will still remain.

*Who am I as a Traveller? That kind of .....And that has been eroded over the last 40 to 50 years or more, it has actively been eroded.....It is around identity, because cultural practices, every generation changes. ....it is around recognition of identity.*

[Thomas McCann 30th Jan 2015]

Tinsmithing has been used as a way to re-engage Traveller men initially in community education and it provides recognition of this Traveller tradition within the curriculum.

*It is something you would love to teach because it is who you are?...my children to show them, when they hear Travellers the think of tinsmiths, How do you do it? I wouldn't have a clue. (Pavee Point, 26th Jan. 2015)*

Tinsmithing is a source of pride as it is strongly linked with the Traveller identity. But all the Traveller men that I spoke to wanted employment and a wage. The recognition is that the disappearance of past trades has led to a greater emphasis being placed on education by Traveller fathers who would've kept boys from school in the past

Education is impacting into the role for Traveller men as it is being seen as a possible path towards creating some opportunities for employment. But it has to deliver for Traveller's and on the evidence of this research it is not leading to employment.

Here is a young Traveller man speaking of his experience of applying for a job in a supermarket after completing his leaving certificate,

*So I went up anyway, dropped in my CV, rang me, come up for an interview, telling me they'd give me a call back and nothing. That was about three weeks ago. Nobody rings back.*

(Pavee Point, Dublin, 26th Feb. 2015)

In a society which discriminates against Travellers, it is imperative that a pathway to support the progression of young Traveller men through education and into employment is developed.

### **3.2 What are the barriers preventing Traveller men from engaging in adult education?**

Community education is 'a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and collective level' (DOES, 2000, p. 110). Community education if practised according to the problem-posing education model has immense potential for Travellers. The process of empowerment at a collective level starts with an analysis of where you fit into the present world, and then you can set about changing that.

*In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.....it is also true that the form of action they adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world.*

(Friere, P, 1996, p.64)

Apart from the legacy of negative early school experiences, the common themes which prevent Traveller men engaging in adult education include

1. Gender role
2. Lack of safe space
3. The need for education to be based within the learner's community and be appropriate to the learners needs

#### **3.2.1 Gender role**

Gender roles along with the prior experience within mainstream education have an influence over the decision by Traveller men to re-engage in community education.

With an awareness of the clearly defined and observed gender boundary in operation in Traveller culture, let us return to the *Teach Report*, and examine a comment made by a woman working in a Traveller Training Centre. She stated '*they (Traveller Men) wouldn't come in during the day, because they didn't want to be 'mollies' and come in with the women'* (Hourigan, & Campbell, 2010 p.42).

The literature on gender in lifelong learning in Ireland, assisted in shaping and defining areas of differing experiences and attitudes between men and women when they choose to re-engage with learning (Carragher, L, 2013) (King, P., O'Driscoll, S., Holden, S., 2002) (Owens, T, (2000). Kimmel notes that '*masculinity is a public enactment, demonstrated and proved in the public domain before the evaluative eyes of other men*' (Kimmel, 1996, p.45 cited by Owens, 2000). Indeed Owens found that public perception and peer pressure is an issue of some importance to men who are returning to education.

The education space is frequently referred to by Traveller men as not a place for them....

*Education is something that women are better at, like my sister was better at the sums and the maths and the reading or whatever, it wasn't me.*

(Pavee Point, Dublin, 26th Feb. 2015)

### **3.2.2 Lack of culturally appropriate space**

In 'Gender and Learning' creating the right space and environment is crucial to success and it is stated in terms of how to create greater access, along with working in spaces where people feel comfortable and familiar (King, P., O'Driscoll, S., Holden, S., 2002, p.115). There is an importance around issues of control and people being the agents of their own change, feeling like they are driving the project.

For a person to engage in education, they must feel safe within the learning environment. Maria Joyce emphasised the importance of the community education space in terms of the advances that have been made for Traveller women through healthcare and education which took place after women came together collectively to address their concerns.

