

## Li Sobindoy – Roma in Action



*Edited by  
Dr Brian Belton  
Senior Lecturer  
YMCA George Williams College  
Canning Town  
London*

## Introduction

The following is the result of a Grundvig partnership, made up of organizations from Germany, Turkey, Spain and the UK. We sought to focus at educational (formal and informal) activities, principally focusing on the position of Roma and Sinti<sup>1</sup>, transmitting something of the history, culture and values of Roma, but also suggest ways and means of responding to these socially and economically challenged groups.

We also wanted to question existing non-Roma perceptions about Roma, providing some food for thought and perhaps inspiration in terms of social responses that can effectively promote the challenging of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, while inviting Roma to develop a level of autonomy within host societies, but also contribute to those societies as a the culturally rich, vibrant and diverse population they are.

However, the core of the research is the effort to share and suggest innovative practice, approaches to and practical action for building positive relations between Roma and majority populations in the European context. This encompassed examining actual and potential responses to the causes of Roma poverty and exclusion, which we take to be part of the cause and effect of prejudice and discrimination experienced by these groups.

The partnership has proved to be a valuable resource to create a platform for exchange of methods, the sharing of information and successful approaches, developing personal and group insight and providing educational activities for non-Roma about and with Roma as well as for dissemination of good practice.

We also hope our work together has generated awareness and fostered debate about the problematic situation Roma and Sinti face across Europe, part of addressing, while exploring and promoting means to reduce, racism and prejudice. We have also looked broadening perceptions and response horizons, so strengthening tolerance. However, as we started to work together we soon began to understand that acceptance might be the humane reaction that can arise out of the mechanistic promotion of tolerance; one will tolerate something to the point one will not longer tolerate it – acceptance seems to imply a more lasting, multifaceted response; it is, logically, a two way process.

It is hoped the small steps we have taken and the practice we here highlight, will contribute to a fairer, more humane European society, providing concrete evidence and means to reduce the discrimination against the Roma population and other minority/vulnerable groups.

We did not just want to focus on the direct empowerment of the Roma, the problems with this response are articulated below. However, we saw it as important to undertake the research and related activities with the understanding that it is society that, in the main, discriminates against Roma. We argue that prejudice and discrimination is rooted in the social milieu, not Roma culture.

The partnership wanted to provide a resource to improve the prospects of coexistence of Roma and non-Roma. We were motivated by the idea that stigmatization and discrimination can be reduced by informing and educating each other and, by way of media like this publication, the wider context. We want to be informative and encourage people to become more educated about and/or aware of Roma culture, promoting a positive narrative relating to Roma that might help undermine stereotypes. Thus educational activities have to be qualified and increased - the following is part of such a process.

Our approach was to invite the Roma to be part of our collaboration as an example of a commitment to Roma being embraced fully in social action and interaction. For us Roma, like other minorities, add to the richness of society and as such their views and contribution are appreciated, respected and understood to add value to this work.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Sinti (also Sinta or Sinte) are a Romani people of Central Europe. Traditionally itinerant, today only a small percentage of the group remains unsettled. In earlier times, they frequently lived on the outskirts of communities. Some argue that Sinti have connections with the Manouche in France. Some Sinti speak the Sinti-Manouche variety of Romani, which exhibits strong German influence.

The partnership has been privileged to be given the opportunity by Roma groups in the UK, Germany and Spain to improve the response of non-Roma to those who are part of and/or who identifying with Roma culture and identity in European societies. An authentic approach is a significant part of the project. The balanced inclusion of representatives of the Roma, non-Roma as well as teachers, youth and community workers, mediators and staff of educational organizations has been the key to a successful and fruitful cooperation. We have learnt a lot from Roma, they have been our educators and we now want to hand that gift to our fellow European citizens and the world.

This document is writing in the spirit of the Directive on Racial Equality the European Union policies, as well related policies and legislation of the partners' national governments, which clearly entail the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin. All European Union countries have transposed the Directive into their own national laws.

As mentioned above, many Roma continue to suffer from prejudice and social exclusion due to the actions (and lack of action) of majority society. This learning partnership has sought to do what it can to address exactly this issue. Together we want to demonstrate that practical action, learning from work with other minorities and migrants, can promote integration (not the assimilation) of Roma within European societies. We understand integration to be a process of joint action, collaboration and mutual benefit. We do not understand this as a type of compliance to an overall order or homogeneity of identity, but the embracing of the best of Roma culture as part of the tapestry of our continental culture.

In the process of a merging Europe, where the many become one, but the one is an evolving *mélange* of all, different ideas, approaches, perceptions, knowledge and understanding can confirm, broaden and enrich our response to difficulties and challenges. This, in the long run, reduces the costs and energy and allows the partners to widen the prospect of their work.

Mistakes as well as positive results and outcomes have been shared and this has taken us forward in a positive direction. All of those participating have been involved in a learning process, at first hand, by being culturally embedded in cultural encounters.

### **Social historical context**

Historically the name attributed to Roma in Romania (and elsewhere) 'tsigan', originally meant "slave". This understanding (and the 'tsigan' epithet) was, up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, pretty consistent across much of Eastern Europe. Roma lived in slave settlements, outside villages, with no access to any formal education or social support. Marriage between Roma and non-Roma was in most areas strictly forbidden by law and Roma even had had separate graveyards. This was a slave and an apartheid system, wherein to be Roma was to be a 'non-person'.

Gypsy slavery was not abolished in law in Europe until well into the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century but persisted as a social practice well after that date. However, subsequent to slavery Roma were turned off of the lands they formally toiled over and evicted from their huts and other dwelling places. This meant that they were without the means of life and labour; literally bereft. As such a proportion of them were obliged to become itinerant, looking for work and temporary shelter.

However many stayed on as a kind of serf labour with their former masters, or simply had no other recourse but to beg for food and shelter, having only their labour to offer in exchange. Thus the former slaves remained trapped in a semi-slave state, labouring on the land or gaining positions as the most lowly of household servants. The majority had no access to any type of formal education or alternative means of survival. The social situation and pariah status of Roma made fertile ground for the unabashed racism that continued for the best part of the next Century, even up today.

In the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Roma have arrived in national contexts across Europe with the above cultural and social history; they come as what can be understood to be a 'Pariah' group (see Hancock 1987).

## **Impact**

As a result of the project youth and community workers, teachers and other staff working with Roma and non-Roma, not just those involved with the participating organizations, but also within institutions and organizations within each agency network, have been better prepared and are now more able to disseminate a more authentic and positive image of Roma to non-Roma.

At the same time, particularly with regard to contributions from German and Turkish partners, those of us experienced in terms of working with Roma groups have been able to look at and evaluate responses to other marginalized and 'disintegrated' groups (migrants and refugees). These approaches, and in the case of our Turkish peers, the social compassion enacted, can inform our response to those pushed to the edge of social consideration.

*Each of the following sections was written by representatives of the respective organizations and agencies involved in the partnership. Some by individuals, others by collective efforts of two or more people. It was suggested that writers supply bibliographies about their personal or joint motivations, some have chosen to do this while others have not. We believe that either response is to be respected as it allows this document to celebrate personal, joint, group and collective achievement.*



*We all find our place in the song.*



## **The Editor**

*Coming from an East London/Gypsy background, Brian entered youth and community work in the early 1970s docklands. While working in youth work related situations around the world, including Israel, the Falkland Islands, Germany, the USA, Thailand, Hong Kong, Zambia, South Africa, China and Canada, Brian's interest in identity and ethnicity flourished and today he is an internationally recognized authority on Gypsy Ethnicity, and the rights of Roma in Europe, having written widely on that subject, delivering papers most recently in the USA, Austria, Greece, Sweden and Slovenia as well as around the UK..*

*Brian had continued involvement over the last five years with the Commonwealth Youth Programme, developing professional practice in youth work across South Asia (working in situ in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Malaysia). He recently organized and delivered youth work training in Iceland which drew participants from 15 European countries (speaking 13 different languages) and is working on a pan-European project looking at the inclusion of Roma*

*At the time of writing he is involved in developing partnerships developing detached and outreach youth work with practitioners in Holland, Romania, England and Malta.*

*Having written close to 90 books and numerous articles and learned papers, spoken regularly at conferences, on radio and TV, throughout the UK and beyond, Brian is a recognised and respected academic and writer in the field of professional youth and community work and informal education.*

### **Relevant Publications include:**

***Questioning Gypsy Identity: Ethnic Narratives in Britain and America*** (2005) AltaMira Press

***Gypsy and Traveller Ethnicity: The social generation of an Ethnicity*** (2005) Routledge

***Black Routes : Legacy of African Diaspora*** (2007) Hansib

***Developing Critical Youth Work Theory*** (2009) Sense

***Radical Youth Work: Developing Critical Perspectives and Professional Judgement*** (2009) Russell House

***All Change! : Romani Studies Through Romani Eyes*** (2010) University of Hertfordshire Press (with Damian Le Bas, Thomas Acton)

***Differentiated Teaching and Learning in Youth Work*** (2010) Sense (with Simon Frost)

***Supervision – Praxis and Purpose: a critical reassessment of reflective practice in work with young people*** (2011) Russell House (with John Peaper and Tina Salter)

***Youth Work and Islam*** (2011) Sense (with Sadek Hamid)

***Youth Work and Islam: A Growing Tradition*** (2012) *Continuum in Muslim Youth Challenges, Opportunities and Expectations* (edited by Mohammad Siddique Seddon and Fauzia Ahmad)

***Establishing a Professional Youth Worker Association: A 12-Step Guide*** (2012)

Commonwealth Youth Programme, Asia Centre, Youth Work Education & Training Unit, Chandigarh, India

Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House: London, UK

***Professional Youth Work: a concept and strategies*** (2012)

Commonwealth Youth Programme, Asia Centre, Youth Work Education & Training Unit, Chandigarh, India

Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House: London, UK

***Cadjan/Kiduhu; Global Perspectives on Youth Work*** (2014) Sense

***'Weak Power' – Community and Identity in Race and Ethnicity*** (2014) in *Secret and Exclusive Social Orders: Blood and Shadow* (Matthew W. Hughey ed.)Routledge



## Good practice

*To be able to judge or estimate good practice, one needs a comparative, something of a plimsoll line of intention and action. This section provides the latter. The Roma Support Group have a relatively long and exemplary history of involvement working with and for Roma and as such offer a rich and useful set of markers by which intervention, collaboration and outcome can be assessed.*

*The following was written by Brian Belton and is based on interviews with Roma Support Group (RSG) Co-ordinator/CEO Sylvia Ingmire; Tania Gessi, Culture & Arts Development Co-ordinator; Laura Greason, Roma Aspiration Project Worker; Przemek Kierpacz Roma Advocacy & Campaigning Project Worker; Andy Shallice, Policy and Information Worker; Alexandra Staskova, Roma Advocacy Project Coordinator and the views of Roma young people. The text reflects their collective perspective and voice, focusing on Roma youth, their role and participation within RSG. . All images are courtesy of RSG.*



Contemporaneously debates in Britain surrounding immigration, premised on the impact of social policy in the light on the austerity economics and concomitant concerns related to employment, housing, education and health care, have exacerbated fears, anxieties and defensive responses to migrants, perhaps in particular, Roma. The general apprehension has been confirmed, exaggerated, fuelled, provoked and encouraged by Political and media responses (see for example <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2644280/The-new-face-racial-tension-As-ex-Home-Secretary-David-Blunkett-warns-clashes-Roma-locals-Sheffield-bitter-irony-previous-generation-immigrants-angriest.html>)

As such, as in other contexts, the position of Roma in the UK is complex. They are a socially, culturally and ethnically rich/diverse/heterogeneous grouping, often from indistinct by varied origins. However, most people in Britain understand Roma to be a homogenous, racially distinct people, probably coming from Bulgaria or Romania. This being the case, many find the presence of Roma disturbing because, as a group, they are effectively mysterious.

However, association with poverty, benefit fraud, child trafficking (<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/may/17/trafficking-gang-masterminding-benefits-fraud>) and general



crime (<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/380512/How-Romanian-criminals-terrorise-our-streets>) has intensified such sentiments, giving rise to forms of discrimination, prejudice, social injustice and inequality.

Given current situation of Roma in the British context, coupled with a history of oppression, and the understandable concomitant cultural defensiveness, which might be expected of any group experiencing continuous and unremitting inequality, these groups place little faith in institutions and organizations they perceive or suspect to be part of the general milieu of social subjugation. This might be dismissed as naivety or ignorance, stoked by a sort of inverted prejudice, but this would be an incorrect and unsophisticated perspective. Roma have, by necessity, become reliant, first and foremost, on the social nexus of the family. Looking for security beyond the familial framework has proved to be not only unsuccessful and so disenchanting for these groups historically speaking, but also dangerous and thus foolish.

With this in mind, looking to approach young Roma independently of, or separate from their family context would (and has) not only proved to be unsuccessful, but is likely to constitute a general threat to the family and wider social network of Roma families.

It is this understanding that has led to RGS generating a culturally aware and empathetic approach to their work with Roma individuals and groups. RSG has, from its origins, looked to work 'with' Roma families by way of forms of developing associations and group collaboration; allowing those coming forward from Roma backgrounds to make the pace in terms of developing organizational activity with Roma via contact and the development of trust with families and family networks. To understand RSG's work one need to grasp the social, political and economic roots of Roma experience as outlined above.

### **Participation; making choices and developing strategy**

Given the above, with the need for families to take a lead in the work RSG does, together with the legal limitations on active involvement of the management of charitable enterprises in the UK (one needs to be at least 18 years of age to be part of a management committee) the involvement of young people with regard to building and guiding organisational strategy is careful, nuanced and subtle. However, RSG is conscious that the role and involvement of youth, if it is to be developmental for them, the wider context of Roma and society, needs to be participative, clearly influential and taken seriously.

With this in mind young Roma, along with their older cultural peers, are active and vocal within RSG, principally by way of the peer and group advocacy forum. This vibrant medium of discussion and debate informs and impacts on organisational policy, allowing young Roma to take an authoritative part in relation to the direction of practice, expressing and promoting their needs and aspirations.

All activities for and with Roma are developed with and alongside them. Often decisions are made on the basis of informed choices from a range of options (where access and funding is or might be made available) presented by volunteers and staff (many of whom come from Roma backgrounds, formally being involved with RSG). However, Roma participants are just as likely to present ideas and desires about what they want to do or create. Recently, following an activity that took place in a rural setting, young Roma independently decided that they would work with staff and volunteers to organize a short camping vacation, which would encompass a range of contextually practicable activities.

As such, activity options and potential tend to be products that are fashioned by way of organic interaction, collaboration and cooperation. They are the result of shared insight and imagination and developmental of judgement, communication and organisational skills. They are fabricated out of trust, responsibility taking, the dealing with consequences. They present Roma with the opportunity to manage change (by the bringing about and operation of events/activities) and work as teams to achieve agreed goals.

This reiterates that activities are a means to broader ends than the mere completion of an aim; they are multidimensional tools that facilitate social learning, personal and group growth. That RSG promote many Roma/non-Roma activities (for instance a very popular martial arts group, managed and coached by Roma, and the 'Roma Orchestra') there are also strong elements of community cohesion and anti-discriminatory practice.

## **The Ambit of operation**

RSG are based in the East London district of Canning Town and Plaistow. Ostensibly the immediate focus of operation has been this area and the wider context of the London Borough of Newham. However, because the Roma Diaspora is fluid, in a state of constant flux and always increasing its reach in the context of London and the UK, RSG is finding that it is increasingly developing a 'pan-London' and even national perspective. This chimes with the organisation's vision:

*Roma communities are empowered through the realization that their strength lies within every individual and his/her fulfillment as a member of society*

## **Youth focus**

Roma groups are not as clearly segregated by way of age, in terms of take up of services, as is the case in wider society. RSG's Mission Statement reflects this generic focus:

*To improve the quality of life for Roma refugees and migrants by helping them to overcome prejudice, isolation and vulnerability.*

*To make the public aware of Roma culture, heritage and the current situation of Roma refugees and migrants in the UK*

Looking at this in a superficial way one might easily take it that RSG does not place high emphasis on Roma youth or any particular interest or age group. However, this is to both misunderstand RSG's operational approach and the character of the Roma population in the British context; to work with Roma, in the current social milieu, means that one must work within the broader family and family networks that define Roma culture within what is an oppressive and as such threatening context.

