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**A report by the LONDON GYPSY AND TRAVELLER UNIT commissioned by  
Waltham Forest Children's Fund Partnership Board**


**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN FROM  
TRAVELLER AND GYPSY COMMUNITIES IN WALTHAM  
FOREST**

Thanks to everyone who participated in this project

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## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The purpose of this report is to examine the needs of children aged 5-13 years from the Gypsy and Traveller communities who currently live Waltham Forest. The report will enable the Children's Fund Partnership to make informed decisions as to appropriate use of resources identified for these communities.

## INTRODUCTION

There are three distinct communities of Gypsies and Travellers in Waltham Forest. These are the English Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma Refugees and asylum seekers. Each group will be considered separately in this report and the following five main areas of need will be explored: education; health; access to

services; accommodation and relationships with the local community.

## AIMS OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- To consult with the various Gypsy and Traveller communities to identify the needs of their children 5-13 years.
- To consult with known agencies working with the Gypsy and Traveller Communities.
- To identify other agencies who may have contact with Gypsy and Traveller Communities.
- To identify agencies who could potentially offer support in the future.
- To seek out models of good practice of work with Gypsy and Traveller communities in other boroughs.
- To promote the Waltham Forest Children's Fund on-going programme and encourage Gypsy and Traveller participation.
- To identify social activities and leisure activities which may be made more accessible to Gypsy and Traveller communities
- To identify Gypsy and Traveller community access to Health Services such

## 1. KEY CONTACTS

as registration with GP's Record of immunisation etc

- To identify any interaction the Gypsy and Traveller communities may have with the wider community.

## METHODOLOGY

### • Agencies

The first task was to identify any professionals or agencies that have contact with the communities either currently or in the past. Appointments for an informal

interview were arranged. These initial contacts provided other useful individuals or agencies, which were subsequently followed up.

## • Traveller and Gypsy Communities

The most effective way of meeting with the Gypsy and Traveller communities was through individuals who have on-going contact with the families. Peter Norton, Advisory Teacher from the Traveller Education Service was the main contact. As a trusted and effective worker with the communities, Peter Norton assisted easy access and communication with the families.

The Interpreter/Outreach worker, Christina Kalinina, facilitated the interviews with Roma families. Without the support of Peter and Christina it would have been difficult in the timescale of the report, to have any meaningful dialogue with the

## 2. GATHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

communities.

Background information was sought from professional workers and agencies, Government and voluntary sector reports and Internet research.

Information was found on the following areas:

- The history of the different Gypsy and Traveller communities.
- Relevant Government legislation and statistics.
- Details of known families from the TES i.e. Names and Addresses, numbers and ages of children.
- Details from TES data on numbers of children in school, attendance, attainment, and turnover of children in the borough.

## 3. INFORMAL INTERVIEWS

- Key contacts within the different communities

In order to address the aims and objectives of both the Children's Fund and the Needs Assessment as outlined earlier, the following broad headings were used as a basis for all the interviews

- The purpose of the Needs Assessment
- Education
- Accommodation
- Health
- Access to Services/contact with agencies
- Relationship with Local Community
- Recommendations for extra resources

The actual questions and/or emphasis were modified for each interview. (See Appendix 2 for examples of Interview Questions)

### **3a. RESPONSE TO INTERVIEWS**

- **Agencies**

There was a very positive response from all the agencies contacted. They all recognised that the needs of Gypsy and Traveller children ought to be high priority. Agencies with a high level of contact with families were particularly informative as they gave a more detailed overview of the needs of the different communities.

- **Communities**

Families were generally open to answering questions. Some were very quick to understand the purpose of the interviews and offered much clarity in their response. For others, particularly the interviews with the Roma families, there were a number of constraints many of which are outlined below.

### **3b. CONSTRAINTS**

- There are very few agencies that have established on-going relationships and a good level of trust with Gypsy and Traveller families.
- An initial introduction to a family with a person they know and trust was crucial. This meant imposing on the valuable time and scarce resources of others.
- The timing of the Needs Assessment made access to the community more difficult. This meant reliance on Peter Norton (TES) during July – September, which covers the two busiest periods for the TES (end of term and beginning of term), and also the school 6 week holidays. There was also an OFSTED in September. The timing also made access to some families more difficult as many go Travelling during the summer months. This was particularly true on Folly Lane Site.
- It was essential to visit Roma families with an interpreter who they already know. Interviews were conducted jointly with Christina Kalinina, who interprets for the TES, but unfortunately her time was limited.
- Meeting families without having any previous relationship or on-going involvement meant that they were initially less forthcoming in the interview. It was difficult for some families to understand the purpose of the visit when there was nothing tangible on offer.
- At times it was intrusive particularly when visiting Roma families living in difficult circumstances.

DESCRIPTION OF THE GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES  
ENGLISH ROMANY GYPSIES

There are 16 families living on the Folly Lane Caravan Site. These families belong to the community of Romany Gypsies, of which there are an estimated 63,000 living in Britain. (1) They have a long history and strong sense of their own culture, traditions and identity. The families have been living on a site in this area of Waltham Forest for more than 50 years. They were originally living on a caravan site nearby which was built during the 1960's. This site was deemed unsafe and the families were relocated on the existing site 7 years ago. The site is located in an isolated and inaccessible place, just off the North Circular Road. The nearest shops, schools and public transport are 15 minutes walk through an unlit lane. The families were not consulted on either the location or design of the new site when it was built.