*I think first and foremost those spaces allowed for a safe space for Traveller women to come together to be able to talk about , name the kinds of issues that were affecting them.....It allowed for the analysis, for women to develop their own analysis.*

(Maria Joyce, NTWF, 27th Jan. 2015)

The success stories with Traveller women in the Primary Health Care projects came through community education projects which respected the gender boundaries which are in place in the Traveller community (Peelo, D., O'Connor, A, O'Toole, G., 2008).

*....if we are out on the site and we are having a social situation or there was a discussion going on you would see them gender boundaries very clearly, So this has been part of Traveller culture for a very long time. And if the women were having a chat you wouldn't have a lot of the time, men coming into it.*

(Thomas McCann 30th Jan 2015)

The cultural deficit in existence is illustrated in the lack of understanding that sharing the space might prove an issue for Traveller men. Even during the course of setting up this research one Traveller men's group did not take place due to the venue being a shared space, and therefore perceived was the '*women's space*'.

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Before the start of one focus group we were all sharing some jokes in the canteen. A Traveller man described how different spaces operated. In the men's space there was more likely to be joking, which would not occur when women were present.

*There is respect as well, showing a bit of respect as well.....we wouldn't tell them jokes in front of the women. ... That is just the way within the Travelling community.*

(Pavee Point, 26th Jan. 2015)

A sense of ease and comfort was observed in both focus groups indicative of the socialisation taking place within the observed gender boundaries. The groups also worked together collectively and this is culturally appropriate for Travellers. According to McCann,

*I think we have more of a collective focus.....Whereas if you are talking about community it is much more connected into what the rest of the community is part of the culture of the community.* (Thomas McCann 30th Jan 2015)

When asked if the group would operate if women were present one was informed that

*It wouldn't because the women would laugh at you or you would laugh at the women.....You wouldn't feel comfortable.* (Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015)

The coming together of men and women to work on things together or to socialise in groups is not part of the way of life, the habitus of Traveller culture. Courses and community education spaces need to be designed with this boundary in mind, in order to attain an optimum learning environment that enables the learner to feel comfortable.

A sense of shame is experienced when these gender boundaries are broken. As Thomas McCann explains

*..it is taboos within the community regardless of whatever happened in the past there are taboos, and in every culture you will have taboos, talking about certain things, engaging in certain ways. And I think that throws up shame.*

(Thomas McCann 30th Jan 2015)

Creating a comfortable learning environment, free from fear and shame is essential to securing the engagement of Traveller men in community education. This working together at a collective level, whilst reflecting the gender boundaries that exist within Traveller culture is important and it will yield results. In '*Gender and Learning*' creating the right space and environment is crucial to success and it is stated in terms of how to create greater access, along with working in spaces where people feel comfortable and familiar (King, P., O'Driscoll, S., Holden, S., 2002, p.115).

According to one member of the focus group in Cork, having this educational space has given the men a focus and they now have '*Something to aim for*' (Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015). They have undergone the same change that Maria Joyce spoke of, that is, naming issues that affect them directly and developing an analysis. You can hear the development of an analysis in statements like this from one of the Cork Traveller men.

*Group work, coming together like, they are trying to fight now to see what we can get, what is better out there for you. (Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015)*

Designing a process which allows Traveller men to re-engage in this community education space is crucial. Respect for the culture is key in the creation of this safe space, but it also the starting point in terms of making community education learner driven and has to be led by Travellers.

In the focus groups one could witness the difference that having this respectful learner centered approach was making in their lives. It was obvious that the Traveller men were being listened to and empowered.