The orientation of RSG is perhaps best expressed by the Roma that use and shape the organisation's service. For example, a young woman (15 year old) from a Roma background, using the opportunity within the services of RSG to express herself commented:

*I want the European Commission and everyone else to know that for us Roma, the most important right is to be safe from violence, discrimination, bullying and fear. I want them to know about it because I feel we, Roma are excluded from this right,*

Another young Roma, taking a leading role in RSG's Advocacy Project told how;

*Back in Eastern Europe, none of my family members were able to work. Whenever they tried to get a job, they would be turned away as thieves and beggars. The police treated us the same way – they were applying labels on us...now living here, I am a football coach and I know that I wouldn't be the same person if I had never come to Britain.*

The trajectory of RSG's work Roma might be understood to have been founded on the work of Dragica Felja and RSG's 'Roma Mentoring Project' (see <http://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/documents/Mentoring%20Project%20Report.pdf>).

It is the ethos of this project and the role and aims of mentoring that underlie and underpin the wide range of work undertaken with and by Roma within the auspices of RSG. This is congruent with the precepts of professional community work practice and informal learning responses in that activities and projects are not seen as an end in themselves, but as a means by which people can grow and develop in a broad and holistic sense. This can encompass political and social consciousness but also personal and group awareness, exploration of identity (in terms of culture, religion, gender, sexuality etc.).

One example of this was provided by a member of staff and volunteer from RSG.

*We took a group of young people orienteering. We were waiting for the train home when one young man said to me 'All that going down in France...' (referring to the 2015 'Charlie Hebdo' murders in Paris). The kind of discussion we had doesn't happen just like that.*

Here is just one instance of how the work of RSG can lead to the exploration of their feelings and perceptions, articulating concerns and gain skill and confidence expressing their ideas and perspectives.

RSG has provided the means for Roma to articulate their feelings and frame their opinions via the provision of a number of initiatives (there is room for only the sample of these mentioned in this paper) like the Young Roma Advocacy Project and the Education Support Project that specifically relates to youth. In fact, from an analytical perspective, RSG's youth related activities can be understood to form the basis of the medium and long term future of Roma. This is evident from another young Roma woman's point of view:

*In my opinion, there is not contradiction between going to school and living a 'Gypsy life'. I go to school to gain knowledge and living a 'Gypsy life' is my culture and tradition, which I will never throw away or lose. I am really looking forward to going to college and university because it will improve the quality of my life in so many ways. I know that college is for many people a key to success. I am positive that almost every day I will hear something interesting in the class that will expand my knowledge and make me more prepared and confident to deal with the world and people from all walks of life.*

This statement is important because it can be seen how the line between being a beneficiary or a consumer of RSG's services and an advocate and activist in terms of Roma rights and social development is indistinct. Non-Roma are often (perhaps understandably) blind to the fact that by taking part in and making use of these opportunities Roma oppression and social discrimination is being addressed; they are asserting themselves socially and politically. They are also reshaping, redefining and developing their cultural response to the world.

This young woman, and many like her are the fulcrum of RSG's overall project, exhibiting courage, fortitude and optimism, often built by way of their own and the interaction of families with RSG. To see this as anything other than a creative process on the part of Roma, to dismiss it as mere consumption of activities provided, might be to show a completely erroneous grasp of what the collaboration that youth and community work with Roma is. This work is utterly dependent on Roma learning to use their influence in order that that they might **take** authority over their personal and cultural experience; authority **given** by others is a contradiction in terms – those who take authority and use it are the creators in political and social discourse. Perhaps RSG's greatest achievement is that they clearly work with Roma in order that they might take authority for themselves and their identity peers, so creating their own place within the world and refusing the option of isolation and the concomitant segregation.

As such, activities and events become a stage on which Roma can experience and learn how to find or make their place in and so become full members of society, but also maintain and build on their identity. This is a complicated process but it is founded on simple, but brave participatory attitudes. The following statement from a 17 year old Roma expresses something of this:

*I would like to become a full-time boxing coach, helping young Roma to step away from a life of drugs and crime.*

A Roma Trainee, embedded in RSG's Arts Development Project, after playing with musicians from the Grand Union Youth Orchestra, expresses much the same sentiments:

*It was difficult but I enjoyed it a lot, playing with other musicians. I particularly like the sound of African drums and saxophone when playing Roma tunes. I hope we will play together again.*

In short, and as can be understood from the above, RSG is a Roma led organisation and as such, its response and service provision in relation to Roma is informed and guided by the wants, needs and perspectives of Roma.

The organisation works in collaboration with non-Roma to enhance the position and perception of Roma in society. Roma staff and volunteers (who are mostly drawn from the Roma community) develop and direct practice alongside a management committee of 11, six of whom are Roma (including the chairperson, Roza Kotowicz). Roma are encouraged to (and do) express themselves by and through the management structures of RSG.



The main areas of activity are:

- Roma Support & Engagement
- Roma Advocacy
- Culture & Arts Development
- Roma Aspiration
- Roma Advocacy & Campaigning
- Community Support
- Sport
- Elder Roma Engagement



While Roma youth are implicated in all the above (including Elder Engagement by way of intergenerational work) sport, advocacy, culture and art are the principle areas of youth involvement. These areas encompass the Roma Youth Music, 'Roma United' and enhancing the experience and attendance of young Roma in schools. The latter involve young Roma as service users, staff and volunteers. One young Roma commented:

*My volunteering experience in the RSG office was fantastic. I was treated like an adult. I would not have this opportunity anywhere else...The RSG made me proud to be Roma*



Reflecting on his participation with 'Roma United' a 17 year old Roma said:

*Playing football makes me happy because I can represent my community. It gives me something to look forward to, and keeps me doing something positive for my community (which makes me proud).*

Young Roma taking part in a karate championship told how this acted *to show that we, Roma, can be the best.* Judges were impressed with the Roma team's spirit and sense of mutual support, showing something of what Roma have to offer to the wider society: *They give us an astonishing example of what good team work is all about. It is hardly ever seen in this sport.*

Roma Youth Music, from the starting point of providing opportunities for young Roma to express and develop their musical talent, has led to them being involved in nine live performances (including at the historic Hackney Empire theatre) and the production of a CD 'Roma Youth Music', which aimed to enhance an understanding of Roma culture by celebrating and sharing Roma music heritage.



Roma artists presented a joint-performance with Gurt Lush Choir and St Mary Redcliffe School All-Stars Symphony Orchestra performing in Colston Hall (Bristol). They also performed in Leicester, Nottingham and in the Olympic Park, outreaching in total 950 people.

One Roma musician commented:

*In every lesson we learn something new. When I performed in front of people I was very nervous at first, but then I was really excited. Now I feel very proud when I can play Roma music in public*

Another performer said:

*I have dreamt all my life to hear Roma music performed by a 'real' Orchestra and sang by a 'real' choir. The effect was astonishing and the fact that I could contribute to it was something that exceeded my life dreams*

Last year's evaluation of impact of Roma Youth Music showed an increase in:

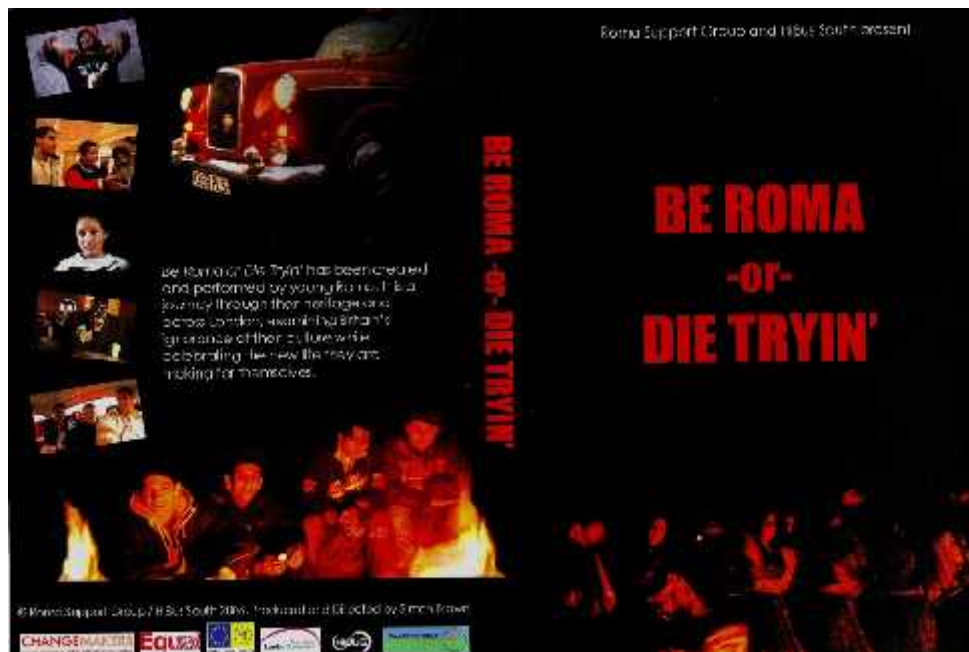
- music making and instrumental skills (88% of beneficiaries)
- knowledge of studio technology (37%)
- performing skills (70%)

Three quarters of young people involved reported their aspiration to pursue a music career in the future.



The RSG media project for Roma children and young people from East London produced a short documentary in collaboration with a community media company. The project enabled Roma youth to take part in all stages of film production from planning, script writing, researching, acting, narrating, music production and film editing. The product is a journey through their heritage and across London examining Britain's attitudes towards Roma while celebrating the new life that the Roma refugee children and youth are making for themselves in the UK.

The launch of the film, 'Be Roma or Die Tryin', took place in the Genesis Cinema in East London and was also been screened during the 1st International Roma Film Festival in London. Both shows attracted approximately 300 people and were followed by a Panel Discussion involving the public and the makers of the film. They created an opportunity for Roma to talk about their lives and issues that they face as refugees in multicultural and multiracial London.



This year RSG have generated over 2,200 cases. But of course, this is just the tip of the iceberg as each individual intervention represents impact on families and communities, as those coming directly to RSG are almost unfailingly representatives of more extensive groups. At the same time, year on year the client base grows, to the extent that in any year RSG are supported by dozens of Roma volunteer workers. Approximately 30 percent of those involved directly with RSG services are young people. However few cases do not implicate and impact on the well-being of Roma youth

For RSG, in terms of the reaction to Roma discrimination, not much has changed in Europe over time. Stereotypes still form much of contemporary thinking about Roma, demonizing and distorting the situation of Roma in modern society. Anti-Roma media making apocalyptic predictions of 'waves' of Roma migration from Romania and Bulgaria, due to changes in British immigration, have caused something close to frenzy and

hysteria, there was hardly any space for an audible/authentic Roma Voice and this is what RSG look to facilitate. This has highlighted the Roma reality of being an excluded and ignored community. Roma, as part of the Support and Engagement Programme, have been involved with the delivery of training, funded by the Department of Education, to a range of service providers. This has included 'Introduction to Roma Culture' and 'History and Tradition'. Last year 341 professionals attended 17 training sessions.

The RSG has, since the mid-1990s, made ongoing progress in developing an effective Roma self-help organisation, which understands Roma as an enhancement to British society. Advice and Advocacy projects have helped many Roma overcome barriers of poverty and homelessness, increasingly focussing on their employment and employability skills.

Work with Roma families has assisted them in terms of fulfilling their educational and vocational aspirations, while ensuring that local schools and other institutions better understand their needs. Roma music and sport tutors have played a vital role in training and teaching young Roma to succeed in their chosen areas of interest, not only acting as role models, but also reinforcing the concepts of 'competitiveness' and 'success' as being compatible with Roma cultural and social values.

RSG have devoted much energy and thought to the ways of enhancing the public understanding of Roma culture, drawing from a rich heritage of Roma arts, particularly through music events and concerts, some of which were exceptionally pioneering and inspiring. The organization started a new Policy and Campaigning Project, which aims to enable Roma community members to participate in decision making processes, facilitating their individual and collective voices on matters that are important to them and influence policies which affect them.

The organisation has been able to achieve much more than its resources would allow thanks to the hard work and dedication of volunteers. RSG has developed a volunteer training programme for each service area and implements a volunteer policy in line with good practice guidelines. Volunteers are involved in and help with all projects, in particular: Advice and Advocacy, Art, Aspiration and Policy and Campaigning Projects.

The RSG has also benefited from its partnership with the European Voluntary Service and Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, which enables the organization to host one volunteer from an EU country on a full time basis for the duration of one year.

Furthermore, RSG have provided work placements for social work students from the University of East London, as well as students of Goldsmiths, (University of London), University of Padua (Erasmus Student Mobility Programme) and a number of secondary schools in the London Boroughs of Newham and Waltham Forest.

RSG seek to meet the challenges Roma face. The organization is absolutely glowing with passion for what it does and there are some uniquely delightful aspects of RSG that demonstrate its commitment, involvement, and integrity. It believes and demonstrates the importance of recognizing Roma needs and it proves how small frontline organizations are able to fill the gaps between Roma and the host society.

According to a Roma Music Tutor:

*It gave me great satisfaction to observe the progress that children were making. Our last CD is a tribute to their achievements and hard work.*

An Art Development Project continued to build bridges between Roma arts, British society and mainstream art organisations. Last year, the RSG art programme included:

- Delivering instrumental music classes for young Roma and non-Roma people in the London Borough of Newham
- Promoting Roma musicians and artists to perform in art events across London
- Facilitating traditional Roma dance sessions and music rehearsals.



- Instrumental classes (accordion and violin), which Roma tutors delivered at the Newham Academy of Music benefited 28 young Roma and non-Roma people, who attended weekly classes of traditional Roma music.

The RSG Policy and Campaigning Project started in the autumn 2013, to improve the social inclusion of Roma through their civic participation in decision making structures.

The strength of this Project is in its community empowerment approach, as it gives Roma people a voice on matters that affect them on a local, national and European level.

The specific aims of the Project are:

- To enhance social inclusion of Roma refugees/ migrants by developing Roma-led campaigning;
- To increase Roma participation in the local decision making processes;
- To encourage practice that is more responsive to the needs of Roma migrants;
- To influence and co-shape local, national and European policies, which affect Roma refugees and migrants, ensuring that their perspective is effectively communicated to the UK Government.

The Project develops RSG's former advocacy work and takes it to the next level by utilizing data from the on-going frontline work as evidence and empowering Roma peer advocates in London. The Project's activities include:

- Delivering the Roma Forum in East London;
- Building strategic relationships with civil servants and parliamentarians; representing UK-based Roma perspective to the European decision makers;
- Developing RSG's policy position based on evidence provided by Roma community members and our casework;
- Publishing quarterly e-newsletters to increase awareness about Roma-specific needs amongst statutory and non-statutory agencies.

RSG are looking to continue to:

- Develop its existing frontline projects;
- Develop local and national Policy, Information and Campaigning work in order to empower Roma communities and strengthen effectiveness and capacity to influence policy and decision makers
- Further develop the Roma Support and Engagement Programme, which enables RSG to share our expertise and models of good practice with statutory and non-statutory agencies and develop our enterprising skills
- Promote an understanding of Roma culture and history
- Implement fund raising strategy in order to ensure the continuity of frontline services in the areas of advice and advocacy, education support, aspiration, oral history and health related projects.

Around 500 Roma have improved employability skills working with RSG. One beneficiary said:

*I come here for advice when I need it the most, when I don't understand what I should do, when I feel lost and when all doors seem to be closed. There are many people who feel the same way I do. The support I get here helps me to tackle my problems and gives me confidence. There is no another place in London like that for us.*



The on-going nature of learning that is of course founded on questioning and so doubt, invites further examination. As such 'good practice' as exemplified in the work of RSG encompasses such an ethos of exploration. From the material above it can be concluded that RSG has developed a sophisticated model of practice. It avoids emphasizing the many of the dichotomies that hold back learning and development, premised on age or relative position in the organizational hierarchy. Leadership and direction of the organization is the result collective activity, working within the broad framework of Roma rights and equality of access. The approach arises out of a mentoring ethos that has acted as a keystone in terms of organizational approach. This deploys activities and events, chosen, suggested or initiated by and/or alongside Roma, not as an end in themselves, but as pathways to continuous learning, advocacy and activism premised on building a more just, fair and equal society.