There are currently three extended families living on the site. These families tend to be quite static. They have a number of relatives living locally in houses. The Traveller Education Service (TES) is in contact with 20 children from housed Gypsy families and 13 children living on Folly Lane Site. It is most likely that there are a large number of Gypsy families in housing who the Traveller Education Team is unaware of. Many families will hide their Gypsy identity due to the prejudice they commonly experience. The TES data (See appendix 1) show a turnover of Gypsy families of 18% in 2000-2001 and 15% in 2001-2002. In comparison with Irish Travellers and Roma, the English Gypsy community are the least mobile of all the Traveller communities in Waltham Forest.

*Traditional  
Gypsy wagons*



## IRISH TRAVELLERS

Irish Travellers are an ethnic group indigenous to Ireland. They have their own cultural heritage and have traditionally travelled throughout Britain. They are distinctly different from the English Romanies, and although there has been some inter-marriage, the two communities see themselves as distinct from one another. It is estimated that there are now approximately 19,000 Irish Travellers living in Britain (2), although their connection with Ireland remains strong and many families regularly travel too and from Ireland.

The Traveller Education Service is currently in contact with nine Irish Traveller families in housing and three families on a licensed site. This includes a total of 43 children, but as with the English Gypsies it is most likely that there are other families housed in the borough unknown to the Traveller Education Service. Families living in caravans who move into the borough are generally evicted very quickly, so the majority of Irish Travellers are housed, but still remain very mobile. The TES data shows a 90% turnover in 2001-2002 and 83% turnover in 2000-2001. Therefore this is by far the most mobile group of families.

## ROMA REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Roma Gypsies form a group of approximately 8-10 million people in Europe (3). During the early to mid 90's Roma families began arriving in Britain as refugees from many different Eastern European countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and former Soviet Republics. Most have fled from situations of persecution and discrimination in their own countries. According to the Council of Europe,

***“The Roma have been in Europe since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, very often they are not recognised by the majority society as fully-fledged European people and they have suffered throughout their history from rejection and persecution, culminating in the Nazi's attempt to exterminate them. As a result of centuries of rejection many Roma/Gypsy communities today live in very difficult conditions, often on the fringe of society, and the participation in public life is very limited’ (3)***

The Traveller Education Service is in contact with 92 Roma children from 50 families who live in the borough, the majority of whom are asylum seekers. Many have been moved to Waltham Forest from other boroughs due to cheaper rents. According to the Roma Support group there has been a recent dispersal policy by which many Roma families have been moved from boroughs such as Hammersmith and Fulham and Camden. The largest numbers of Roma families were found in these boroughs.

Most Roma families are in temporary accommodation with very short-term lets and so they are frequently moved at very short notice. The TES data shows that for Roma children there was a turnover of 52% in 2000-2001 and 45% in 2001-2002. One of the main differences between the Roma and the other Traveller and Gypsy communities is that of language. Most families have arrived in Britain unable to speak English. Language and access to interpreters is the main issue that impacts both on the families and any professionals who have contact with them.

## FINDINGS

### Folly Lane Site

#### 1. ENGLISH ROMANY GYPSIES

- **Poor attainment and non-attendance at Secondary School**

#### 1.1 EDUCATION

There is a history of very poor attainment by children from Folly Lane Site, despite reasonably good attendance in primary school. Few children have attended at secondary level. The Education Welfare Service do not have a good relationship with the families on the site, and generally will not follow up children who are not attending school. Traveller and Gypsy families in Waltham Forest are rarely prosecuted for non-school attendance.

- **Traveller Education Service**

The input from the TES over the last two years has been significant. When the service began in September '99, work in Roger Ascham School, where most children from the site attend, was given priority. Aspects of Gypsy culture and traditions were explored with the children. The impact on the Gypsy children was noticeable. According to the advisory teachers, the children began to talk about their culture and lifestyle. They felt more included in the life of the school, and consequently the attendance improved. The children were recently involved in two innovative arts projects organised by the 'Arts in Education Network' in conjunction with the Traveller Education Service. This work is described later in the report under 'models of good practise'.

*For many it's thumbs up for school*



## • **Communication between the school and home**

Homework becomes a difficult issue for parents who are illiterate. Often parents feel inadequate when trying to assist their children with reading and homework. They also find it very hard to gauge their children's progress. It is more difficult for illiterate parents to keep in touch with what is going on in the school, or what their children may need for the next day, as the usual form of communication from the school is by letter. Missing out on this information can impact on the children's sense of inclusion in the school activities.

### **CASE STUDY – JOSIE, FOLLY LANE SITE**

Josie's story is a stark example of how the education system has failed the Traveller and Gypsy Community. It is also a success story, showing children achieving well and integrated in school.

Josie has lived in this area all her life. As a child she regularly attended Roger Ascham Primary School. She and her sisters all left primary school unable to read and write. Josie has 13 children. The first 7 children, despite attending regularly all finished primary school illiterate.

***' I was sending them to school every day and they couldn't read and write, they couldn't even tell the time. I thought, well all seven children can't be stupid, there must be something else wrong, so I went up to the school and asked them why my children were not learning anything''***

The oldest three children transferred to secondary school, but experienced a great deal of bullying and racial harassment. Josie did not find the school supportive and they stopped attending. The next four children did not even transfer to secondary school, and the family was never approached by an EWO.

The youngest 6 children are all making much better progress in school than their older siblings. They are all learning to read and write and generally have a much better sense of inclusion in the life of the school. The children talked enthusiastically about school, and the recent assembly they took part in where they described the mosaic project they were involved in last term. They have made much stronger friendships with non-gypsy children than their older siblings. They are invited to birthday parties and have friends back to the site to play. Josie's 12 year old son has just transferred to secondary school.