One interviewee argued that educational programs ... *should be Traveller led because a settled person wouldn't have a clue. Fair enough, they read a book but how would they know that is true?*[Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015]. This illustrates the need for the space being one that is respectful of Traveller identity and differs immensely from the mainstream school experience

The inclusive and respectful atmosphere of the community education space is reflected in international literature which examined models which work for those re-engaging marginalised young people back into education, where the relationship with the learner is one of '*caring, small, community, family, respectful equal, supportive, non-judgmental, mutual responsibility*' (McGregor & Mills, 2011, p. 857).

The focus group participants emphasised the importance of the space for learning being specifically a Traveller space, and a place where they feel that they were going to be respected and where Travellers are central to the learning. As one Traveller said '*It is important because you are listened to*' and in this way you need to create the opposite experience to that which many Travellers experience in mainstream education [Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015].

### **3.2.3 Community education needs to be based within the learners community and be appropriate to learners needs**

Community Education 'is about bringing learning to people in their *local* areas as a response to the area's needs' (AONTAS, 2010, p. 10, emphasis the researchers). This is not the model of practice in evidence for Travellers. For some reason, community education when it does happen for Traveller men, is not based in the community. Both focus groups were not based in the community. But there are buildings that exist in the community which have been lying idle since they were closed in 2012.

*There is a training centre there on the site, but it was closed down because of funding, but the building is still there and it is a top of the range building. There is a woodwork room there, there is a computer room, a big kitchen in it, offices, whatever now that is closed down and nobody is using it and yet nobody owns it and we can't get it. This is perfect in the site. (Pavee Point, 26th Jan. 2015)*

On the basis of the principles which have been drawn up by the Department of Education in order to apply for funding, the education for Traveller men is in contravention of at least

### Section 3 – Findings

three of the principles around it being, accessible, and local area based (KWETB, 2015).

*...it is not in the community. We are in somebody else's comfort zone but we are not in the Traveller comfort zone all the time...we have just come to accept that as the norm, that we do it outside of the community. [Thomas McCann 30th Jan 2015]*

In Australia, a study showed that a degree of 'sensitivity' to the backgrounds of the learners has been proven to be very important factor for success in teaching practices with sizable ethnic minorities (Murray & Mitchell, 2015, p.17). The role of active listening to the concerns and needs of the Traveller men has to begin with a conversation in the community. Often the actual design of the community education program, which is aimed at Travellers is done without any consultation with the community and is based on assumptions. For instance this young Traveller had this to say in relation to common program which gets trotted out '*Interest in horses, my age, there is no interest in horses*' [Pavee Point, 26th Jan. 2015]

There was also a feeling of frustration as Traveller men see the social problems daily that are rife within the community, including suicide, yet, they witness a lack of adult education programs or opportunities or attempts to address these problems in any meaningful way.

According to Thomas Mc Cann, '*You talk to the men, they'll say very few people have come to me and talked to me*' (Thomas McCann, 30th Jan. 2015). The process of re-engagement with Traveller men has to begin with a conversation to find out what are the men's needs and what they wish to see emerging from the re-engagement with education

*So it is drawing them in on the right thing that they want to do and then measuring around them. But as you say if it is mainstream and it is Swords and we live in Finglas, how in the name of God? It is not going to work.*

[Pavee Point, 26th Jan. 2015]

Community education is a powerful force for change, but that is one that is based on principles such as being learner centred, accessible and focused on the needs of the community. That model does not appear to exist for Traveller men. There is a need for community education amongst Traveller men but it must incorporate time to establish a safe comfortable space for the learner where they explore and discover what their needs actually are, and then to build from there.



## Section 4

### What can be done to ensure that education initiatives work for Traveller men?

Traveller men's attitudes towards education are changing but all experience begins with their initial one of education within the mainstream system. Initial research into this area demonstrated, and this research corroborates it, that the gender role that exists for Traveller men continues to exert a strong influence over the attitudes towards education. Due to the large degree of socialisation which takes place within cultures, often Traveller children's first real experience of integration with the majority population takes place in school. It is apparent that within the education system, there is a lack of structures, policies and training to ensure that children are not stereotyped, stigmatised or treated differently. This research has pointed to several issues which can be addressed and which are matters of concern coming from the male Traveller experience of education, both mainstream and community. Once that experience has taken place, in order to bring Traveller men back into adult learning, there have to be measures taken to reverse the negative experience. Rather than blaming Traveller men, steps need to be taken to adjust the adult learning and community education setting so that a space is created where you can discover and focus on the needs of the learner.