This collaborative operation allows Roma to become conversant with management and leadership structures and practice the same. Thus the hardship of 'starting from scratch' is avoided in terms of skills and knowledge, as is the danger of people being left to flounder organizationally, as is likely in oppressive and non-empathetic contexts. Yes, this sometimes does not implicate folk being left to learn from their mistakes, although it is more usual for people to make the same mistakes over and over again, especially if left without alternative ideas with regard to functioning.

RSG has an organic organizational structure that nurtures ability, motivation and interest from where people are at. To that extent RSG deploy a progressive model of participation with regard to Roma.

RSG embeds its work with and alongside Roma into its structures and processes at every level. This emphasis represents a holistic approach. This is at the very heart of RSG's strength and is why it endures and, even in these straightened times, prospers. It clearly understands its main resource is those it seeks to serve and facilitate; the organization is conscious it is defined by Roma and it is obviously energized by the participation, advocacy and activism of Roma. This avoids the common patronizing or even colonizing approach to Roma that sees these groups predominantly as a victimized minority and as such necessarily in need of help (as essentially 'helpless') and so the object of pity (as relatively 'pitiful'). RSG understand Roma as a vivacious addition to host societies, evidentially having the potential to hugely augment their context.



## **Carts work with the Witchford Traveller Youth Group**

*The following is written by Maureen Buchanan who has been involved with the project focused on from its earliest days. The 'Travellers' referred to come from groups who have customarily resided in, or resorted to the area (perhaps for hundreds of years in the case of some families) in the course of traditionally itinerant lifestyles. These groups have a diverse heritage and are made up of those from 'Showmen', Romany, Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Fenland 'van people' and formally settled groups that (for a range of economic and social reasons) habituated a travelling lifestyle, perhaps just three or four generations ago.*

*Of late Roma families are also making the district their home, both in a permanent and temporary sense. However, most of these groups have collectively come to be known as 'Travellers' over the last couple of decades. Some families at one time objected to this label as they felt it wrongly identified them as Irish Travellers and there are those who continue to insist on maintaining the identity designates familiar to them and their families (for example 'Romany').*

*Most 'Travellers' in the Witchford district are 'settled', that is they for at least other than a seasonal basis, reside on permanent sites, in conventional social or private housing. While some families have or continue to live in relative poverty, most come from what might be understood as 'average income' backgrounds. Contemporaneously educational attainment is mixed, but for the most part reflects regional averages, although entry further and higher education remains an exceptional rather than an expected achievement. This said, as the following to some extent illustrates, this position represents a marked development in terms of accomplishment and attitudes historically. This is a testament to Maureen's work, and (as she is the first to point out) the voluntary, part-time and full-time youth workers she has managed. However, none of this would have been possible without the collaboration, forwardly looking goodwill, commitment, hard work, insight, communal intelligence, joyful and sometimes challenging energy of Traveller groups, families and young people.*

### **History of the Traveller Youth Group**

The Witchford Traveller Youth Group began in 1993 as an 'after school' social group for young Travellers who attended Witchford Village College (from here on to be called the 'College'), based in East Cambridgeshire in the rural Fens of England. There was a programme of activities for various students and a large adult learning programme run by the Community Education Department with groups, clubs and classes both within the College and in various venues in local villages. None of the latter targeted Travellers and no Travellers (openly) attended any of the Youth programmes that were offered. Most of the young Travellers were unable to attend the village Youth Clubs. The rural nature of the Fens and the lack of transport in the area made evening or weekend attendances impossible for this group. We realized that beyond the school gate, the Traveller young people did not meet with their school friends at all socially. However, the College provided a late bus on two evenings per week that enabled students to remain at the College after normal hours, engaging with different interests and classes. So began the longest running Traveller Youth Group in the region.



At that point in time, few students readily identified themselves as Travellers. Many feared bullying and intimidation by other students. There were disruptions in classes as youngsters, who had perhaps missed months of schooling, whilst travelling with roving (nationwide) Fun Fairs, returned to school unable to fit back into the rhythm of the institutional year. These young people were quick to defend themselves in any arguments on the playground, and for the boys, bare-knuckle fighting was their common response to any name calling or unwanted rules from some staff. It was not unknown to see staff chasing a student, who had refused an instruction, or even worse, to see a teacher physically restraining a cornered student, who had misbehaved in some way.

Clearly such situations and events enraged anxious staff, students and parents alike and often it took some time to resolve issues and to keep Traveller students in College. Often parents wanted to withdraw their child for the young person's own protection, whilst staff felt Traveller children were unruly and wanted them out of the classroom. However, we felt that this was counterproductive to our aim to improve the life chances and education of the Traveller children. How could they learn if they were not involved? How would they have equal outcomes if they never had any options?



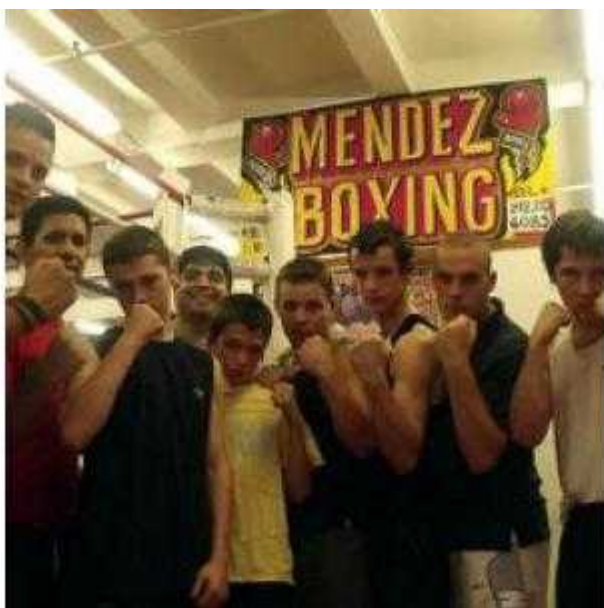
There were also, as in many Traveller groups, enormous misunderstandings about the relevance of the fixed school curriculum that looked to teach (for example) a 13 year old boy (for instance) French, Science or even Maths, while the family wanted him to learn (say) how to use carpentry or welding tools and be able to slot into the family business. Often, in the Fens, Travellers are self employed. They can be engaged in various means of earning a living. The days of working on the land or even picking fruit and vegetables were over and many had begun tarmac work (maintaining driveways etc.), tree felling or scrap metal work. Show families designed and ran their own fairground rides. The local farmers, who at one time had traditionally employed many Traveller families for their strawberry or market garden picking, had built dormitories on their farmland for European students, who they transported by coach each summer to the UK, in exchange for work and English lessons. The old work and opportunities that sustained many families in years gone by and led many to travel around the country (and sometimes beyond) as the seasons changed, no longer existed. The creation of the 'poly tunnel'

and the introduction of new varieties of crops have changed the nature of agricultural work (and so the concomitant workforce) in the UK dramatically over the last generation.

There is a comparatively large number of 'Show people' (families involved in fun fairs and sometimes circus) based in the Witchford area. Many are on the road (travelling) often with their families, between March and November. They return to their privately owned bases for the winter months. The College worked hard to create systems to keep in touch with their students during these absences, and were successful in setting up e-learning systems, supplying laptops and eventually mobile internet connections for all those travelling students. This linked in well with a media project called 'Savvy Chavvy' (smart Traveller) that help set up a social networking group similar to Facebook, but limited to Travellers.

For many Traveller families, as in many working class contexts in the last century, a teenage boy is seen as a valued asset in supporting the family income stream and a strong pair of hands, who could support their father, uncle or other family networks. It was the norm for young Traveller boys to leave school at 13 (during Year 9) and many families were satisfied if they could read and write, but were unimpressed by the wider curriculum that appeared to serve no useful purpose once they were working outside school.

This was the context that motivated us to set up the Traveller Youth Group; we had identified a need and hoped we could create a strategy, with some objectives, that would suit everyone involved. We were strongly of the view that the day-to-day agenda was a responsibility that needed to be taken by young Travellers and not the institution or its representatives. As such, it was essential for them to identify what they wanted to achieve and to work with us in making it happen.



### **Self governing Committee structures**

It was against this backdrop that attendance of the Traveller Youth Group was offered to students, with the proviso that any activities were supported by an adult committee that included parents to oversee fund raising; there was no money for programmes outside the standard curriculum or to support workers in their efforts. Parents were supportive, as they saw the benefits to their children. Some activities extended to include the parents occasionally, so that staff, parents and young people became more familiar with each other, providing a situation wherein helpful levels of trust could develop.

There are some essential features in a successful project that we used as a model namely:

- Communication
- Clear roles
- Understanding and commitment

- Clear boundaries – it was not an easy option, but we felt some behaviour needed questioning at times
- Openness and shared values
- Honesty
- Conflict resolution – talking issues through between individual students, staff and/or students
- Clear objectives and timescales
- Leadership, when appropriate – a trip to New York took courage for many participants and their families in terms of ‘letting-go’.
- Reliability and punctuality – for instance, if a minibus was booked it would not wait beyond a given time.
- Dialogue within relationships – offering different viewpoints of individual actions
- Agreed expectations about inputs, outputs and outcomes



Over the years a weekly club has run with young Travellers making decisions about the content of the programme, organising and running events for themselves, with the support of Youth and Community workers. The young people learned new skills in financial control, as they were responsible for weekly subscriptions (relatively small payments) for attendance and for external bookings of minibuses for outings, or coaches for larger events such as Appleby Horse Fair. They also helped to write external funding applications for financial grants and, over the last 20 years, had considerable success with the new National Lottery (a national fundraising gambling scheme for voluntary organisations and general ‘good causes’) as well as regional and local grants to support their activities. The young Travellers have learned how to organize themselves and others (no mean feat) and to understand that their own health and safety is important, for example when undertaking motor-bike or horse riding. The activities also included looking at their own family histories or learning about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller lifestyles (both past and present) plus research into the Holocaust, with visits to museums. They produced by writing, editing and learning photography skills various books about their activities, many of which were distributed to non-Travellers in the area. This widened the understanding of the families who live alongside Travellers, as neighbours in the villages or outlying areas.



*Horse preparation at Appleby Fair*



*Old style bow topped caravans, rarely seen these days apart from at Horse Fairs.*

### **A challenge to Staff**

The staff of a Traveller Youth Club needed significant support and training in conflict resolution, cultural awareness and rejection of stereotyping (in terms of their own attitudes and responses) as (like us all) their personal biases required questioning and developing, and if necessary had to be repressed, as they learned to listen to the families and young people in order to see how best to work alongside them. Many teachers employed by the College were unhappy about the creation of a separate youth group, as they wanted Traveller young people to assimilate with the existing provision. But the fact was the students did not attend other activities and were therefore excluded from social events and activity weeks (students going away for a week with staff for extra curricula fun activities).

### **A challenge to behaviour**

The attendance at the Traveller Youth Group was a challenge to young people, as there were staff expectations of punctuality, good behaviour and respect for everyone. This resulted in many trying to push the boundaries in an effort to define personal and social limitations/possibilities. They quickly understood that the staff was not a

soft and woolly group, and that conformity to the rules (that they had previously set for themselves) was the best way to ensure inclusion in the occasional trips to the cinema or to the coast. They all had to earn their favourite activities, for example, if they wanted to learn to ride Fen Bikes (small 50/100 cc motorbikes, often used illegally by youngsters to get around the rural area between villages) they first had to learn how to service them, to repair punctures, and understand the safety requirements and the law as it applied to the use of these vehicles; thus, despite some protests, helmets were obligatory - no amount of excuses or reasons why a helmet was unnecessary would get them onto a bike without one and so they all learned to ride safely, earning CBT (competence) Certificates confirming their efficiency at servicing and riding their machines. This also ensured greater safety for the wider public, who may well have been run down by the old style (wilder) riders, who were fearful of being caught by the Police.



## Trust

There was an essential ingredient to the success of the Traveller Youth Group and that was the growth of trust between the young people, staff, parents and managers. However, it is impossible to 'front-load' trust; it, like respect, needs to be earned. Everyone was working together to improve their prospects and sometimes bad news had to be delivered to parents, for example if young people had to be excluded for a week for some misdemeanour (violence could not be tolerated). This said, sometimes praise was heaped upon a successful individual who had excelled in some way. This trust was often thought to be misplaced by some non-travellers, who felt (for instance, among other negative perceptions) that *'travellers are all criminals and thieves'* etc. But it was the case that in all the years I managed the group I never found any young person to be dishonest. In fact I frequently relied upon them to remind me to pick up my handbag or other possessions that I might otherwise have lost or forgotten. They took care of all the equipment, whether it was laptops, PCs, cameras, videos, TV, music mixers; nothing was ever damaged or lost and it would be difficult to say this was the case in many other clubs and projects for young people. Of all the thousands of young people who have passed through the Youth and Adult provision under my guidance, it was only young Traveller students who offered me some hand made gift or personal treasure as a personal 'thank you' for support. Trust and generosity are perhaps endemic as reflected sentiments and a major facet or product of the mutual respect that leads to progress and success.

The aims of the Traveller Youth Group were:

- To raise the self esteem of the individual young people (note that non-Traveller young people were welcome, as were Travellers at other clubs and projects and mingling became natural over time).
- To raise awareness of their own individual cultural heritage that they could be proud to acknowledge (without creating further isolation). Some identified themselves as Romany, others as Show-people and still some preferred to be known as Travellers or Gypsies. We used the term 'Travellers' as an agreed, all encompassing term (although in other contexts this might not be accepted).
- To raise the profile, awareness and understanding of Travellers amongst the non-Traveller population.



- To build a relationship between the Travellers and the College that would undermine any feelings of mistrust.
- To reduce any behavioral issues and truancy that may exist.
- To liaise with other agencies to broaden understanding of needs and, at times, to seek funding.

The Community Education team made significant and conscious efforts to break down barriers put up by the majority community. Workers reported at local Parish Council meetings about Traveller encampments and raised concerns about the way Travellers were sometimes being discussed negatively. The team regularly publicized activities and achievements of Travellers, using College notice boards, through local newsletters and coverage in the local press (for example, when young Travellers have won individual or group awards, press releases and photos were issued). But these efforts to present positive images of Travellers have also been perceived by some people as evidence of ‘favoritism’ and negative press was always more readily and boldly presented by the local newspapers, radio and television than our good practice.

Attendance at the group was the gateway for access to other facilities and events, such as away days, Christmas parties and sporting tournaments. ‘Paper Flowers’ - a workshop aimed at publishing a collection of writings and photography by Travellers - was the first major undertaking of the group. The Travellers have achieved recognition both individually and collectively in such spheres. A Traveller boy accepted the High Sheriff’s award at the school assembly on behalf of the group for their book, and a Traveller young woman won an individual award for her poetry, which was fostered through the Paper Flowers project. Two students travelled to Rome in 1996 to collect an award at an International Literacy Competition in Italy for the Paper Flowers publication. This was the first of our many European representative trips from each of the local youth clubs. The Traveller youth group attended an International camp at Montpellier in the same year.

The group organized their own 10-week programme that typically consisted of:

- Establishing club rules and programme or updating them from the previous year.
- Cooking workshop – e.g. ‘make your own pizza’ (including basic food hygiene certification).
- Personal hygiene workshop that included the distribution of samples of deodorants and perfumes donated by local shops.
- Cinema trip to an age appropriate film.
- Orienteering (the Fens offer a lot of options for this) with ‘Black Box’ hunting in teams.
- Climbing walls & outdoor pursuits.
- Swimming lessons at the local pool.
- Evaluation week – the group discuss what worked and praised individuals who organized the different weeks.

Each of the above required people to take on varying levels of responsibility voluntarily, which encouraged the development of confidence and the building of self esteem. The weekly group size could vary between 10 and 45, depending on the time of year or the nature of the activities. The activities offered the opportunity for staff to support young people in many different ways in other areas of life, as such the activities can be thought of as tools to reach out, build trust and life-skills, rather than just an end in themselves (which reflects the traditional ethos of good youth work practice).