***'The younger ones are now doing really well. Lilly is only six and she can read, we think she's brilliant!'***

Josie believes that the change in her children's achievement was due to the fact that:

1. **She challenged the school directly about her children's progress**
2. **There was a new Head of the school and a change in teaching staff.**
3. **The presence of the Traveller Education Service.**

In all case studies used the names have been changed for the purpose of this report.

## 1.2 ACCOMMODATION

### • Site Location

The site is located in an inaccessible and isolated place. The only access to public transport and local amenities is by an unlit walk -way. The children walk along this lane to get to school, and in the winter it is very dark. There has also been a major problem in recent years of very bad flooding in the lane, which has resulted in the site being cut off to those on foot. This has prevented children from getting to school. Chris East (TES) worked with the families in trying to get the flooding dealt with. Some drainage work has now been recently completed

### • Site Management

There are a number of site management issues on Folly Lane, and site residents find the council slow in their response. The biggest concern currently is rats. Families are having great difficulty getting anyone in the council to take responsibility for dealing fully with this problem.

The DETR grant for caravan sites was applied for last year for improvements to the amenity units, which were built with no heating in the bathrooms. The council were turned down for last years grant and it is unclear as to whether or not they will re-apply this year.

### • Discrimination

Site Residents continually suffer discrimination when using their address. For example they cannot get any taxis or deliveries of goods to the site.

## 1.3 HEALTH

### • GP's

Local GPs are not taking on new patients and therefore it is difficult for new families moving onto site to register with a GP. The relationship between the local surgeries and families are reasonably good, although it is common to have to wait ten days for an appointment. Families tend to use the hospital emergency service rather than wait for an appointment at the GP.

### • Immunisations

Several years ago the health visitors carried out a series of immunisations on site as a number of children were very delayed with their immunisation schedule. This is no longer necessary as families are now using their local clinic and keeping immunisations up to date.

#### **1.4 ACCESS TO SERVICES/RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY**

Gypsy families tend to mostly operate within their own community networks. The location of the site accentuates their isolation from the 'settled community'. Children on the site have never been involved in any summer programmes or after school activities in the local community. Some parents would be very keen to access these, particularly during school holidays, as there is very little for the children to do on the site. Children have been involved in some on-site craft activities during the school holidays, led by Paul and Angela winter from the London City Mission. Teenage boys do attend the local boxing club and the teenage girls will go to activities themselves such as the cinema or swimming.

There is a Muslim cemetery next to the site and there has been some friction between the two communities, but in general they tend to keep their distance from one another.

#### **1.5 EXTRA RESOURCES**

The community on Folly Lane stated their need for the following:

- 1 Transport to school. This is a particular need in the winter months when children have to walk to and from school along the unlit lane in the dark.
- 2 Additional staff in the TES. In particular more support with home – school communication.
- 3 A homework club on site. This would particularly support children with parents who are illiterate. It would also support and encourage parents in helping their children with homework. There is an unused warden's hut that could be ideal for this purpose.
- 4 Holiday/after-school play-provision on or off the site.

#### **HOUSED ENGLISH GYPSIES**

The Contact with the Gypsy community in houses was limited due to some of the constraints outlined earlier. The TES knows of 11 English Gypsy families in houses, but does not have a great deal of ongoing contact. Many families will choose to hide their identity rather than face the prejudice and discrimination experienced by the community. This is particularly true with regards to education. Many parents feel that their children will get on much better in school if they are not identified as Gypsies. For this reason also they may choose not to be known by the TES.

## 2.1 ACCESS TO SERVICES

### 2. ROMA REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

It is most useful to begin by looking at the Roma Community's access to services as this impacts all the other areas of need.

- **Mobility**

The majority of Roma families are asylum seekers and have been housed in Waltham Forest in mostly private rented accommodation on very short-term lets. This means that families are very mobile and will often be moved to another house at very short notice. This impacts enormously on health and education in particular. Professionals such as health visitors or teachers that have established contact with these families will often lose contact with them and this prevents any follow up. The senior Health Visitor in Waltham Forest stated that she believes there are large numbers of Roma families who completely outside the system and have extremely poor access to services.

- **Language/Access to interpreters**

The majority of adults in the Roma Community speak very little English and therefore need access to interpreters. This can be problematic as the Roma families have come from a number of eastern European countries and speak different languages. Even within the Romany language, families from different countries will speak different dialects. Professionals such as GP's or Health Visitors rarely have access to an interpreter who speaks Romany.

The TES are in a unique position as they have Christina Kalinina working with them once a week as an interpreter. Christina is herself Romany and speaks not only a range of different Romany dialects but also a number of other languages from Eastern Europe. Peter Norton (TES) described the difference in using Christina and another non-Romany speaking interpreter as 'chalk and cheese'. This is not only an issue of language but trust and also one of relationship.

*Outreach work families*



*with Roma*

- **Attitudes towards 'officials' and establishing trust in the Roma Community**

Roma families tend to have a level of suspicion and fear of 'officials'. Some professionals stated that they found the community difficult to work with, finding them suspicious, evasive and hard to keep contact with. Often working with Roma families required a great deal of staff time, with frequent unsuccessful home visits.

In contrast to this there are small number agencies that have established trust and on-going relationships with the community. This can be seen in the work of the TES, The Children's Society Roma advocacy worker, and the Roma Support Group. Families are using these agencies enormously to help them gain access to services. This will be explored later in the report when looking at models of good practice.