#### **4.1 Ethnic Recognition - Valuing difference**

Within the mainstream education system there has always been from the parents 'an expectation that you were going there to learn something' (Thomas McCann, 30th Jan. 2015). A 'cultural deficit' operates within the mainstream system in which Traveller boys are treated differently and are being judged on the basis of their Traveller identity (Lynch & O' Riordan, 1998). Often the views expressed display a lack of understanding of Traveller ethnicity or culture and lead to a lack of service delivery. This experience results in the alienation of young Traveller men, some of whom hide their identity in order to continue in an education system in which they feel isolated in.

Where there has been re-engagement in adult education, a respect for Traveller culture and recognition of Travellers being an ethnic group has proven an important factor to the men. By the State recognising Travellers as an ethnic group, and ending the long standing untenable position of denying it, it would send a clear message to Irish society to not only accept difference but also to value such difference. It should also encourage the development of culturally appropriate materials for learning and promote knowledge of Travellers, the only indigenous ethnic minority on this island of Ireland. Ethnic recognition

is not a panacea, but it would be an important first step for the Irish state to take. By not recognising Travellers as an ethnic group, Ireland will continue to ascribe a ‘cultural deficit’ to Travellers and outcomes will continue to be poorer in comparison to the general population.

## **4.2 Recognition of the negative experience of the education system**

There has to be recognition that the overall experience reported here from Traveller men is a negative one when it comes to school. The focus groups recalled collective punishments that were used as means to discipline the Traveller group for the indiscretions of one Traveller child. When the Traveller group, brothers, sisters and cousins would arrive to school they were immediately sent to be washed. ‘...over been Travellers you were just outsiders’ Hughie (Sreenan, 2014).

One man related the story of not being allowed to go to the toilet in junior infants, so that he ended up wetting himself in front of the entire class. The word torture was used to describe the treatment of one particular teacher. As John, one Traveller man said ‘*we were only ever managed. We were never taught really*’ (Sreenan, 2014, p20). The negative experience for Traveller men in formal education leaves a legacy that is recognised by Community educators, and directs their work in dealing with the implications.

Assurances and an understanding has to be reached with the Traveller concerned that there is a difference between their old experience of ‘education’ and the learning that takes place in Community Education. A relationship must be formed that includes ‘caring, small, community, family, respectful equal, supportive, non-judgmental, mutual responsibility’ (McGregor & Mills, 2011, p. 857). This element of best practice has to be incorporated into programs in order to start as you mean to continue in developing a comfortable safe space.

## **4.3 Provision of culturally appropriate space**

A significant finding from this research is that many of the models for the re-engagement of Traveller men in lifelong learning are culturally inappropriate. Again we see the ‘cultural deficit’ being displayed, particularly around the issue of sharing space. One of the key findings is that the tightly observed gender boundaries which exist for Travellers are not easily transgressed. The implication for adult educators is that we need to develop educational spaces that are appropriate to the needs of the Traveller men, and in which they feel comfortable, respected, and valued as the agents of their own change.

The two focus groups took place within organisations which have long been associated with Traveller rights. However despite this, the educational models that are being practiced differ greatly from the community education principles which are supposed to apply. The adult learning opportunities occur both outside the community and outside the comfort zone for most of the Traveller men, to such an extent that you could reasonably ask if these programmes should be defined as community education.

However, the men interviewed were linked in with Traveller rights groups which tied in with the definition of community education.