There were other specific weekend workshops, such as video-making, circus skills, lessons in steel drum playing and similar fun themes. But some workshops were used to address behavior, for instance fighting, personal development and relationships. Over the years there have been many trips to London, Norwich, different Coastal towns as well as local visits and outings, for example go-karting, motor bike training, the theatre and cinema. The first overnight stay took place at an activity centre in Northamptonshire. This was a success, with both parents and young people taking part. It sealed the trust between all concerned and was a milestone in the progress of the group. Previously Traveller children had not been allowed to stay away from home overnight.

Intensive work has often been necessary when young Travellers first join the groups, and it is clear that they do not expect the ‘usual’ ground rules. The young Travellers we have worked with are usually extremely well-

behaved around their families and in the home environment, as they understand that respect is gained by love and imitation of adult conduct; external discipline is not usually necessary. Explicit systems of 'outside rules' are less familiar, and disruptive behaviour can often be a response to the threat posed by this unfamiliar situation. Special events, such as the first Christmas party held in 1995, was a new social experience for some young Travellers, who can become tremendously over-excited and unruly. It has to be understood this is not directly related to identity or ethnicity, but unfamiliarity with certain social expectations in particular environments. So some rules had to be agreed by the young people, but they were 'managed' with their agreement, by the youth workers. After three warnings, disruptive young people were not allowed to attend certain activities - although they are never excluded outright from the group. The youth workers gained respect by being seen to enforce the rules fairly and the lure of an exciting trip usually encouraged good behaviour after the odd indiscretion, as not unusually peer authority kept everyone in order.

As an additional support the Community Education office also operated an 'Open-Door' policy for young Travellers during lunch times, as they sometimes felt pressure from non-Traveller students at this point in the day. This is well used by Traveller students, reflecting an ongoing need. They often bring newcomers to meet the staff, offering new ways to make contact. The tone of these sessions is positive - with an emphasis on the activities that the young people are directly involved in organizing, so they are given access to telephones and support in making bookings on the internet etc. This separate time for organizing the group provided more up time for the weekly group meetings and worked well.



The local authority organized an external review of the work in the area with Travellers and the main researcher commented in her conclusion that:

*“Teachers at the school often take advantage of the expertise of the Community Education team in dealing with disciplinary problems amongst the Traveller pupils. It has already been mentioned that teenage Traveller boys may be encouraged to become economically active at a far younger age than most non-Travellers. The effect of being pushed into adulthood very quickly by their families, and the restriction of opportunities for fun, was thought by the youth worker to lead many young Travellers into disruptive behaviour, such as setting off fire bells. This behaviour was often met with heavy-handed*

*responses from teachers, who were unable to give the one-to-one attention which was needed, or might be responded to equally inappropriately by sending offenders home. There had been examples of alienation of Traveller pupils which the youth worker felt were avoidable if agencies could work together to resolve issues more effectively. Because of their rapport with young Travellers, the Community Education team is often treated by teachers as 'gatekeepers' who are able to 'control' Traveller pupils. However, despite their readiness to take on preventive work, youth workers did not necessarily feel they had a role in the disciplining of individual pupils. Both Community Education staff and the Team for Traveller Education were concerned about the tendency to channel all issues to do with Traveller pupils through them, rather than increasing the ability of classroom teachers to deal effectively with Traveller pupils. Some teachers had proved willing to discuss problems with youth workers, such as the PE teacher who relaxed uniform requirements in response to Traveller pupils' concerns about modesty". Over time the School is beginning to manage the issues themselves taking guidance from the Senior Management Team that includes the Community Education Manager and this gives strength to the provision. "*

### **Aiming Higher and improving academic achievement**

As a result of the success of the Traveller Youth Group and the work at the College, we had the largest number of GRT (Gypsy, Roma, Traveller) students on roll in Cambridgeshire and were listed as demonstrating good practice in a Department of Education document in 2003 called 'Aiming Higher' raising the achievement of GRT students

Front cover of the Department for Education Report on 'The Inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children' featured young Travellers from Witchford (photo taken in my office).



### **Witchford 'Savvy Chavvy' 'You've been logged' and the 'Boxing Club'**

We also worked with national Traveller Groups and had some success working on a media project with Jake Bowers, a Romany journalist who invited us to join another national project. This came about after a MORI poll in England, which found that more than one third of adults taking part admitted to being prejudiced against Travellers/Gypsies. Mainstream media can frequently reinforce these prejudices. Combining social media with web technology in a unique social networking site, 'Savvy Chavvy' gave young members of this often

misrepresented and marginalized community the opportunity to take control of how they are perceived. Fifty young bursary award-holders were trained in social media techniques – ten students were from the College. Nationally they have made short films on topics as diverse as religion, immigration issues, Gypsy boxing clubs, and ways to tackle the bullying faced by young Gypsy and Travellers in mainstream education.

As the trained students produced photography, podcasts and video blogs, they encouraged participation from an expanding membership base. This phenomenon (perhaps movement) is now over 1,000 strong and continually growing. A user-administered community, 'Savvy Chavvy' is becoming a democratic outlet for young Gypsy and Traveller stories to move into the mainstream media (see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7so\\_HuWBnvA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7so_HuWBnvA)).

Supporting social life, individual and group purpose, with much of the Traveller community no longer able to move around, this type of social networking will go some way to countering the declining community cohesion and communication in and between extended families. Providing a place to chat, joke and catch up, as well as a hub for citizen journalism and user-generated media, Savvy Chavvy also functions as a forum for young Travellers. Reflecting the vibrancy of these population groups, they discuss topics ranging from the serious (bullying in mainstream education) to the light-hearted (organising dances). Savvy Chavvy aims to provide young Gypsies and Travellers with a means to build confidence and skills to generate and populate a social networking site through which they can communicate with each other, as well as the wider world, as citizen journalists. It seeks to create a sense that young people are able to develop and change their culture, identity and context and how it might be perceived, without having to depend on others. It also encourages and supports different functional and communication skills – for example the students involved at the College planned and carried out interviews, using digital recorders. They learned to use software that enabled them to edit their work, they wrote their own film scripts, planned musical sequences and performed within the film. The process of working with former BBC media crew people and Jake Bowers, they have increased their self-confidence, discussed issues relevant to them and been able to plan to express their ideas and get their own message out. It has offered them the opportunity to raise their aspirations and hopefully the project will be something they are all proud of and can build upon.

We also created a GRT after school project to work on creating a web space for GRT news and a link with Rokker Radio (a dedicated GRT radio station) with media training that encourages GRT journalism. Films were scripted, filmed, acted and produced by GRT students. The GRT after School group created two DVDs that they produced during the 'Media Box Project'. The first is called "You've been Logged" and tells the tale of a young Gypsy girl being verbally abused by other students in a school situation and all Travellers enthusiastically played the parts. Basically the story shows when a student relates an issue of verbal abuse to a teacher, the response is not sufficient to make a difference and this may lead to the student retaliating with their fists to 'solve' the problem. The students demonstrated how they want issues and the details of abusers 'Logged', so that subsequent problems might be reduced. This was all scripted, filmed and edited by the GRT students involved with the project. Equally well done was the second DVD called 'The Boxing Club'. This was all scripted, filmed and edited by the ten GRT students involved with the project. This outlines the work done with people from the GRT groups as boxing coaches affiliated to the British Board of Boxing Control and shows how the sport encourages physical health, training and self-discipline.

This group successfully raised grant funding and took the initiative to arrange a trip to a New York Boxing Club. This represented the longest (in terms of distance) trip undertaken by the Traveller Group. The experience was both exciting and educational as many had never left the immediate area of the UK where they were born and brought up.



*Boxing demonstration May 2014*

Carts Charity has continued the work with the Traveller Youth Group over the last couple of years, as the College management structure and financial systems changed due to Government spending cuts. It has organised a series of projects aimed at exploring the barriers students in deprived areas face.

The characteristics that supported our success include:

- Dynamic youth leaders who establish a ‘can do’ culture and who value and motivate other volunteers and part time staff.
- The use of systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of the work with young Travellers and associated curriculum, as well as individual progress of both young people and staff. Training is an ongoing feature to both update and improve motivation and knowledge.
- The projects are ‘learning organizations’, and make experiences and learning fun rather formal activities, so we all grow together.
- We have tailored the annual programmes specifically to meet the needs of the young people; these involve flexible approaches.
- We set ambitious targets for everyone, track them informally and intervene immediately should anyone fall behind or drop out, so follow up procedures are important.
- We are creative about recruitment and retention of staff, often enlisting people from the local community and ex-group members for all staff positions.

The following is a summary of the ‘extra mile’ activities we feel we have made (in addition to the above) to specifically target the most disadvantaged group of young people in our area:

- Introduce role models to show young people that individuals from similar backgrounds to their own have been successful (so by implication they also can achieve their ambitions).
- Communicate to young people appropriate ways of talking, writing, and behaving in formal environments (for example when requesting grant funding).
- Set non-negotiable standards of behaviour and mutual respect.
- Provide cultural opportunities that they would otherwise not have access to (sport, art, and other activities).
- Ensure staff are socially attuned and learn to interact with Travellers in non-patronizing ways.
- Work harder in praising positive behaviour with rewards, mentions, certificates, and prizes.
- Do more outreach work, including out-of-hours support and working with families.
- Establish a ‘no excuses’ culture where no one gets away with not working, not behaving, not co-operating, not trying, or not attending.
- Securing attention, engagement, and mutual respect.
- Raising aspirations for everyone.
- Build students’ repertoire of spoken and written language.
- Develop students’ social, emotional and behavioural skills.
- Equip young people with skills for the future.
- Hold people to their word; no-one fails without a fight for their success and this may mean specific support during transition points in their lives.



*Traveller Boys presenting their projects to the Grundtvig Group May 2014*

Over the last twenty years the Witchford Traveller Youth Group has worked alongside hundreds of young Gypsy, Romany and Traveller people and overwhelmingly the theme has been fun, fun, fun! The core of the work has included projects that offer pragmatic skills and lots of laughter, smiles and friendship from adults to the youngest child and back again, with respect for culture, faith and needs. But overall it has been a success story mainly for individuals, who have enjoyed and benefitted from their specific experiences of working with us. Alas it has also illustrated how long it takes to change non-Traveller attitudes and prejudices towards their local neighbours and demonstrates that change is a very slow process; attitudes are often passed from one generation to another, all too commonly without good cause.

Maureen Buchanan EU Project Director, Carts Charity. UK





## Syrian Citizens

*The following contribution from partners from Mardin, Turkey presents an example of social compassion to a level that many of us would find hard to envisage being extended in our own contexts. We believe it provides an exemplar in terms of attitude toward and empathy for the 'other'; a humane response that we perhaps need to understand and interpret into other milieu in a world that is increasingly needing to find moral and ethical ways of coping with mass migration that often Roma are caught up in and/or are part of.*

Because of the internal conflicts, from April of 2011, Syrian citizens began to arrive in Turkey. Prime Ministry, Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) has satisfied all humanitarian needs of those who have sought sanctuary in 22 camps, located in 10 provinces.

The daily humanitarian needs and health services of recent Syrian arrivals in Turkey, who live outside the camps in various provinces of Turkey, have been provided in coordination with AFAD. Those with temporary admission were placed in the tent cities located at Yaylada 1, Altınözü, Reyhanlı, the first stage beginning from May-June 2011.

Related ministries, state institutions and organizations, and the Turkish Red Crescent provide shelters, food, health, security, social activity, education, religious service, translation services, telecommunication, banking and other services in each tent and container city.

The tent and container cities have schools, mosques, a centre of trade, police stations, health centres, press meeting rooms, playgrounds, television rooms, grocery stores, sewing courses, water tanks, purifying centres, power distribution units and generators.

At the time of writing there are more than 1.7 million Syrian people in Turkey. Half of this number is below the age of 18.

According to the standards of the United Nations, the Turkish Government spent \$4.5 million in response to the needs of Syrian people from 2011 to the present.

### **Current status in Mardin**


In Mardin, Syrian citizens began to live outside of the camp situation from May 2011, but from July 2013 they were placed Midyat Tent-City (the only Tent-City for Syrian Citizens in Mardin).



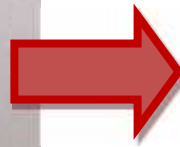
## Population statistics.

Nearly 50,000 Syrian citizens are living in Mardin. There are approximately 3,000 currently residing in Midyat tent city; 47,000 live outside the tent city. It should be remembered that the total population Mardin Province is only 745,000.

## Administrative decisions

	2014
Syrian Citizens that have a residence permit	(Nearly) 1,900
Syrian Citizens who hold a 'foreigner identification' document  	(Nearly) 22,500
With the above document a Syrian citizen can stay in Turkey at a permanent address and can benefit from healthcare, education (excluding higher education) and social welfare services.	

## Documents relating to administrative decisions.



**RESIDENCE  
PERMIT**



## FOREIGNER IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENT

### Midyat tent city

Covering an area 336,000 square metres, the Midyat camp is made up of 2,000 tents; it has the capacity to serve 6,000 people. Potable water and showering facilities are provided by drilling and there is a sewage infrastructure.

The camp has social facilities, such as a playground, a sports area and computer rooms. The camp also provides a translation service. The Turkish Red Crescent provides food and shelter and other basic services.



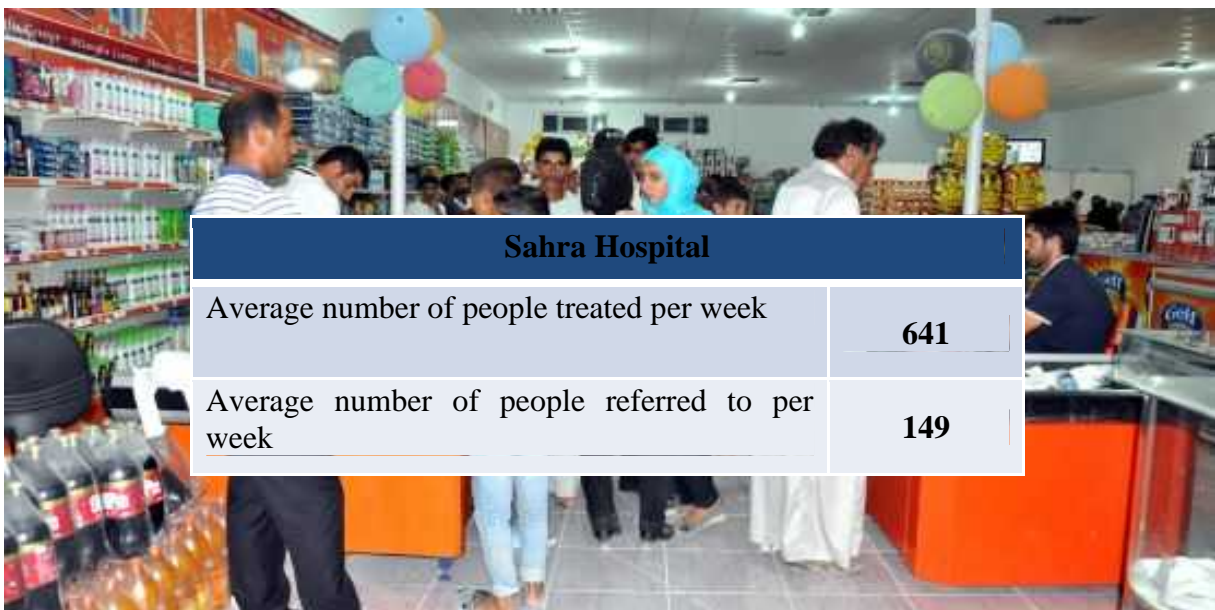
The public health centre, the Sahra Hospital, has 7 doctors, 11 other medical staff and an ambulance, that is used for outreach medical services.



The camp has six mosques and three Quran schools. Around 6,500 books (suitable religious reading) have been distributed.



Every Syrian citizen that lives in the camp receives 85 Turkish Lira a month. The camp has a market that has a range of merchandise on sale.



### **Health services outside the tent-city**

The foreigner identification document allows those who live outside of the tent city to access hospital and healthcare services.

### **Education statistics**

There are two types of schools in Mardin for Syrian students. Those only for Syrian Students are attended by 3,511 children. These institutions are staffed by 168 teachers.

There are 528 Syrian students studying at Ministry of National Education schools.



### **Social welfare services**



Civil servants work at Department of Religious Affairs of Mardin. They usually visit Syrians who live outside the camp, providing them with food and clothes.



The Mardin Governorship also provides services that include provision of food, clothes, coal and other services.