- **Accessing Information**

It appears that there are no agencies in Waltham Forest that provide support and information with access to interpreters. Frequently families are confused by the systems they are caught up in. These range from housing, benefits, asylum issues, health and education. Families will ask the TES for advice and information on these concerns as often they don't know where else to go for help. The Roma support group is clearly filling this gap in other boroughs, but currently they do not provide a service in Waltham Forest.

## 2.2 EDUCATION

- **Admissions**

The TES have been working with a significant number of children who have never been to school. Securing school places is the first step, and this can be difficult due to classes being full. This is an on-going problem as families are constantly moving and children can be out of school for long periods. According to Valdimar Kalinina (TES Hammersmith and Fulham) more resources are needed for the induction of Roma children into school, as this is crucial to their success. Agneshka Walsh from the Polish Roma Education Project in Newham, also stated that supporting parents and children with the initial stages of starting school is a high priority.

- **Attendance**

Roma children have the poorest attendance in comparison to other Gypsies and Travellers in the borough. The TES data (see appendix 3) shows an average attendance over the past three years of 71% in primary and 73% in secondary level. Many Roma families have had few positive experiences of education in the past, and therefore do not value education. Other priorities quickly take over. Children are often used as interpreters for medical or housing appointments. Many families are dealing with crisis over housing, benefits, or the threat of deportation. All these issues have a major impact on school attendance.

There are other cultural issues which effect attendance. Parents are very protective over girls once they reach about 12 years old. Often girls are not allowed to out unaccompanied, and can be engaged to be married at 13 or 14. Teenage marriages and teenage pregnancies are not uncommon. Some teenage girls have been referred to the Teenage Pregnancy Re-integration Service.

Roma families are sometimes reluctant to send their children to school at 5 years old as they consider it too young. Children will rarely attend nursery and many will not take up a school place until a child is 6 or 7.

- **Inclusion**

Bullying of Roma children in school is common. There are issues of prejudice and perceptions of the Roma amongst teachers and pupils. Frequently, parents may not understand letters home about various activities or events going on. This along with poor attendance prevents greater inclusion in the life of the school.

- **Access to GP's**

## 1.3 HEALTH

Roma families find it very difficult to register with a GP, as lists are frequently full. Many families have multiple health issues, which some GP's are reluctant to take on. GP's receptionists have been known to 'block' families that are considered 'undesirable'. Families will use A&E more frequently for primary care issues. This is due to either not being able to access a GP, or a lack of understanding of the system.

- **Immunisations and child development**

The mobility of Roma families prevents continuity of care and follow up when needed. Some families are familiar with the procedure of immunisations from their own country and do use local clinics. There are many children with delays in completing their immunisations. Health visitors have found that if they have the opportunity through an interpreter, to explain the benefit of child immunisations, parents will be willing to cooperate.

There is a need to work with families in exploring child-care practices. To promote the importance of developmental checks, language development, home safety, diet, and the importance of antenatal care.

- **Antenatal care and Maternity Services**

There are concerns from medical practitioners that there are many women from the Roma community who are receiving no anti-natal care. Each year there are a number of unplanned deliveries at Whipps Cross Hospital. A woman may arrive at the maternity ward to give birth, and there will be no previous record of any ante-natal care during her pregnancy. There are also some cases of home deliveries taking place without a Midwife or a Doctor present.

Hepatitis B is quite common within the Roma Community. The Hepatitis B audit group identify women who are carriers, and have given birth. The baby will then be immunised.

## **CASE STUDY -MARTINA**

Martina and her family arrived from Poland in December 1999 seeking asylum in the UK. She has three children aged 4,10 and 16. The family have been moved a number of times and this has had a major impact on their access to services particularly in the area of education and health care.

The Traveller Education Service made contact with Martina after receiving a referral from a health visitor, who had visited her eldest daughter Monika, who was a teenage mother. The TES worked jointly with the teenage pregnancy Reintegration Officer, and Monika is now attending an ESOL course at Waltham Forest College.

Martina's main concern is her second daughter Madalina who is 10. Madalina has never attended school in Poland or the UK. Her hearing is extremely poor and she has significant learning difficulties. Her vocabulary is limited to 3 or 4 words and her social skills are not well developed. At times she can be aggressive and very demanding. At other times she can appear withdrawn. Martina said that Madalina requires constant attention often until 2am, and she has little support from any extended family. Martina really wants Madalina to go to school to learn to communicate with others and to have a better quality of life.

The mobility of the family has prevented the professionals involved from making progress with accessing appropriate provision for Madalina. There were delays during a period when the TES actually lost contact with the family. In the last 5 months the family were moved three times.

The family have had great difficulties registering with a GP. Martina rarely has access to an interpreter. Peter and Christina (from the TES) have been her main source of support and information.

### **• Language /access to interpreters**

Access to interpreters for medical appointments is a big issue. Families may have to wait 2 weeks to see their GP with an interpreter. Often parents will use older children to interpret for them. In Newham the Polish Health Advocate will accompany Polish Roma families to medical appointments and assist them in registering with GP's and other health related issues.

## 1.4 RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY

Roma families tend to function within their own community, often with more than one family sharing a house. Due to the language barrier, high mobility and prejudice, families generally, have little relationship with the local community and

will remain isolated.

## 3. IRISH TRAVELLERS

### 3.1 ACCOMMODATION

#### • Housed Irish Travellers

The housed Irish Travellers in the borough are mostly in temporary housing. Generally the families are large and therefore they tend to be housed in the private rented sector, as large council properties are less available. Many families find it extremely difficult to live in houses, but feel they have no option. Pitches on permanent sites are in great demand, with long waiting lists and infrequent availability. These families feel they cannot face the hardship of living on unauthorised camps without any facilities and constant evictions. They often find it very difficult to settle in housing and may remain quite transient. They can feel isolated and disconnected from their community and traditional way of life, and this frequently impacts on their health. This is recognised by the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit in their report on Housed Travellers.