*Community Education is education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community*

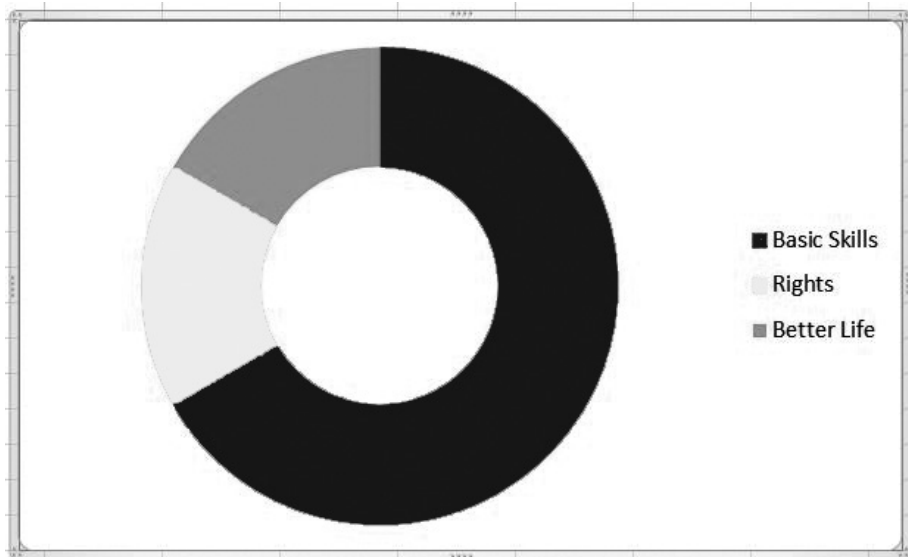
(AONTAS, 2000 cited in 2004).

Developing a space, where you can begin to address the needs of the learner, takes time. A space needs to be developed where Traveller men know they are ‘going to be listened to’ [Cork, TVG, 18th Feb. 2015]. Once there, the men quickly see that ‘this was about self-development, the individual and the community’ (Sreenan, 2014, p.26). It is only by listening to the needs of the learner that we can we begin the journey of Community Education. Knowing this space is one where you are going to be respected and listened to is key.

#### **4.4 Learners needs must be central**

There is a definite recognition of the importance of education for young Traveller men. There appears to be universal unity around the view that being ‘the provider for my family’ is a key role for male Travellers. In the past, Travellers did not see education as having anything to do with that role. This is definitely changing. The main motivation around re-engaging with education, according the TVG Focus group, is to improve skills, share experiences, become empowered to fight for rights, and to have a better life.

**Motivation Chart – TVG Focus Group**



The ‘cultural deficit’ being displayed by programs about horses, set up without any consultation directly with the Traveller men needs to end. We have already seen fathers

#### *Section 4 – What can be done to ensure that education initiatives work for Traveller men?*

exert a strong influence on their son's education. Once education is seen as relevant to the prescribed gender role, Traveller sons are encouraged to stay on in school.

One interviewee quoted his Traveller father, who had encouraged him to stay on in mainstream education, saying '*I had nothing, so you do it.*' (Pavee Point 26th Feb. 2014). What is shown in that quote is the changing masculinity over time. The father had dropped out of school, but now realises that it limited his chances, and now he wants to encourage his son to remain in education.

In this research 30% of the Traveller men had attained their Leaving Certificate. This was mainly due to parental encouragement, and many of the young men reported that it was their father's wish that they stay in school. There is also recognition that much of the old working practices for Travellers are disappearing or gone. The ability to pass on livelihoods or bring sons into businesses is gone. Therefore the way that education fits into the defined gender role of men providing for the family is an important finding which should be explored further.

There is a need to challenge discrimination, but there is also an opportunity to demonstrate that adult education can lead to employment. If community education can offer a path to employment, then there will be major demand for places because it will fit perfectly into the gender role of being the provider.