During Ramadan four evening meals were organized for Syrian citizens. After every meal lots of shoes and clothes were distributed.



## **Institut für Migrations- und Aussiedlerfragen Heimvolkshochschule St. Hedwigs-Haus e. V.**

*The following demonstrates some means and approaches to promote forms of social understanding to facilitate cultural integrative responses. The reader might recognise how these might be used, adapted and reinterpreted in a range of ways to fit various contexts, social and identity groups. The same could also include Roma.*



Our residential adult education centre – St. Hedwigs-Haus – is a recognized institution for adult education. It offers accommodation for its learners (like a boarding school). It is open for any person interested in our courses.

The main target groups are however migrants coming originally from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Our work is focused on life-long learning in the fields of political, social and cultural education. Our residential education centre is a place where time and space is devoted to learning. Located in the heart of the Teutoburger Forest, in an oasis of tranquillity, a distinctive natural environment, it is a place of education with set in a unique ethos.

Each year about 3,000 participants take part in about 130 courses which, on average, last three to seven days. St. Hedwigs-Haus is more than just an education centre. Here we learn, work, live and relax together in an informal atmosphere. Far away from the hectic pace of daily life, we have been organising further education courses for approximately 50 years.



*Learners learning*

The organization and spirit of the institution relates to a model of classical residential education (Heimvolkshochschule) resonant of the facility Danish writer, poet, philosopher and pastor Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (see below) founded in 1840.



We have adopted his pedagogical model of consolidated living and learning. One of the main concepts we follow today is life-long learning. Our participants learn and live under the same roof. We provide a place for open dialogue, information transfer, understanding, relaxation and tranquility.

The main focus of our work from the mid-1950s to the late-1970s was to support the refugees and those otherwise expelled from their homeland. Later we provided services for ethnic Germans from diverse Eastern European countries. It was our aim to help them deal with their new situation and culture in the newly founded democracy of West Germany.

In the 1980s, following Glasnost and Perestroika, ethnic Germans were able to leave the Soviet Union. With the fall of the Iron Curtain more and more ethnic Germans began arriving in Germany. They represent the largest group of immigrants in our country. Since 1990 our work has concentrated on the integration of migrant and ethnic Germans coming originally from the countries of the former Soviet Union.

We see the main challenge of our work as the ‘sheltering of new citizens’. We believe that the demographic vitality of these new citizens is a great advantage for our society. One of our approaches is to win network partners (working voluntarily) from the circles of migrants. These people are important as leaders in the reality of migrants. They contribute to the integration process as mediators, who connect our institution with other migrants who commit themselves in the crucial places (schools, churches, neighborhoods, and migrant organizations organized and created by migrants).



*Consolidated living and learning*

Our main task is to accompany these people in their voluntary work, discovering talents, encouraging and challenging our learners within the sphere of our activities. The trust between our staff and the learners is built on person-to-person encounters and the hospitality of all our staff members.

New ideas have been developed, tested and evaluated. They have led to a wide variety of innovative seminars and training methods, such as business games, future workshops and project realisations, but we also deploy classical methods of information retrieval and role plays. Collaboration with network partners (working voluntarily) as mediators and our target groups is encouraged. Sustainable relationships between us and these networks, together with personal contacts with new citizens in the community, are the basis of our success. In this way, our work develops.

As already mentioned, in our daily work we concentrate on ethnic German immigrants. For 25 years we have been facing this particular phenomenon. Today around 3 million ethnic German immigrants live in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1 million of which live in North Rhine Westphalia, the region where our institution is situated.

This situation presents very complex and sensitive challenges for the nation in terms of the social integration of these new citizens. We are convinced that their integration is very important with regard to creating and maintaining social cohesion in our society and for economic development of the nation. The task of the majority of the host society is to offer these people possibilities to participate in all the different aspects of life in Germany.

We feel that our work has contributed greatly to social and political reconciliation and good relations with other countries, particularly Poland. Exchanges between our house and Poland are regular events. Following World War II Germans were expelled from their homeland in the former Eastern part of Germany (now Poland), the Czech Republic and Romania. The Catholic refugees founded the St. Hedwigs Association.



The focus of work at that time was to support the refugees and others expelled from their former homelands.

Now, nearly 70 years on, we still have good contacts and relationships with these people and/or their children and grandchildren. It is great honour for our institution to have participated in the integration process of these people and we hope to continue contribute to the successful integration of ethnic German immigrants who have come to our education centre over the last 25 years.

As outlined above, our work is focused on life-long learning in the fields of political, social and cultural education. The themes of our seminars and workshops include:

- Participation in the new community.
- Learning democracy.
- Learning about Europe.
- Learning about social structures and laws.
- Learning about different milieus in our society.
- Training courses for voluntary work in the community.
- Finding one's own identity.
- Analysis of one's own biography.
- Challenges in the work situation.
- Self-confidence building.
- Aesthetic workshops.

Although the ethnic German immigrants show their willingness to belong to the majority society in Germany, over recent years there is an increasing tendency to separate in small groups or even for some to become isolated from the general social environment. Moreover, there are conflicts of various kinds between groups of foreign origin. Intercultural education and communication are necessary steps in order to accelerate learning processes among members of all social groups. Through many years of experience of building the 'East-West-bridge', particularly in the field of intercultural education, we have developed a specialist approach to diverse social groups of migrants coming from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Our teachers have grown to understand this milieu and are familiar with the people involved. Through this way of work, we believe we achieve a high level of acceptance of our education centre.



*Intercultural dialogue in action*

The trust that learners have in our institution and its staff is based on the discovery of the skills that migrants bring and supporting them within a framework of the intercultural dialogue. Our courses include opportunities for learners to understand and manage different realities and become aware of their own cultural and biographical background. Moreover, they are encouraged to look at themselves from different perspectives. They also have the time and space to see different value orientations via observing other learners. This method is very important for us because, together with other approaches, a unique atmosphere is generated, encouraging connection to a fruitful and pleasant work environment. We have found acceptance, warmth, good relationships and trust arise out of this approach. At our institution we practice hospitality and resist xenophobia.

Our training courses are usually 3 to 7 days in duration. We work intensively with learners, but they also have a ample time for themselves and getting to know each other. Our learners enjoy contributing to the lessons. They learn not only to understand others better but to accept the 'otherness' of their peers. They also learn to reflect on their own actions and attitudes and so develop greater understanding of themselves.

It is important that our learners come to us from different places in Germany, so they can, among themselves, exchange their knowledge and experience gained during integration process in Germany.

Our experience in working with the learners in the ways outlined above shows that working, learning, eating and singing together, over significant periods of time, can produce conditions for a wide range of achievement and success for all involved.

Other facets of our work that together make our offer unique include:

- The way of teaching and the content of the seminars.
- The personal approach and uncomplicated manner of our colleagues.
- The scenic location of our institution.
- The good food and hospitality.

As indicated above, aspects of the training we offer focuses on intercultural communication. We generate and use many exercises and case studies, based on the everyday life of the learners. These can be very effectively used to influence volunteering in the community. The ideas of those involved are accepted here as well as their criticism, in order to work out a solution to any learning obstacles or difficulties.

For several years our institution has been participating in European projects like Grundtvig and Socrates. A good example of our everyday work is our multilateral Grundtvig project - 'Unused potential of Senior Migrants – Experts for Life' (01.10.2010 - 30.09.2012). There are two different although comparatively similar groups of users who profit from this project:

### *1. Senior Migrants*

Having come to another country, the migrants are sometimes unable to offer their full experience of giving help to and taking care of each other (e.g. in the family, in the

neighborhood or among close friends) as they might have formally in their native countries. As a result there are a lot of migrants who can sometimes feel relatively useless and isolated. As such there is a risk that their abilities and skills may not be as well used as they might be. Often they look to fulfill traditional or new useful tasks.

## *2. Migrants looking for help*

The main beneficiaries of this project are those migrants who maintain traditional or habituated ways of solving problems. They are sometimes unable find connections with their new home country. These people can require help and guidance in areas such as child care, parental support, or the care of sick and old people.

The aim of the project ‘Unused potential of senior migrants – Experts for life’ was to bring these two groups together and to reach the following results:

- Senior Migrants address isolation and sense of uselessness. Using their abilities and skills to help the others, they become more self-confident.
- The group of the migrants in need finds support in various spheres of life free of charge. They accept this support more easily from people from their own cultural background, especially because of problems with the new language.
- As Senior Migrants commit themselves as volunteers, the authorities and the supporting organizations are no longer the only place to go for help. This is a saving in terms of local and national government expense.

There were five project partners working in the sphere of integration of migrants all over Europe. During the project six, 10-day training units took place in five partner countries: Lithuania, Germany, Greece, Italy and Finland.

The migrants were trained in various fields, such as:

- Biographical learning.
- Project management.
- Intercultural communication.
- How to work with emotions.
- Reciprocal maieutic<sup>2</sup> approach.
- Country specific conditions: National Health Services, child care (kindergarten, nursery school), education system, parental involvement.

In the field of new citizens solidarity and subsidiarity there are no theoretically known values, only lived practice. The feedback from the different social groups, where the trained Senior Migrants have already been working, suggest how positively this training is being accepted in wider society. The encouraging feedback of the Senior Migrants who had been trained further evidences this. We note, especially for those

---

<sup>2</sup> A pedagogical method synonymous with the Socratic Method. Maieutics is based on the belief that many important lessons and truths cannot be taught directly as a transmission of knowledge from an instructor to a learner, but instead the learner learns these truths by interacting with an instructor and through his or her own experience.

who play a part in the life of the society, the integration process runs forward relatively quickly.

Over the two year duration of this project more than one hundred migrants were trained as Senior Migrants. These Senior Migrants are currently helping migrants in need from their own cultural background. Even after the conclusion of the project the dissemination continues to reach more and more migrants – as potential future Senior Migrants or as migrants in need.

The effectiveness of the project ‘Unused potentials of senior migrants – Experts for life’ is, as such, exemplary. The experiences encapsulated in this work can be used by other institutions working in the field of integration and by migrants who want to become Senior Migrants. It can be used as support and inspiration these individuals and groups.



### **The Oerlinghausen meditation path – Socratic Dialogue**

*The following is an example of just one of the techniques/approaches used to promote the work and processes outlined above.*

Brief description: This special path leading from the chapel of St. Hedwigs-Haus in Oerlinghausen to the St. Hilfkreuz, on the Tönsberg in the Teutoburger Forest, is marked by seven stones representing seven virtues of Christianity (four ‘Cardinal’ virtues of prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance and three ‘Theological’ virtues: faith, hope and love).

It is a way to apply the ‘Socratic method’ of dialogue with migrant or multicultural groups. The method uses the principles of rationality, controversy and plurality – the major goals of political education.

Whilst walking along the path it is easy to converse, discuss and philosophize, each stone being used as a place to stop and begin new discussions about virtues and values in life.

*Age of participants:* 17 – 99

*Group size:* 4 -25

*Target group / characteristics of the group:*

Diverse groups, especially migrant groups with limited knowledge of German, educationally disadvantaged participants, but it can be difficult for participants with physical handicaps

*Duration:* Approx. 2 hours

*Location:* Oerlinghausen meditation path in the Teutoburger Forest

*Aims:*

- Strengthening of democratic competence.
- Getting an idea about Christian virtues.
- Promoting democratic virtues, personal values and the values of others.
- Reflection: Thinking independently and critically.
- Encouraging speaking and discussion.
- Defining problems and proposing reasonable answers.
- Using specific, thought-provoking questions to encourage the exchange of cultural perspectives.

*Additional commentary on the application of the method:*

Conversation group - Socratic Dialogue is practiced in groups with the help of a facilitator, so that self-confidence in one's own thinking is enhanced.

Prior to the application of the Socratic Dialogue, the group members should become acquainted with one another, since the method draws substantially on the mutual knowledge of the participants in relation to values and virtues. Appeals to authorities outside the group should be strictly avoided.

Application - In a seminar room, the participants make preparations for the 90 minute walk. Some practical information can be given at this point; weather conditions, appropriate clothing and shoes, etc.

While walking, the group must be considerate of slower participants; all members will wait at each stone until the entire group has assembled around it. At this point, the facilitator provides the group with certain thematic questions relating to the specific virtues on each of the stones.

Facilitator - The group leader has a difficult task in this context. S/he should be aware of the content of the discussion and also on the methodological steps being taken. The length of the discussions at each stone needs an appropriate time limit. The facilitator should be well-informed about the themes being discussed and prepare open questions on the topic.

As the participants cannot keep track of all small-group discussions simultaneously, the facilitator should summarize the content of these discussions for the entire group at the end of each round.

Conversation theme - The themes are predetermined, but the facilitator should organize the discussions in such a way that the participants begin with their own examples and move towards more general perspectives.

Meta-conversation - After the walk is finished, a conversation about the method itself is important.

*Experiences:*

Our positive experiences show that this method is especially appealing to migrants, in part because of its highly flexible nature. The participants are free to participate (or not) in the conversational process. The meditation path is a completely new experience for most people. The act of walking in the forest can enhance communication in small groups, and fosters familiarity within the group as a whole.

Difficulties with language might be overcome with translation. Such difficulties are mostly unproblematic, since the participants have the opportunity to speak informally in their native language.

A feeling of warmth and acceptance emerges in the group. Participants who are otherwise not academically inclined find the opportunity to speak in the context of the new surroundings.

Moving around in the forest can be physically and psychologically stimulating. Participants tend to provide in-depth answers.

Age is typically not an issue, although the uphill climb can prove too arduous for certain older or otherwise physically challenged participants. The facilitator is responsible for considering such issues with the group before embarking.

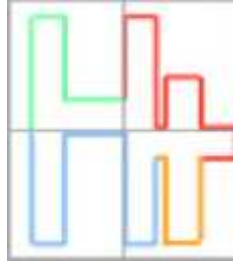
A smaller group of about 10 people is comfortable, but the method could also be implemented with groups of up to 25 participants.

The weather can be a problem with this method. Another potential difficulty comes when attempting to summarize the content and results of several small discussions. It can also be problematic to reach participants who voluntarily decide to withdraw from the discussion, perhaps because of physical or psychological limitations.

The fostering of a 'culture of discussion' is one means of developing democratic competence in an egalitarian, pluralistic society. The 'new' citizens usually recognize the necessity and chance of participation in socio-political decision-making processes; they often learn the extent to which this active participation is a necessary condition in building democracy, and how it can contribute to positive outcomes in their daily lives.

# HochVier - Gesellschaft für politische und interkulturelle Bildung e. V.

## *Education against Anti-Tsiganism*



As a small third sector organisation, we are mostly involved in providing non-formal education for learners of all ages and backgrounds in the German Federal State of Brandenburg. However, a principle focus of our work is working with those who are disadvantaged in terms access to education, for instance migrants and other minorities, early school leavers, persons living in relatively isolated rural areas and women. The organisation seeks to improve access to learning experience for such groups, so strengthening their social, political and economic participation. We adapt to the learning needs and interests of these learners and others, working with them, using a range of approaches, including participatory and experiential learning.

We also target groups disadvantaged by forms of discriminations. For example, over the last few years we have been engaged in education to address gender inequality, racism and discrimination based on disability. This includes informing and motivating learners who are not the target of such discrimination, encouraging reflection on prejudice, including their own inclinations in this respect, as well as on institutional and social levels.

We work to build empathy and solidarity between our learners and those facing discrimination, and to think about and take action that could contribute to reduce prejudice. This educational approach is premised on fundamentally and sustainably addressing discrimination across and between groups, rather than working only with the people who are discriminated against. We directly address a combination of ideas, potential action and structures that cause marginalisation and disadvantages for specific groups of people. We also offer services to educational professionals, social workers and public service staff. These groups are especially well placed to translate learning about discrimination into action that can improve access to educational and other services for those facing prejudice, helping to achieve equity in terms of social, political and economic participation.

## **Roma and Sinti**

In recent years, as in other European contexts, throughout German society, there has been an increase of prejudice and discrimination against Roma, Sinti and other minority groups. These groups are seen as homogenous and vilified and labelled as ‘Gypsies’. At the same time, there is little general awareness on this discrimination, although Roma and Sinti are increasingly marginalised, even though many have been part of German society for generations, although Roma migration from South-Eastern Europe has been a factor in recent years.