***‘Little consideration has been given to the social cost of Travellers moving into housing away from their traditional way of life and family support systems. It is clear though that since 1994, homelessness and the rootlessness that goes with it are a severe and escalating problem for Travellers’ (4)***

Other families will have chosen to live in housing rather than in caravans, but finding suitable accommodation is often a problem. Travellers find it particularly difficult if they are housed in high -rise blocks, or a long distance from their extended family.

#### • Wadham Road Caravan Site

One extended family lives on a recently licensed site on Wadham Road. The families had been living on unauthorised sites for many years. They bought the land themselves and were initially refused planning permission. After going through an appeal they finally were given permission to stay on the Land. Travellers have great difficulty getting planning permission for sites, so this was a very significant victory. The family have built their own amenities on the site.

### **Children from the**



Mary has five children and 12 years and she is pregnant with her family have been in

past 10 years, which is clearly their preference over living on a caravan site. Mary has a strong sense of identity as an Irish Traveller and she has maintained her connection and involvement with her community. Mary feels that her choice to live in housing gives her a little more freedom to bring up her children in her own way with less pressure from others.

### **Wadham Road Site**

### **CASE STUDY – MARY**

aged between 2 is currently sixth child. The housing for the

### Housing

The family were previously living in private-let properties. Two years ago they were made homeless and were housed in their present flat by Waltham Forest Council. They are in a first floor, two-bedroom flat, and are consequently very overcrowded. The children have no privacy and bedtimes are very difficult. It is also difficult for the children to have toys or bikes and there is no quiet space for homework. The problem of space is compounded by the fact that Mary is afraid to let her children play outside on the estate, as they have experienced a great deal of racial harassment. They are frequently called names such as 'tinkers' or 'Pikies', and have been physically attacked a number of times by older teenage boys. Each time an incident has occurred, Mary has called the police but no action has been taken.

### Education

The younger primary age children are very settled at school. They attend well and Mary feels they are achieving well in school. The children are involved in assemblies and school performances and feel a part of the life of the school. They have made friends and are happy.

Mary's eldest son John has just completed year 7. He is currently out of school because of problems with his behaviour. He has not made any close friends in school and is generally not very happy. Mary is committed to sending her children right through secondary school. She wants John to get on well, not only for himself, but also as an example for the younger children in the family. There are lots of issues that she feels the school doesn't understand, and she finds hard to communicate.

***' When I go up to the school for a meeting, they ask me what John wants to do with his life. I don't know how to answer that because he's a Traveller and that's what he will be. Travellers don't get jobs the same as settled people. I don't know how to explain that to the school and I just get shy. Johns sees all his cousins not going to school, and they tease him and call him 'school boy'. He doesn't really see the point of going, he can't see how it's going to help him get on and earn a living when he's older'***

## • Unauthorised Sites

Between January 2000 and September 2002 there have been 10 unauthorised camps in the borough, all of which were Irish Traveller families.

(9) A number of these camps were evicted after 2 or 3 days, and the rest were there for between 2 and 8 weeks. It appears that the local authority have not undertaken consultation on the needs of the families, as advised in the 1994 Government Guidance. Instead police are asked to implement a summary eviction under section 61 of the Criminal Justice Act

## CASE STUDY -THERESA

This family belong to a small group of extended families living on a licensed site. The families own the land, and have recently been granted planning permission. Theresa has had a large family; her three youngest children are attending school locally. Previous moving on to this site, the Reilly's were travelling for many years and staying on unauthorised sites. They were continually mobile due to constant evictions.

***' We had no choice but to keep moving on. Sometimes we might be lucky and get six weeks in a camp, but often we would be moved in a day. Sometimes we would have to get the kids out of bed and move late at night. As long as we were out of the way no one really cared about us. We would have to wait two months for school places to come up and then we would have to move on anyway'***

### Education

When living on unauthorised sites, the children had very fleeting periods in school due to constant evictions and difficulty in accessing school places. Since settling on their land, the TES has worked closely with the family. The children are all in school and attending well. Kathleen, aged 11, has just transferred to secondary school. Only one of Mary's older children can read and write. Laura (who is now in the 20's) was given support in the past from Teacher working with Travellers. Laura now provides the family with some literacy support when needed.

### Relationship with Local Community

When they first moved on to their site they experienced hostility and racism from local people. This was fuelled by an article in the local paper, which gave the family negative and harmful publicity. Kathleen, aged 11, experienced some serious bullying in school, which led to a racial attack on the family.

***' This boy with older brothers came to the site and threw eggs and stones over the fence. They then came into the site when the families were away and threw bricks at the caravans. Lots of damage was done. We called the police but they didn't really take it all that seriously'***

The families have now built up good relationships with the local community. 500 local residents gave their signatures in support of the families appeal for planning permission to stay on their land.

## 3.2 EDUCATION

- **Access**

Frequently there may be a large number of children requiring school places from one family. This combined with the mobility means that children can be out of school for long periods.

- **Attendance and Achievement**

The TES data shows that the average attendance for Irish Traveller children is 78% for primary and 68% for secondary. Attendance is often interrupted by community events such as weddings, christenings or funerals. For those children that are attending well, under achievement remains a major concern. The schools perception of housed Travellers is often that they will have fewer problems in school, but this is not the case.