#### **4.5 Develop a National Strategy specific to Traveller men and Education**

Engaging in a mainstream education system which has not placed a value on your ethnic identity, which has no examples of your culture within the curriculum; which does not have mandatory diversity training for teachers and which has cultural deficit in operation is a difficult fit for young Traveller man.

*The evidence is, on balance, persuasive. Adult learning influences people's income and employability, as well as the attitudes and behaviours that affect people's mental well-being. ....adult learning does indeed change lives. More accurately, it offers people resources that they can use to make changes in their own lives*

*(Field, J, 2011, p21-22).*

The Traveller men that I spoke to during the course of two years of research are no different from other adult learners. They want to have a better life; those that have re-engaged with lifelong learning can see the benefits that come from it, but major barriers remain and opportunities appear limited. The argument about the importance of education has been largely won and you have father's encouraging their sons to stay on in education, to get the Leaving Certificate. But after that point, it still remains difficult to point to the success stories. We have Travellers, 1% of them going on to third level, but even still there is a lack of good news stories in terms of outcomes for Travellers in education. Instead, we hear of Travellers applying for jobs and not getting interviewed. We hear of Travellers getting work, and then losing work after it is found out that they are Travellers. We hear of the struggle of Traveller parents to make the arguments to their sons to complete their education, when they have seen their older brother get his Leaving Certificate, only for him to find work through a community employment scheme.

Community education is a powerful force for change, based on the principles of being learner centred, accessible and focused on the needs of the community. From this research, that model does not appear to exist for Traveller men. Further education or 'second chance education' does not appear to be delivering any opportunities to fulfil their ambitions (AONTAS, 2014). A focused strategy needs to be developed in conjunction with Traveller men. In addition a national network of community education groups focused on the needs of Traveller men needs to be developed. This is essential if we are to produce outcomes with regards to training, employment and the progression back into third level if desired by the learner.

## Section 5

### Conclusion and Recommendations

We have reached a moment in time where it appears that the Irish State is faced with a major decision in terms of recognising Travellers as an ethnic group. Within that group there are the Traveller men. There is practically no infrastructure for engagement with Traveller men and yet the scale of the suicide crisis amongst Traveller men is known. The time for investment is long overdue. True Community Education is uniquely positioned to offer a chance for Traveller men to fulfill their aspirations. This small group of the Irish population has been failed and continues to be failed by the education system. It is time to work with Traveller men to design, build and implement a culturally appropriate structure to allow Traveller men to engage in education.

*What is done without us is against us . . . African proverb*

The structure should focus on delivering outcomes which match expectation in terms of employment and advancement. In 2016, it is time to start valuing Travellers as an indigenous ethnic group. It is time to invest. It is time to restore hope. It is time to give Traveller men the opportunity to have visions and dreams of a better life within Irish society.

#### **Recommendations**

In examining why Traveller men do not engage in education, this report sets forward the following recommendations on how barriers to education can be overcome.

1. Ethnic recognition – The Irish State should follow the UK in recognising Irish Travellers as a distinct ethnic group.
2. Government bodies should work with the Traveller community to develop a national strategy to address the lack of engagement of male Travellers in education. In developing the strategy, the negative legacy of education policies and practices in Ireland must be acknowledged and addressed.
3. To ensure that an inclusive and culturally respectful education system is available to all, it is imperative that the education sector meets the needs of all, most especially Travellers and other ethnic minorities. Therefore
  - (a) Mandatory diversity awareness training must exist for all educators
  - (b) Investment must be made in culturally appropriate learning environments

- (c) Culturally appropriate learning materials must be developed for all sectors of the education system
4. Traveller organisations should be resourced to develop a national network committed to supporting Traveller men in engaging in culturally appropriate education initiatives. Central to this should be the learner's needs. This includes –
- (a) Acknowledging gender roles and the need for men to engage in relevant learning in an appropriate and safe space.
  - (b) Creating opportunities for Traveller men “to provide for their families” through employment.

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