In this context, we, like other civic and human rights education providers throughout Germany, have increasingly been working specifically addressing discrimination, which usually, in Germany is referred to as ‘Anti-Tsiganism’<sup>3</sup>.

Regrettably, together with other organisations, including some self-organised associations of persons identifying as Roma, we discovered that despite Anti-Tsiganism in Germany having a long and brutal history (that continues today) culminating in the Porajmos (the genocide of Roma and Sinti by Nazi Germany and its wartime allies throughout Europe) this is not addressed educationally in a way that might be adequate to broach the complexity of issues this involves in terms of personal and group transformation. The materials and approaches we identified largely depended on stereotyping and generalising perspectives of effected groups. This risked reproducing some elements of Anti-Tsiganism, instead of questioning the marginalising laws and practices that created the necessity for living certain lifestyles, including people habituating non-sedentary living. This might be thought of as a culturalising and romantic view on Roma and Sinti.

Such perspectives failed to incorporate more contemporary ideas and understandings derived from social constructivist views of culture and related insights into racism, forms of exclusion, marginalisation and related concepts. The latter can be called upon to explain the causes and negative effects of Anti-Tsiganism. One such insight is how racist ideologies and practices themselves create, homogenise and objectify the groups.

Overall, it seemed that there was little interest or research into Anti-Tsiganism and scant response to the latter in terms of educational responses. While there was some historical science, this predominantly deals with Anti-Tsiganism as a phenomenon of the past and is based on traditional, largely outdated/discredited perspectives.

### **Our own learning experience**

The Grundtvig Learning Partnership “Li Sobindoy – Roma in Action” has been a great opportunity for us to develop and inform our approach to the issues outlined above. Exchanging approaches and good practice with partners who have been involved with the same and related challenges, we have been able to discuss and consider complicated and multifaceted views, ways of working, political and social responses and impacts. On a conceptual level, many of our critiques of existing educational material related to Anti-Tsiganism were confirmed. A case in point was a presentation we heard during our visit to our partner organisation ‘Community Carts’ in the UK, during which the social construction of ethnic Gypsy and Traveller identity, through discriminatory and stereotyping practices and assumptions, was highlighted.

On a more practical level, it was helpful to see how different the approaches can be and how all of them could make an important contribution to improving the situation of Roma, Sinti and Travellers, as well as other groups that are confronted with discrimination, forms of racism and prejudice.

---

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that there is an ongoing debate in Germany about the appropriateness of the German equivalent of the term “Anti-Tsiganism”. Some groups of self-organised Roma in Germany are very critical of the use of this term, as it is seen to reproduce the term “Zigeuner”, which cannot be separated from its falsely homogenizing, pejorative and racist connotations.



Parallel to participating in the learning partnership, we continued striving to improve our response to Anti-Tsiganism by way of our educational activities, through a project, funded by a German foundation, Alte Feuerwache e.V. This organisation, which is based in Berlin, had begun developing and testing pedagogical methods and tools directly dealing with Anti-Tsiganism for non-formal education with youth and adults in different learning contexts. Working with this foundation we were able to develop learning materials linking historical learning and anti-discrimination education, including a toolkit and handbook on the subject of Anti-Tsiganism for formal and non-formal educational work<sup>4</sup>. This was published in 2013. We have used the latter publication in our educational activities, building on our previous analysis of an important gap in this field, this material is now a cornerstone of our educational work in relation to Anti-Tsiganism.

Aimed at teachers, trainers and social workers, the handbook includes compact and up to date information on the history of Roma and Sinti, on Anti-Tsiganism its historical and contemporary manifestations and transformations. The publication provides a conceptual and pedagogical approach, informed by the recent debates. It not only targets individually held Anti-Tsiganist stereotypes, it demonstrates how Anti-Tsiganism is embedded in the institutions and structures of society. More practically, 26 useful tools and methods for Anti-Tsiganism education in formal and non-formal educational contexts like schools, youth centres or universities, are provided.

We have piloted this publication in workshops and training and have found that the methods are adaptable and useable for groups as varied as disadvantaged youth in vocational education and experienced teachers. As the materials avoid moralising, we have identified that the toolkit and handbook can be combined with other subject areas, such human rights education. The publication's approach is founded on encouraging dialogical engagement with and between learners, allowing them to approach this topic from their own knowledge base and experience; it starts from learner interpretations of social life.

### **Our activities in education against Anti-Tsiganism.**

Our experience with European partners has helped us see that the toolkit might be able to be used beyond workshops with school students and training with multipliers.

The typical sequence of activities in a workshop:

- Becoming acquainted with each other, shedding light on the diversity of the group (gender, origin, interests and hobbies, family background, youth cultures etc.) so learners might understand that the identities of individuals and groups are complex and never only determined by one aspect (say being Roma or non-Roma).
- We repeatedly remind the group of their diversity over the whole duration of the workshop.
- We relate to different aspects of learners' identities (for instance young single mothers, a young male without a child etc.) to experiences with prejudice and discrimination.
- This is followed by clarifying meanings, social functions and levels of prejudice and discrimination.

---

<sup>4</sup> 'Methodenhandbuch zum Thema Antiziganismus für die schulische und außerschulische Bildungsarbeit',

- Continuing to relate to the experiences of learners, we look at different forms of discrimination (for example, in terms of gender, origin, religion, dis/ability). This all serves as a way to contextualize Anti-Tsiganism within a broader range of prejudice, most of which are experienced by the learners themselves.
- It is only after this point that we directly broach the subject of Anti-Tsiganism by first using ideas and perspective the learners come up with and share.
- This allows trainers to get a better view of the learners' prior knowledge, perspectives and assumptions with regard to Roma, Sinti and Anti-Tsiganism. This is important for the planning of the next part of the workshop, how activity might be adapted, say for instance if strongly Anti-Tsiganist positions within the group are identified.
- We then, using a brief video, provide general and easily accessible information on Anti-Tsiganism, highlighting the differentiation between a term imposed by others (for instance 'Gypsy') and self-designations ('Roma' and 'Sinti' for example). We look at the origins of these terms and labels, as well as the everyday exclusion and marginalization of the individuals and groups identified.
- Next we encourage learners to think in more detail about the origins and history of Roma and Sinti, considering both self-designations and pejorative and discriminatory terms. We look at the languages, cultures and religions of Roma and Sinti, the long history of Anti-Tsiganism as well as the contents and configurations of Anti-Tsiganist stereotypes. At this point a lot of information needs to be passed-on, so the methods used are playful and interactive, including a quiz and a time bar.
- Finally we work with learners to raise their awareness about discrimination in general. A consciousness that the experience of diversity in society is an asset and something to value rather than to fear is promoted. Relating to more forms of discrimination, we maintain the focus on Anti-Tsiganism, facilitating learner empathy with persons facing discrimination. This promotes understanding of the complex and long term consequences and implications of discrimination and how it can contribute to confirming the prejudice it is based on. However, we discuss how that it can also raise awareness of the gains of being a more diverse society.

We are very conscious that experience of working with and alongside our European partners has helped us shape and hone the above approach, generating humane and empathetic attitudes towards learners about what is a rich but sometimes problematic subject. The methods we use are guided by discussion, simulation games, exercises based on media, testimonials and excursions. The experience with our workshops has shown us how important and fruitful it can be to address this topic.

Anti-Tsiganism is widespread in the Federal State of Brandenburg, we encounter it with learners from all backgrounds. At the same time, we have the impression that providing learners with relevant knowledge and perspectives, opening up spaces for the consideration and discussion about Anti-Tsiganism and other form of prejudice, in a respectful and unusual manner, can address many issues of social and personal concern.

In our work on Anti-Tsiganism (as well as on other manifestations of discrimination) including being informed by our work with our European partners, we have identified the following approaches that can increase the likelihood of achieving sustainably positive results:

- Include the learners' own experiences of discrimination, developing personal and group empathy for those discriminated against and disadvantaged by phenomena such as Anti-Tsiganism.
- Include several dimensions of identity to diminish the risk of reproducing binary constructions of identity ('Us' vs. 'Them') that are the basis of much discrimination, including Anti-Tsiganism.
- Identify that discrimination is not only caused by prejudice and interactions between individuals, but is also embedded in social institutions, laws and structures like the labour market (institutional and structural discrimination).
- Avoid reproducing homogenising, simplifying and/or romanticising discourses on Roma and Sinti, but show the heterogeneity and diversity of people that are negatively affected by Anti-Tsiganism.
- Demonstrate that people negatively affected by Anti-Tsiganism are not passive victims, but themselves take action against the inequality they face, for instance by self-organising on regional, national and international levels.
- Indicate possible ways to translate learning about Anti-Tsiganism into action against Anti-Tsiganism.

### **What do we aim for in the future?**

In our evaluation of our activities related to Anti-Tsiganism we have identified two areas we would like to improve, one relating to the learners, the other to our trainers and educators.

*Towards a more empowerment oriented educational approach:*

While we view our educational approach as a contribution to tackling the discrimination and disadvantage that Roma face in Germany, there are two main insights we have gained through the collaboration in this learning partnership with other European organisations. The first is that we are motivated to more specifically and actively engage with Roma themselves as learners. In the field of our education directed against Anti-Tsiganism, this implies a change in perspective:

From;

- education that aims to inform and motivate persons who are not the targets of Anti-Tsiganism

To

- reflect on prejudicial assumptions and ideas, structures and actions that contribute to Anti-Tsiganism, as well strengthening their empathy and solidarity with those disadvantaged by Anti-Tsiganism.

We now are looking to move towards providing educational experiences that strengthen and empower persons negatively affected by Anti-Tsiganism.

Our experience with empowerment education with disadvantaged young women and persons experiencing racism has suggested that one of the most important negative effects of discrimination education should address is the 'interiorisation' of the discriminating discourses; blaming oneself for one's disadvantaged position. This can be understood as a psychological mechanism, one that we have often witnessed, and which has been described in scientific research on effects of discrimination.

Facilitating a considered and more systematic understanding of personal experiences with discrimination and inequality, perhaps calling on approaches such as biographical learning, can provide tools to question negative judgements and blaming (perhaps motivated in part by the media and/or interactions with public service institutions and so on). In the long term this approach can increase self-esteem and so a move away from judging oneself harshly or even unjustly.

If personal experience can be shared with others who have similar experience in relation say to a range of forms of discrimination, in a relatively discrimination free learning setting, such exploration and examination can have an even more positive impact. Another note-worthy aspect of empowering education is the provision of a space wherein both individual and collective strategies for dealing with and resisting discrimination can be shared and exchanged. Here, it is often very useful to provide information about possible activities, (self-organising groups and networks) as marginalised people often do not have an easy access to such information.

*More actively involving Roma as trainers and experts.*

Having experienced the rich variety of activities with our partners in this project, we have found ourselves asking; ‘Who are the trainers, educators and other “experts” in our educational activities?’ We will, in the future, aim at more actively trying to involve Roma and Sinti as trainers and educators in our work. Having only non-Roma facilitating learning on Anti-Tsiganism risks a paternalistic reproduction of the image of Roma and Sinti as passive objects, subject to the actions of non-Roma and non-Sinti.

We also want to provide learning situations – not limited to Anti-Tsiganism – in which members of the majority population encounter Roma or Sinti taking the role as trainers, educators and teachers. We feel this would challenge widely held Anti-Tsiganist perceptions of Roma and Sinti, for example that as they are uneducated and are only involved in unskilled jobs, scavenging and begging on the streets. We see this as an important contribution to directly, by personal experience, challenge some of the Anti-Tsiganist stereotypes widely prevalent in German society. For those negatively affected by Anti-Tsiganism such encounters could have a strong empowering effect.

Another reason for actively involving persons affected by Anti-Tsiganism is that this would open ways to directly contribute to a better access to resources and income for those who, because of Anti-Tsiganism, face considerable barriers to equal economic participation in German society.

In our neighbouring town Berlin there are very lively and active self-organising Roma groups that we are developing collaborative ties with. We are currently trying to find ways to more systematically cooperate with such groups in the educational activities we provide in the Federal State of Brandenburg to challenge Anti-Tsiganism. One option we are considering is to pair one member of HochVier e.V. with one representative of a Roma self-organising group in our training.

As a next step in our work against Anti-Tsiganism, we are currently researching funding and implementation opportunities to regularly offer workshops on Anti-Tsiganism to youth in our region. We want to offer three-day workshops to schools and youth centres (targeting individuals and groups from the age of 12). Due to other priorities of national and regional

stakeholders in the field of education, like other organisations trying to specifically tackle Anti-Tsiganism, we are currently facing challenges, especially in terms of funding. But we are confident that we will find some options in the near future.

We cannot claim that by way of our educational approach that we will change the discriminating situations and structures Roma and Sinti face in Germany, but we are motivated to contribute as much as we can to this process. The Learning Partnership ‘Li Sobindoy – Roma in Action’ has significantly contributed to this motivation. Thank you to all the partners!



# **Roma Mediators the Key of Tools, Methodologies and Approaches against Discrimination of Roma Ethnic Minorities**

## **Barró Association**

Barró is a non-profit organization; a social and educative association which works in the social field. Its aim is to create a social and educative space, for personal and community development for those at risk of social exclusion and/or vulnerable to marginalization.



*A group of men working*



Barró intervenes in coordination with a network of local and regional groups, institutions, associations, social services, etc.

Barró was founded in 1994. The organization is registered with the Spanish Ministry for Public Utility and has the quality certificate. We had gained a number of awards in recognition of our commitment to addressing social inclusion.

Our benefactors are the collectives of people in disadvantage social situations that include children and young, adults, ethnic minorities (Roma) and migrants.

Our Mediator led project started more than 10 years ago with the aim of addressing equality issues of Roma and making the experience of Roma woman visible, a group trying to achieve a relevant role in the process of social change. As a consequence of this project Roma women are transforming by way of taking opportunities to participate in, and contribute to society.

Barró, via this project, understood that social policies needed to change, and that a new perspective was required when working with Roma women. Working in neighborhoods wherein social exclusion is a common denominator informed and developed our objectives. Networking facilitated the exchange experiences, which caused us to continually modify our aims, which improved effectiveness in terms of outcomes as well as making our connections with targeted communities stronger, collaborating with the populations we work with and for.

The empowerment of women became a principle aim. By this we mean working with, in particular, Roma women to achieve autonomy and realize their citizenship.



*Women working on recycling*

Mediators were central to this work, and our axes of action were key to the success of the project. The Mediators are Roma Women, most have personal responsibilities such as children and marriage. They come from low income backgrounds and usually have been disadvantaged educationally. They complete a Mediation Course authorized by Madrid City Council. These women are the bridge between Roma groups and the majority population. They do not abandon Roma culture and traditions, but promote forms of equality, looking to promote the social participation of Roma, especially women.

The Roma women who gained accreditation to work in this field demonstrate a suitable profile for training. They have social and leadership skills and enthusiasm, combined with a commitment to and understanding of the roots of their own identity.

The social situation in Spain is in crisis. Structural poverty has had a devastating impact on Roma people. According to FOESSA<sup>5</sup> Report on Exclusion and Social Development, in Spain, in 2008, there had been a significant rise in the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) but at the same time social inequality continued to be a national issue.

Despite the redistributive policies of the 1970s and 1980s, although many inequalities were stabilized, there have been no improvements in this respect since that time. Poverty increases and employment is no longer guaranteed to improve the welfare of families. Migrants,

---

<sup>5</sup> Fomento de Estudios Sociales y Sociología Aplicad - A Foundation for the Promotion of Applied Social Studies and Sociology

women, children, old people and Roma are among those most impacted by this situation and poverty implies social exclusion.

Social exclusion is the process of loss of integration and is linked to low income, relatively poor access to the labor market, weakness of social bonds and the concomitant lack of social participation, which translates to unawareness of rights and or the ability to access the same. According to FOESSA Report, severe exclusion affects people living in the neighborhoods where Barró develops its projects.

Recent studies by the European Union, there are around 9 million Roma in Europe, being many are suffering the effects of exclusion and poverty.

Over the last few years there has been a growth of awareness about the marginalization of Roma. This has resulted in the Council of Europe and the European Commission among others, putting pressure to the governments to address this issue. In 2004 the European Commission published 'The Amplified Situation of Roma People in European Union'. The intention of this document was to draw attention to discrimination and prejudice against Roma, and promote the social inclusion of this group.