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The transfer school is a all Travellers but the largest children who 7 are Irish in cases have achieved they will often

difficulties in year 7 and 8 and will quickly drop out of school completely. There are many different factors that contribute to this situation, ranging from under achievement in primary school to various cultural factors (5). In Waltham Forest, secondary transfer is particularly difficult for Irish Traveller girls because there are few girls' schools in the borough, and these are very over-subscribed. For cultural reasons parents are extremely reluctant to send girls to a mixed school.

According to the Traveller Law Reform Unit ***'There are too few Gypsy and Traveller children participating freely and fully... the level of literacy within the community is still significantly below that for the 'settled' population. School attendance is unsatisfactory. In the OFSTED report (1996) it is stated that as many as ten thousand Gypsy and Traveller children at the secondary stage are not even registered in any school'***.

### Secondary

#### ***Irish Traveller boy in secondary school***

to secondary major hurdle for and Gypsies, proportion of drop out at year Travellers. Even where children well in year 6, face great

(6)

### **3.3 RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY AND ACCESS TO SERVICES**

Irish Travellers mostly operate within their own community networks. They frequently experience racial harassment, on sites or in houses. There have been a number of articles in local newspapers, which generate strong anti-Traveller feeling and racist attitudes in the local community. .

There are also a number of examples of support from neighbours and good relationships with the local community

### **3.4 HEALTH**

- **GP's**

Registering with a GP is problem for Irish Travellers, particularly those families who are very mobile. Sometimes families would register as a temporary resident but they still found it difficult to get appointments and would often go to A&E instead. One particular problem for very transient families is that there are no records of their medical history, which prevents continuity of care.

- **Unauthorised Sites**

Families living on unauthorised sites are usually living without basic amenities such as toilets and water. Children suffer more frequently from sickness, diarrhoea and infections. When evictions take place late at night or early morning, children are taken out of bed when the family has to move. This can be distressing for the children and stressful for the whole family.

- **Mental Health Issues**

For many Travellers who have been used to living in caravans, moving into to a house can seriously affect their mental health. They can frequently feel isolated and cut off form their community. Depression, particularly among Traveller women is common. Teenage girls can be particularly isolated in housing as they are expected to take a lot of responsibility for taking care of younger children.

The London Gypsy and Traveller Unit's report on Housed Irish Travellers explores many of these issues in greater depth.

## MODELS OF GOOD PRACTICE

### 1. WALTHAM FOREST TRAVELLER EDUCATION SERVICE (TES)

The Traveller Education Service (TES) has been in existence since September 1999. They are based in the School Improvement Team and consist of two advisory teachers, Peter Norton (full time), Chris East (0.5), and the services of a Romani speaking interpreter, Christina Kalinina. The staff have built up this service over the last three years, and have established good relationships with families and schools. The TES is now the key agency involved with Travellers in the borough.

#### **The Objectives of the TES are**

- To ensure that Traveller pupils gain access to their legal entitlement to an education that meets their needs.
- To promote the inclusion and achievement of Traveller pupils.
- To enable Traveller pupils and families to become independent users of the education system.

#### **The TES offer a range of services. These include:**

- ◦ Supporting families with children out of school.
- ◦ Outreach work between home and school.
- ◦ Supporting families and schools with admissions procedures, interviews and induction.
- ◦ Supporting parental understanding of the education system.
- ◦ Support to improve attendance
- ◦ Supporting and developing best practice that promotes inclusion and achievement.
- ◦ Working with children and parents at secondary transfer.
- ◦ Translation of key documents into Romani
- ◦ INSET

The TES criteria for prioritising support to families, pupils and schools are outlined in Appendix 5. .

All the families visited spoke positively about the input and support of the TES. The success of their work can be seen in the graphs showing levels of attainment and attendance between 1999 and 2001 (see appendix 3). Attendance rates for Travellers in Waltham Forest have improved significantly. Attendance at secondary level improved from 64% in summer 1999-00 to 77% in summer 2000-01. . The TES is receiving an increasing number of referrals from schools and other professionals, as well as from within the Traveller and Gypsy communities. It is becoming more difficult with the present resources for the staff to respond

fully to the increasing demand for their service. There is now a sound basis for the  
development of this work.

## 2. ROMA SUPPORT GROUP

The Roma Support Group (RSG) was constituted in October 1998 as a response to requests from Roma families for support and advice. The majority of Roma families at that time were living in Hammersmith and Fulham, and a weekly advocacy/interpretation service was started in January 1999.

### The aims of the Roma Support Group:

- To improve the quality of life for Roma refugees and asylum seekers through language training, linguistic and advocacy support and through activities which encourage cultural enhancement.
- To raise public awareness of the discrimination and persecution that the Roma people are facing in Europe.
- To support and enable the Roma people to overcome prejudice, isolation, low self-esteem and vulnerability. (7)

### Description of service/activities

- **An advocacy/interpretation service** -Weekly drop-in sessions with advice workers who speak the main languages spoken by Roma. These are based at White City, Upton Park and Manor Park. Advice workers aim to support individuals and families in accessing services such as education, health, welfare, and language support. They will also enable access to legal representation on issues of immigration, housing and welfare.
- **'Empower yourself through English' classes** -The classes aim to help students adjust to life in Britain and learn basic English. A creche is provided for parents with small children
- **Cultural Enhancement -Music and dance** is an integral part of the life and culture of the Roma community. The RSG provide a community meeting place and an opportunity for Roma families to socialise and practise their traditional cultural activities through music and dance. 'Music is not just entertainment but is a means of communication and part of their ritual of life, from weddings to funerals' (RSG Annual report 2001-02)
- The formation of the dance and music group 'Romani Rad' (Romany night) has developed from a workshop of musicians and dancers, mostly Roma children and teenagers from Poland. These young performers have now become regular players in many different events throughout London. 'Theirs is the tradition expressed by costumes, music and dance, the skills of which are handed down to them throughout the generations' (Annual Report 2001-02)
- **Annual Festival of Romany Culture** -This aims to bring the Roma together and to raise their individual and social esteem, and to increase understanding and awareness of Romany Culture.
- **Football Project** -This has been running since November 2001 and takes place weekly in East Ham. Roma children and young people aged 8-14 travel from other boroughs to play football together. It aims to address issues of social

exclusion experienced by Roma young people.

The Roma Support group provides an excellent model of good practice with this community. One of their main strengths is the high level of ownership and participation from Roma people in the organisation. The advocacy work combined with the arts and cultural projects is effective in encouraging participation from all ages in the community.

The RSG are flexible in their response to the needs of the Roma by moving their services to where their communities live. Many Roma families from Hammersmith and Fulham have been moved to Waltham Forest, and so allocating some services in this borough would be a natural development of their work.

### 3. ARTS IN EDUCATION NETWORK

The Arts in Education Network is a voluntary organisation that was set up in 1995. In Waltham Forest they receive part-funding, office space and administration support from the Education Department. Last year they were given some funding by the Higham Hill Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. In 2001-02 the Arts in Education Network collaborated with the TES on a project with the children on the Folly Lane

Site.

#### Projects:

- - **Day Workshop** -The aim of the workshop was to involve the children in the redevelopment of the wasteland adjacent to the site into a community woodland. The children worked with artists to make large bird sculptures and costumes for a procession from the site to the woodland area. The children performed a dance depicting the birds nesting in the new trees, which they had just planted. Parents also became involved in the project, which achieved a sense of participation and ownership in the renewal of the area.
  - **Mosaic Project** -This project took place over a number of weekly sessions in the local Primary School during the summer term of 2002. A group of eight children took part, of which four were Gypsy children from the site. The children came up with the idea for the project, which was to make a mosaic sculpture of a horse. The Mosaic was modelled off a horse belonging to a family on Folly Lane Site. During the sessions the Gypsy children talked a great deal about their culture, and in particular the importance of horses in their lives. The children presented the Mosaic and talked about the project to the school in an

assembly. The mosaic horse will be placed in the newly planted woodland in spring 2003.

### **Impact of the Arts Projects**

- The tree planting and day workshop gave children and parents a sense of ownership and involvement in their local area. It developed environmental awareness and encouraged the children to care for the new woodland.
- The mosaic project encouraged the Gypsy children to talk about their culture and lifestyle in school. This affirmed their identity and increased their sense of status and inclusion in the school.
- The school assembly raised awareness of Traveller and Gypsy culture and was received positively by staff and children.

The Arts in Education Network found the children from Folly Lane Site extremely responsive. They intend to build on these two successful projects, by planning to work with Traveller and Gypsy children in other schools in the area.

## **4. LONDON GYPSY AND TRAVELLER UNIT**

London Gypsy and Traveller Unit (LGTU) was established by Save the Children Fund in 1988 and in June 1999 became an independent voluntary organisation. Since then, LGTU's work has continued to develop a range of direct services to Travellers in Hackney and Haringey, as well as advocacy and campaigning on the rights of Gypsies and Travellers across London and nationally.

### **LGTU is engaged in the following work with Travellers:**

- **Community Development on Sites** -This work aims to support families on official sites to improve site provision and site management. On unauthorised sites the work aims to ensure that local authorities and police work within the government guidance and to support families in access to legal representation in order to gain maximum stopping time wherever possible.
- **Advice and support to Housed Travellers** -A Community Development worker focuses on the needs of housed Travellers, many of whom are facing isolation, discrimination, and housing crisis. Weekly advice sessions in partnership with a solicitor, offers support to families who are facing evictions or who are in need of advice or support with housing issues. This service is in great demand with an increasing number of referrals.
- **Work with Young People** -There are separate weekly youth groups for Traveller young women, young men, boys and girls from sites and houses in Hackney and Haringey. This area of work recognises the social exclusion that most of these young people experience. The groups aim to ***widen the horizons, raise awareness of rights,***

***increase communication and social skills, promote self esteem and develop participation and responsibility'* (LGTU leaflet)**

- ◦ **Policy and Practise in Local Authorities** -To ensure that Traveller families, children and young people in Hackney, Haringey and adjacent London Boroughs have access to services appropriate to their needs.
- ◦ **Strategic work at Regional and National Level** -This area of work aims to address the following areas:
  - Site provision and management of unauthorised sites
  - Challenging discriminatory media coverage
  - Raising awareness of the rights and needs of Travellers and Gypsies with mainstream providers.

The work of LGTU addresses many of the needs that have been identified in this report, particularly amongst Irish Travellers. LGTU is not engaged in direct services to Travellers and Gypsies in Waltham Forest, however, their work clearly illustrates a successful model of working with the Travelling community.

## **CONCLUSION**

Gypsies and Travellers continue to be one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities in Britain. In the light of the Children's Fund objectives, it is clear that children from these communities must be given a higher priority by all relevant agencies, local authorities and government departments. A number of significant issues impacting on the lives of Gypsy and Traveller communities have emerged in this report.