*Radio workshop focused on employment*

Conferences and meeting have been financed to share good practices related to Roma. Conclusions insist on the necessity of the implementation of initiatives in different fields, acting in combination with multiple perspectives to make positive change possible. But these changes are not possible without involving Roma in the development of inclusion policies.

In Spain a Strategic Plan was implemented between 2012 an 2015. The National plan for the social inclusion are combined with local level responses from communities and city councils.



The most important feature of this strategy is that it has been discussed and agreed by Roma representatives; el Consejo Estatal del pueblo Gitano (State Council for Roma people), the Institute of Roma Culture (which promotes efforts to improve Roma visibility) and the Ministry of Health and social affairs. Meetings (three times a year) that include these groups review and shape the response to the strategies of the social European model, to combine economic progress, with paying attention to inequalities and social inclusion.



*Visit of Roma in Action Project. Mr. Fidalgo (standing left) is teacher, counsellor and Member of Madrid Community Team for Diversity Attention, with more than 25 years of experience.*

These measures implicate the cultural contribution of Roma with heightening the visibility of this group. There is commitment to the realization of citizenship, the achievement of equality, ensuring access to education, employment, social action, health care and housing for Roma.

Measures have taken both nationally and locally. The National Council for Roma community, which is recognized by the Health Ministry, was created in 2005 and it has been a crucial collaborator for the Action Plan.

In Madrid, Community and the City Council initiated an inclusion strategy for Roma, to be applied in outskirts of the city where the risk of social exclusion is greater. The measures promote action to address deep rooted difficulties include programmes of mediation. Here the mediator is a key figure in the optimizing of intervention.



*Group of Students of Secondary Grade before the official tests, Level Secondary Grade, Level 1 Students*

Roma suffer from a lack of access to education, health, and conventional forms of employment. Data relating to school failure does not suggest immediate change in terms of the lack of achievement among Roma. Health care data demonstrates that the life expectancy of Roma is 7 years less than the majority population.

Poverty and levels of social exclusion among Roma have become problems passed on from one generation to the next, what might be called a 'fatal heritage'. Lack of awareness, basic academic ability and so qualifications and references, result in disadvantage in terms of the job market. These are symptoms that result in exclusion.

Thus work opportunities for Roma are often restricted to street trading, seasonal work in the fields and the collection of scrap for recycling. This situation has largely not been considered in labor policies and the promotion of training to transform Roma circumstances.

Roma continue to suffer from discrimination despite the legislation designed to mitigate this. At the same time Roma women are culturally pressurized to maintain their traditional role in the domestic situation and its economy. However, women can be agents of positive change; the potential engine of cultural and community development.

In this complex situation the Mediator is a resource to overcome boundaries and difficulties. They work in different settings (depending on the City council) but these include:

- The health care system.
- Schools and high schools (Primary and Secondary).
- Neighborhoods.

In all these settings Mediators have been well received and highly valued, their work has been seen as positive and innovative.

### **Training Mediators**

The idea of the Mediator was motivated following work with Roma in family and school settings, neighborhood associations, healthcare centers, social services and a range of other situations. We realized we needed a bridge between institutions and service provision and Roma. The preferred figures to achieve an approach beneficial for all are women. A number of considerations, including cultural, economic mores, led us to this conclusion.

We identified a group of women with a leadership profiles, but who lacked training. Some had taken representative roles previously. In 2004 we initiated a training course of 'Experts in Intercultural Mediation', with the support of City Council of Madrid. We wanted our mediators to be included in the labor market, creating the possibility of labor insertion of a group at risk of social exclusion, in order to encourage new referents for successive generations.

The first training course was made up of 14 women. They took part in 543 hours of training (which included experiential elements) gaining a certificate of the official institution of Equality of Women. These women were asked to complete the Secondary Education grade in a period of three years.

The second group attracted many more applicants and we had to undertake a selection process to choose the women with our target profile. Our proposals were exciting for these women who answered positively.

Six women from the first course were hired by different social entities as Mediators in education, employment, personal promotion, etc. Finally, in 2005 we could hire Mediators to work in 22 schools. The whole process has been monitored by different associations that worked with Roma.

The school based Mediators were deployed as a result of these institutions having a relatively high number of Roma learners. Complementary training relating to education, health and conflict resolution was provided for the Mediators. The work of our mediators had become effective and efficient, providing Roma families with a person they could trust, because Mediators were also Roma.

The feedback from schools was very positive, but some of the Mediators could not continue due to a lack of finance.



*Cultural visit to Retiro Park*



*Workshop of health: sexuality*



*Workshop on Gender Violence Prevention*

## *Health Axis*

The relative health of Roma in Spain is difficult to establish, because we do not have statistics or studies relating to their situation, although the right to health care in Spain is important.

According to the World Health Organisation, health is the complete state of physical, mental and social welfare. However, most of the Spanish people, and especially those we work with and among, understand health as the lack of illnesses. The awareness of *taking care of ourselves*, seemingly inherent in most non-Roma groups, does not appear to be so much to the fore in some manifestations of Roma culture.

The lack of income and marginalization are conditions of the lowest ranking of health cover, and the level of training is another factor associated with relatively poor health (FOESSA report 2008).

The work Roma typically undertake tends to be associated with a decline of their physical health. It is often a factor in their early aging. Relatively poor housing conditions, invite respiratory problems, infections, insect bites, accidents, etc.

The traditions of some Roma groups result in positive health outcomes, for instance the prohibition of the consumption of alcohol and smoking tobacco in women and the limitation of sexual relations before marriage. Although not all Roma groups or individuals follow all or any of these strictures.

The health of Roma groups in Spain is very poor relatively. In 2005 their life expectancy was similar to countries such as Peru, Morocco, Turkey and Egypt. At the same time Roma birth rates are comparatively high.

We have found nutrition problems, early pregnancy, genetic illnesses caused by endogamy (same blood marriages between cousins, for example), diabetes, painful earaches, excess of fats, depression, stress and obesity to be relatively common place in the Roma groups we work with. All these issues are also more common in any groups subject to relative poverty of course.

It is very difficult to develop the necessary trusting relationship between Roma women and the health workers, and even more with regard to issues related to gynecological matters. When any family member is obliged to go to hospital, relatives go with them in numbers. We have observed two types of behavior: Roma who do not go to the hospital until it is too late and those who go immediately with minor ailments, such as a cold.

A report from Navarra University confirms that the health care system presents problems that militate against Roma. These include:

- Prejudice and stereotyping on the part of specialists.
- Culpability of the lack of hygiene without taking care of the social and economic conditions and the global conditions of this community.
- Cultural conditions which prevent the attendance and prevention.

### *Health achievements*

Family planning, the dissemination of health programs, etc have proved successful. In Barró our main target is intervention to promote health and healthy styles of life, using the resources of mediation as a tool to achieve the same.

Perhaps our most effective intervention is offering consultation about contraceptive methods, and advice relating to pregnancy, induced abortions, gynecological revisions and the continuity of the treatments.

Since 2006 550 women have participated in the Health Programme. We have to take into account the social, cultural and economic factors which have an impact on the process. As such, the Mediators' work within this programme does not only consist of giving advice/suggestions. They accompany the women throughout the whole process of health care. They insert themselves into the service, from providing information, to the appointment with the doctors with Roma women, being with them during treatment and when results are given. In the process Roma Mediators have broken stereotypes among adults and adolescents who should not need these processes according to the Roma culture.

Roma women have worked on the streets, transmitting information to others, adapting their language as necessary to facilitate understanding. They have provided workshops relating to health habits, information about the consequences of the self-medication. This being the case, Mediators have gained the trust of our users, often the latter prefer Mediators to be with them rather than relatives when they attend medical appointments. A consequence of this trust has led to us being able to broaden the extent that we are now able to work with men. Prevention is the key to avoid risks, and knowledge is the path to improve their situation in collaboration with doctors, social workers and so on.

The promotion of healthy habits and diets, together with the identification of risks are key factors that our Mediators work on.

### *Gender Axis*

In Spain, as in most other contexts, equality between men and women has not been fully achieved, but as in many groups in relative poverty, there is a deep divide in terms of equality between Roma men and women.

The concept of gender can be defined as the behavioral patterns which can be especially distinguished by the cultural and social regulations by a determined social group. In such circumstances to be a woman or a man implies different expectations.

Roma women in Spain and in Europe generally are discriminated doubly. Firstly they are women, secondly they are Roma. This is an experience and incidence of intersectional inequality.

The perceptions of the Roma women:

- From the inside point of view: pure, virgins, hard-working, loyal and blind obedience to the Roma tradition.

- From the outside point of view: ignorant, getting married as a child, dirty, lazy, mother of many children, placed at home and markets, illiterate.

However, Roma women are expected to be strong - to work outside and inside. They are researchers of social aids; they take decisions and are autonomous.

Modernity is having an impact on Roma women, just as it is on the majority of women, but Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde claims the Roma women;

*... are leading quick changes offering new meanings to the Roma identity. They are becoming referents and they are passing on the acquired information to other generations.*

However, an enormous amount of work is still required to assure the rights and gender equality of Roma women (and women in general). We need to introduce a gender perspective in all the life spheres. The intervention of Roma women Mediators has proved to be effective in this respect.

It is a tradition in some Roma groups for children to be married up to 10 years before the majority population; usually women are married at a younger age than men. Young Roma women not unusually abandon schooling very early, getting into a triple dimension of disadvantage: gender, culture and lack of training.

However, research has consistently confirmed that Roma girls and teenagers want to be able to attend schools, high-schools and universities. Roma women Mediators are the example of a new model of professional woman who studies without losing Roma culture and identity.

Training deficiencies, family responsibilities, prejudice, and degraded image of Roma women from the majority perspective, make very difficult for Roma women to access employment other than very menial jobs. Mediators can be the push to change traditional patterns and show Roma groups the possibility of new aspirations and perhaps entrepreneurial opportunities.

With an emphasis of Pentecostal Evangelic Churches (PEC), there is a deep and intense religiosity among Roma women and men. Faith and worship are crucial in many Roma communities. From the point of view of Roma women it offers:

- A new and different space of meeting.
- A visible space where everybody has their protagonist role.
- It is open-minded about gender.
- Promotion of self-esteem.

According to the opinion of Manuela Mayoral, wife of a pastor and active participant in the PEC, women meeting is becoming more and more important. For her, when women meet, men are obliged to take on responsibilities for child care and domestic arrangements. Manuela sees herself as helping the believers and if a conflict exists she passes the message to the pastor to intervene between families. As such they might be understood as mediators.

For a lot of women the PEC has promoted a personal change, a push to start to change traditional roles.

Our participation in this axis starts with the assumption that social, cultural and personal difficulties cannot be avoided when dealing with this topic. We have promoted not only debates and workshops, but also some other initiatives to help us to make visible any problems or issues.

In common with women in number of situations, Roma women experience gender violence. Like many of their non-Roma sisters, although Roma women often try to avoid talking about this, they often turn to relatives, both of themselves and their husband, to mediate positively. However, violence is extensively tolerated and it is sometimes the case that Roma have their 'own law' when it comes to dealing with the same.

Working with Equality Agents, our work in various districts has achieved the initiatives to start to address this situation with men and women. The 'Manifesto of Women against Gender Violence', edited by the Roma Mediators, was read publically on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2008; 239 women attended.

The work of our Mediators has proved to be a stimulus among Roma women that motivates them to participate in the initiatives and to be curious. They have become proud of themselves for facing new situations, which offer them new possibilities to be able to successfully meet the challenges in their lives.

### *Education Axis*

Education is a basic pillar in the development of people and the facilitation of social inclusion. School can be a context of personal development and learning to address discrimination; however there are several factors which make inclusion difficult for Roma:

1. Roma in Spain often perceive success at school as a loss of cultural values.
2. Absence of referents to Roma culture in the educational system. There are not didactic units relating to Roma cultural diversity. Stereotypes are reflected, highlighting marginalization.
3. Roma learners often abandon schooling between the ages of 14 and 16, which can result social vulnerability.

Roma school attendance has always been problematical. Some 30 years ago 'bridge schools' were introduced as preparation for school. These facilities worked hard to avoid becoming educational ghettos. Roma in Spain were at that time more sedentary than some other Roma groups in Western Europe, to the extent that from the 1960s many Roma lived alongside non-Roma. However, Roma often saw these schools as dangerous places that threatened the organization of the family, passing on principles seen sometimes as being at variance with Roma traditions and/or values.

While attitudes to education among Roma have changed, other variables for the consistently poor attendance and early drop-out of Roma children from schools conditioners need to be thought about.



*Group of Women, Education Axis*

The transition from primary to secondary school seems to be determinant moment of uncertainty and fears for Roma parents. Personal, social and economic factors also appear to have an impact of feelings about school attendance. Around 70 percent of adult Roma are illiterate; women are seemingly more affected than men in this respect. However, young Roma seem to be increasingly aware of the importance of schooling.

For these reasons among others, the Roma Mediator figure is crucial in terms of providing access to education for Roma, both as practical role models and educational mentors.

Our mediators were hired by Madrid regional Ministry to work in 21 primary and secondary schools. They have been subsequently been hired by our association.

They have worked with teachers, school advisors, canteen-caregivers, etc. The main focus is to work with young Roma to acclimatize to the school as an institution. Families told of the confidence they have in the Mediators because they seem to be able to address any problems that might occur.

Actions the Mediators have carried out include:

- \* Intercultural weeks in educative centres to make the Roma culture visible for students, teachers and families. These activities have included parties, music, etc.
- \* Workshops focusing on gender equality, dancing, Roma culture.
- \* Working with families, completing official documentation: canteen grants, book grants, registrations, etc.
- \* Maintaining personal relationships with educators to address absenteeism and visits to the families.
- \* Engaging with children, achieving excellent results during the infant period.

Our Mediators' interventions have been valued by students, educational centres, families, etc. It means that our Mediators are required by different organizations because their work is both positive and essential.



Mediators have formed basic educational groups for adult women. We offer the possibility of education to everyone, all individuals and groups are welcome to be part of basic literacy programmes, classes for 'new-readers' and secondary education. Our Mediators are officially assessed and they have achieved graduation level in secondary education.

We consider that the promotion of these Mediators' efforts is crucial to promote equal access to education for all. The strengthening of their work enables the understanding of the school as an inclusive context in which we can all participate.



*Celebration of the International Day of Roma*



*Living Together Axis*



*Illiterate participants working*

## Cañada Real Galiana, Sector 6, Madrid.

The following has been written based on the Diagnosis Report about Cañada Real Galiana<sup>6</sup> researched by Fundación Secretariado Gitano and ACCEM, in coordination with the experience of the staff, educators and the Mediation Coordinator, who have worked there for many years. We are going to look at the current situation, some historical background and relevant legislation.

Cañada Real Galiana is one of the most important of a network of nine significant farming roads in Spain, used to herd/transport animals between the North and South of the country. There are four communities along the 400km (approximately) route; La Rioja, Castilla y León, Madrid Community and Castilla la Mancha.



The following focuses on an area of high occupation, mostly made up of illegal buildings (houses, industrial areas, scrap yards, small farms, and general wasteland) associated with the Madrid Community, in neighborhoods encompassed within an area of 15 to 16 km.

Over the centuries, the Spanish livestock roads have had a great economic, social and cultural importance. These roads were created by the first sedentary Spanish societies. These people had the need to move animals from the North to the South of the peninsula. They were particularly well used in the Middle Ages, when the nomadic life-styles reached a peak.

Farming, train and road transport developed, and by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century seasonal migration had all but disappeared and as such the use of the roads declined, dwelling places began to proliferate.

By the 1950s and 1960s Cañada Real Galiana was populated by waves of different groups:

- Rural migrants who came to Madrid to seek work.
- People displaced from central Madrid.

---

<sup>6</sup> See <http://euskadi.goteo.org/project/mas-alla-de-los-desalojos-forzosos/?lang=en>

- Roma people from all over Spain.
- Migrants from Morocco, Romania and elsewhere (from the 1990s) many with Roma origins.
- People from other deprived areas which had been demolished.