## **EDUCATION**

This remains one of the key concerns. There are few other communities in Britain with such high levels of illiteracy. Poor attainment and attendance levels, and the large number of children dropping out of education in years 7 and 8 is of great concern. The contribution of the Traveller Education Service in Waltham Forest to improving levels of attendance and attainment amongst Gypsy and Traveller children is significant. It has been recognised by the Traveller Law and Research Unit that similar results at Primary school level through the intervention of TES units nationally "has vastly improved in recent years. But there is still a long way to go to achieve equality with settled children, particularly with regard to the attendance of secondary –aged pupils"(8)

## **ACCESS TO SERVICES**

Many Gypsy and Traveller families have extremely poor access to services. They tend to remain isolated from the local community and will operate within their own family networks. Children are rarely involved in any activities in the local community. The need for access to information, advice, legal services and interpreters (for the Roma) are clearly major issues for these communities.

## **MOBILITY**

Some of the families spoken to are settled either on a site or in a house, but they still maintain a very strong sense of Gypsy/Traveller identity. Others, the Roma and Irish families in particular, are extremely mobile. This mobility impacts many areas of need, such as access to school places, registering with a GP, continuity of antenatal care, and other health issues.

Despite the high level of need clearly identified in this report, there are very few agencies actively involved with these families in Waltham Forest. Such involvement requires on-going contact, which fosters the building of relationships and trust. Specialist knowledge and understanding of the culture and traditions of the communities is required. It is essential when working with Roma families to have personnel who either speak Romani or other relevant languages. Access to appropriate interpreters is crucial.

The four agencies identified in this report as models of good practice, illustrate some effective ways of working with these communities. The starting point for The Children's Fund when allocating resources must firstly be to build on and develop the good practise and expertise that already exists in the borough. Secondly, to learn from the example and experience of agencies which have established work in other boroughs and to develop new areas of work.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Priority must be given to developing the work of agencies currently involved with Gypsy and Traveller communities in Waltham Forest. Additional resources are needed in the following areas, some of which can be funded by the Children's Fund, but may require the resources of other partnerships and local services. The Children's Fund could be a crucial catalyst in enabling this to happen.

### **1. EDUCATION**

To develop the outreach work of the Traveller Education Service, aiming to:

- (i) Offer parents more support in their communication with the school.
- (ii)** Provide support with homework, particularly for families where there are issues of illiteracy or language. On Folly Lane Site a

homework club could take place in the wardens Hut that is currently unused.

(iii) Supporting families with access to school places thus helping to reduce the

## 2. ACCESS TO SERVICES

To provide:

- (i) Advocacy Workers offering advice, support, and legal services particularly for Irish Travellers and Roma.
- (ii) Interpreters who can establish good relationships and trust with Roma families.
  - (i) The movement of housed families
  - (ii) The council's policy when dealing with unauthorised

length of time that children are out of school

## 3. HEALTH

(i) To fund new Health Advocate post (as in Newham), who can support families in accessing GP's, address other health issues, and help provide some continuity of care

(ii) To provide training and to raise awareness amongst Health professionals of the needs and culture of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

## 4. ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- (i) To develop arts and music projects that engage Traveller children and young people in exploring their culture and identity.
- (ii) To fund agencies who have already been successful in organising such projects, for example 'The Arts in Education Network' and the Roma Support Group.

(iii) To create specialist posts for children's workers and youth workers aiming to:

- Work with parents and support children and young people in accessing local provision
- Engage with local agencies who are offering provision for children and young people
- Develop specialised group where appropriate, similar to those run by the Roma Support Group and the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit

## 5. ACCOMMODATION

To set up an inter-agency working group to explore the following issues:

To provide:

- (i) Advocacy Workers offering advice, support, and legal services particularly for Irish Travellers and Roma.

- (iii) The management and maintenance of Folly Lane Site.
- (iv) To urgently look into the council's application for the DTR grant for sites, as January 2003 is the last opportunity to apply.
- (v) The need for more site provision particularly for Irish Travellers.

## REFERENCES

1. Kenrick, D & Clark, C (1999) *Moving On – The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain* (page 19)
- 1 Kenrick, D & Clark, C (1999) *Moving on-The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain* (page 20)
- 2 Council Of Europe Website *Roma Gypsies*
- 3 London Gypsy and Traveller Unit *Housed Irish Travellers In London* (page 17)
- 4 Hammersmith and Fulham Traveller Education Service *Travellers and Secondary Education*.
- 5 Clements, L & Morris, R (1999) *Gaining Ground-Law Reform for Gypsies and Travellers*. Traveller Law Research Unit, Cardiff Law School. (page 15)
- 6 Roma Support Group *Information Leaflet*
- 7 Clements, L & Morris, R (1999) *Gaining Ground – Law Reform for Gypsies and Travellers*. Traveller Law Research Unit, Cardiff Law School (page 16)
9. Waltham Forest TES data showing unauthorised camps in the borough Jan 2000 – Sept 2002

## APPENDICES

To provide:

- (i) Advocacy Workers offering advice, support, and legal services particularly for Irish Travellers and Roma.
- (ii) Interpreters who can establish good relationships and trust with Roma families.
  - (i) The movement of housed families
  - (ii) The council's policy when dealing with unauthorised sites.
- Appendix 1 Waltham Forest TES data showing turnover of Gypsy and Traveller Children 2000-1
- Appendix 2 Examples of Interview Questions
  - a) b) Health Visitor, Sally Edwards Peter Norton TES Families
  - c) on Sites
- Appendix 3 Waltham Forest TES Data – Graphs showing attainment
- Appendix 4 Waltham Forest Attendance and exclusion summary 19992002
- Appendix 5 Waltham Forest TES leaflet