These groups have transformed the area and it has become a favela, an extended shanty town, with irregular, informal, heterogeneous buildings, constructed without planning. The area has become associated with a number of housing related and social problems:

- Sub-standard dwellings.
- Scarcity of basic needs (water, electricity, public transport, rubbish collection, etc.)
- Deficient or non-existence public street lighting and sewage systems.
- Drug dealing and issues related to drug use.
- Alcohol related issues.
- Absence of schools, healthcare, sport centres and cultural facilities.

In the 1990s legislation sought to ensure that the old road network should be accessible for public use. Cañada Real Galiana is classified as an area which cannot be urbanized. However, the population, mostly relatively large family groups, illegally occupying the area, has continued to increase.

Dialogue has been established with public administrations to find a way to resolve issues. Most of the population is made up of Spanish Roma families, but there are Moroccan and Romanian, Latin American and Spanish non-Roma families, as well as East European groups and people of sub-Saharan origin.

There are some good houses with internal terraces with big gates. But finding one's way around the area can be dangerous as in some places electric cables are exposed on the ground. Cars cannot easily access many houses; some are precariously built.

The Church Santo Domingo de la Calzada was built as part of the overall informal development and it has become a centre of social life. It is supported by a priest and volunteers. A mosque serves many of the Moroccan population. In the Community El Fanal the 'Factory' is a social and community centre.

There are six sectors in Cañada Real. We focus on the Sector 6 where Barró Association works, networking with other organisations in the district. The area encompasses a bio-solid waste site.

Drug dealing and taking is rife. The area has very limited public water supply other than standpipes. Those dwellings that do have water connections sell supplies to others. Some wells and mobile water-containers offer water to the inhabitants if they pay a tax to Madrid City Council.

There is some supply of electricity but not for all the families and there is no general sanitation service. However rubbish is collected twice a week. Sector 6 has no public transport, except the school bus (there are two stops in the sector, but no defined bus stop). This obliges the inhabitants to walk relatively long distances to access public transport. The only way to exit Cañada Real Sector 6 is on foot or by private car, private taxis will not frequent the area.

Mobile units, including doctors, anti-drugs agents and food providers visit the district, but the area has no schools and no postal service. Police cars visit the area.

The rubbish and dirtiness is overwhelming, which is made worse by the odor from an incinerator. This poses obvious health risks.



*During the visit of the participants of the Grundtvig project 'Roma in Action' to El Fanal Association, coordinators and learners of the project agreed to summarize the situation of the people in Cañada.*

Some people are involved in a few informal businesses/industry including metal recycling, horse selling, bars, press, tobacco and alcohol points, etc.

### **El Galinero**

El Gallinero is a shanty settlement in the Villa de Vallecas neighborhood. The name of 'El Gallinero' means 'the hencoop', which is related to the former use of the area.

The early population of the district was made up of migrants who came from Romania. Some of these initial inhabitants left the settlement for different reasons, but people continued to arrive from Romania or from other European countries. According to the latest data, the number of families stands at around 80 or 378 people in total; 216 under-eighteen. However, the number of families might vary due to the transience of this type of population.

Common features of the family groups:

- Roma and Romanian origin.
- History of nomadism in European context.
- Lack of knowledge of the objective causes of their mobility.
- Temporary return to Romania to obtain documents or celebrate festivities.
- Involved in marginal occupations.
- Low wage families.
- Continuous changes in the inhabitation of shanties, which presents problems in terms of the registration of the population.
- Lack of basic documents.
- Low aspirations.

The idiosyncrasy of the settlement makes monitoring challenging. The families have a high rate of mobility through the Europe, particularly United Kingdom, Italy, France and Portugal.



*'Roma in Action' visit Sector 6*

The Madrid visit of the 'Roma in Action' project took place on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014 to El Fanal Association. Participants were surprised how near the shanty town was to Madrid City Centre, one of the most vivacious European cities.



Clear concerns were:

- Poor housing and deprivation.
- Deficient basic facilities.
- Lack of resources, difficulty of access to decent housing, employment and health.
- Access to schooling.
- Lack of concern/prospects about the future.
- Social stigma and the negative image of Cañada Real.

Barró Association has created a new project for 2015, adapted to the continuous social need (we started working in El Gallinero in 2013). The aim of the project is to train and to promote Roma Mediators to intervene with the Romanian Roma population in Madrid. The main axis

of the project is a programme of social and educative projects which target is Roma people, focusing on needs outlined above.

The general inequality and lack of opportunity this group suffer is obvious, as is the deficit of opportunities, however the inequality of the Roma women within this population is a matter of considerable concern.

The National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma People 2012/2020<sup>7</sup>, an action promoted from the European Union to create national and local plans of action to promote and empower this population, marks the increasing consciousness of the situation. But while there are a growing number of Roma university graduates, relatively few have an impact on the situation of Roma as a whole. As such, there is a need to implicate Roma in facilitation and practice roles as well as the development of inclusion policies.

From January 2016 we are looking to initiate a program with groups of men and women in Gallinero. We will also seek to have better collaboration with schools, health care centers, and other social entities which intervene in the area, where mediators work efficiently.

The project for 2016 will seek to continue the promotion of the health, educative, labour equality, the promotion of gender equality, living together and the prevention of gender violence, with the training and social insertion of Roma women in el Gallinero. We will seek to:

1. Promote leadership of young women, trained in mediation skills.
2. Facilitate school attendance (tackling absenteeism).
3. Promote equal opportunities for young Roma women.
4. Promote healthy habits and a rational use of the health system.
5. Facilitate changes of cultural patrons in favor of gender equity.
6. Prevent violent situations and to promote women defending themselves in such circumstances.
7. Improve the self-esteem and autonomy of Roma women, involving them in decision making.
8. Facilitate families in moving away from the settlements and the access to better/healthier housing.
9. Hire three or four Roma as Mediators.

As a whole the need to intervene in this area in Madrid continues because, despite legislation and regulations, the current situation is unacceptable. We need to offer young Roma the chance of making themselves a future beyond the scrap and dirtiness of this place.

---

<sup>7</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_spain\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_spain_strategy_en.pdf)

## Successfully Working with (and for) Roma

*The following was written by Colin Young who initiated and for a long time almost single-handedly, mostly in his own time (outside his hours of employment) run, staffed and administrated the project focused on below. His efforts were stoical, showing immense commitment and humane care. The latter might be thought of as the fundamental elements and humanitarian foundation of good youth work practice. Out of such a basis, young people can begin empowering themselves (perhaps the only means to authentic empowerment – becoming involved in taking authority over their own lives) via voluntarily tapping into formal education and becoming involved, via their own initiative to participate, in non-formal learning situations.*

*Colin deserves a lot of credit for his leadership, management and the care he was able to offer and multiple by way of his work with young Roma. We thank him for his involvement and contribution to our learning and in what follows, we hope the learning of others.*

About seven years ago we had the idea of opening a centre for young people after school. We took over a derelict shop and totally refurbished the property. Throughout this work we had



little heads pop in, asking “What you doing?” This was our first interaction with the young of Chalvey, Slough (an urban town in the South East of England). Next question: “Can we help?”

For some six weeks of doing the work we had frequent visitors, helping and more importantly telling us about themselves and what they would like to do in the centre and the type of equipment/plant they saw as desirable. One of the disturbing questions was “Will we be allowed in?”

The day we opened over 80 children appear at the door, all Roma, who lived within approximately a mile radius of the location. At the start of the project it was hard work, as we were obliged to use our own/spare time to run what was really a youth cafe. We had no funds to provide activities, or for day to day expenses. However the enthusiasm, character and cheekiness of the young people gave us the



impetus to make this project work. Word spread, and we soon recruited a few committed volunteers, starting with one from the local Children's Centre, a teacher from the local junior school (Montem Junior School). Not long into the project we started to get donations of second hand toys, books and piles of paper for drawing etc.

In the early days there were a range of sometimes problematic issues between the Police and the Roma population, however we worked on this, introducing the PCSOs (Police Community Support Officers) to the project, and with the support of the local Police sergeant and inspector, we established an extremely good and lasting relationships with the young Roma and the Police. This was achieved through the PSOs getting involved with and organising sporting activities, activities for just young women and being around in straightforward drop in sessions.

We were delighted to see a really positive transformation in the relationship between the police and young Roma, led by the police being ready to learn from the young Roma, but also by the young Roma being prepared to 'teach' the police about their situation and culture. This was one of the most rewarding aspects of our time working in what the young Roma themselves named 'The Hangout'. In order to expand the project, we applied to the Big Lottery (a national scheme to provide funding for voluntary projects) for funding to employ a full-time manager and a support assistant. This was successful and we were able to conduct out-reach work and provide more activities.



We never intended the project to be just for the Roma, however they in a way took ownership, and helped on many community projects, for instance park clearances (tidying up local recreation areas), litter picks, planting trees and even working with us and Dulux (an international company, best known in the UK for domestic paint sales) to paint all the shops in the area. The shop painting was again particularly impactful, as we undertook this project in collaboration with the Slough Autism group. This cooperative enterprise worked amazingly well, developing a sense of community cohesion and building understanding between two often misunderstood and discriminated against groups.

We also initiated several sports activities, and the main success was a Tae Kwon Do (a Korean martial art) group, with several young people gaining belts at different levels. We



also worked alongside 'Get Berkshire Active' (the English county that Slough is part of) and 'Sport England' (a national organisation that exists to develop sporting participation and activity) in a project called the 'Community Games', a legacy of the 2012 London Olympics.



We identified a need to employ an assistant able to speak Romanian to help with the interaction with the parents (the families of most of the young Roma attending the Hangout had Romanian backgrounds). Whilst we were in contact with families, there was a language barrier. A chance meeting led to us taking on a highly qualified Romanian woman, who with her experience, helped to communicate what we were doing to the wider Roma population, but more importantly perhaps she was able to let parents know about and help them understand what we were doing and how we were working.

We were not only involved in working with children and young people, we wanted to be a resource to parents and other adult Roma. So, not long after our Romanian speaking assistant was in post, people from the Roma population were calling into our main YMCA Hostel for advice and guidance on a huge range of matters, dealing with the Council (local authority), NHS (National Health Service) and any formal papers, particularly relating to employment, housing and benefits. This was a massive breakthrough. Previously we had relied on the young Roma to translate for their parents.

We were invited to attend a Slough Council meeting to discuss issues relating to Roma in the area, we had, in a remarkably short space of time, become known for working with the Roma.



## HELP PAINT YOUR SHOPS

Have a few 5 minutes up and  
add more life spaces by volunteering  
a few hours of your time. From only  
people who make the difference!

Meet at The Village, on Labadie Road  
in Chelvey Hill

Saturday 16th, Sunday 17th,  
Saturday 23rd, Sunday 24th  
April between 10am-4pm



We linked with Carts Community Charity in Cambridgeshire and saw how they had worked with Gypsies and Travellers. We also joined them on a Grundtvig trip to Madrid to learn more about the EU programme and Roma and became actively involved in seeking ERASMUS funding to pursue more actions. This article will be part of their e-book about 'Roma in Action'. This has led to trips to Malta ( in conjunction with YMCA George Williams College), working with Thames Valley police on a project with the Slovakian Police, and frequent radio talks, and requests from and appearances on local and national Television.



We had many excellent outcomes, and we sincerely hope these will continue. The person who took the lead on this work, Colin Young, has now moved on from the Slough YMCA, taking up a post with Reading YMCA. However he continues to work with all groups of young people, and indeed has kept in contact with the young Roma that attended the Hangout. He has let it be known that he would be more than happy to discuss how this project developed, and help anyone on setting up other facilities.

Colin was contacted by the national Film and TV School with an inquiry; they were looking for young actors that would like a role in a film. One of the young Roma, Rafael Constantin, was chosen. The short film is called "Patriot" and it has been shortlisted for The Cannes Film

Festival short film category. This is wonderful news and a great legacy for our work with Roma in Slough.



# Conclusions

The above in practice moves Roma into the mode of change activists. This is perhaps the most constructive understanding of the over-used term ‘empowerment’.

<p>Deconstructing ‘empowerment’</p> <p>All too often this expression suggests (and in practice plays out) a ‘passing on’ of power from those taken to be relatively powerful to those deemed by this process to be relatively powerless. This is essentially a deficit model, built on subtle but prejudicial assumptions.</p> <p>Power, by its nature, cannot be given. Any power given is, by definition, an act of patronization; the powerful bestow the power, while the recipient of this power is totally reliant on the powerful for their supply of power.</p> <p>But how often in practice do the powerful literally ‘give up’ power and become relatively less powerful? Power, if it is power, if it is transferable at all, is taken rather than given; the taking of power is a powerful act.</p>
---

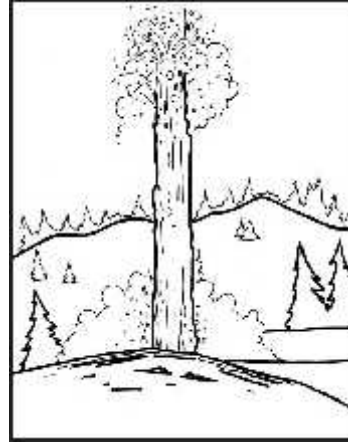
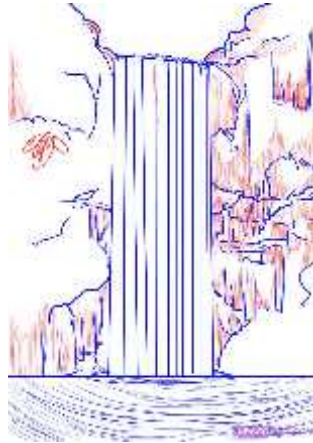
Empowerment, if it is actually to be what the word implies in terms of Roma, needs to be founded on organizations, working with but also for Roma, more as service providers than philanthropic enterprises, generating the means, skills and attitudes to take and ultimately exert power.

This said ‘power’ is probably the wrong word when relating to state, government and institutional entities. In democratic and developing democratic contexts authority structures are usually administrative in their functioning as such are pretty much what is detailed on the proverbial ‘tin’; they are premised on the use and application of relative authority. As such what Roma, working with agencies, are involved with, when it comes to gaining resources and raising consciousness, is access to and gaining influence in relation to authority; one gains authority in these contexts by way of learning to use one’s influence. At a foundational level this is what the agencies included in this document do when working with Roma as they deploy policies of inclusion and participation.

However, the means of Roma gaining or influencing authority is dependent on organizations understanding their aims and purposes, accurately framing and adjusting their ambitions in the light of their potential and actual resources. A realistic assessment of these considerations needs to be a consistent part of organizational culture if an agency is to maintain a change impact. Our partnership has shown rational appraisal of resources in respect of aims to be a shared strength.

## Top down/bottom up

Our work and research together has also indicated that the simplistic ‘waterfall’ (top down) interpretation of authority and influence is inappropriate to work with Roma. We appear to agree that strategic and sustainable, action is (at least) a ‘two way street’ that requires the concentrated and concerted effort both from a ‘top-down’ (‘waterfall’) and a ‘bottom-up’ (‘geyser’/‘fountain’) perspective.



Responding to bottom-up influence appears to be fruitful when working with Roma. Ideas, understanding and interpretation of wants and needs are projected upwards from client to management. Management becomes responsive rather than dictating. This changes the usual client/practitioner dichotomy into something more akin to a collaborative partnership that seeks to achieve shared aims; Roma cease to be a ‘target’ (something hunted) – we stop making ‘interventions’ (incursions) as we promote interaction. In the most useful of professional encounters goals are approached in a spirit of ‘accompaniment’ as part of a shared endeavor.

The capacity of policy delivered top-down to be effective is reliant on national and/or regional authorities or management structures having the will, capacity or need to interpret, deliver and support the services as understood from a sort of aerial view. As many of us have experienced, original objectives tend to get ‘lost in translation’ by way of this process. Thus we often end up delivering something that is quite remote from (or foreign to) what individual Roma and/or their families, from their ‘ground-level’ perspective see as their wants and needs.

However, the research indicates, in terms of achieving ‘connected’ (and so effective) action, an understanding of the means and associated attitudes and skills, to effect bottom-up projections of influence needs to be fostered.



### **A cycle of reaction**

We have established that social and economic mechanisms and circumstances, reinterpreted and understood as almost exclusively arising as cultural, racial or ethnic difference (almost alone), give rise to both internal and external pressures on Roma individuals and groups. The consequences the same are continued discrimination, social exclusion, limited opportunities and social tension. We cannot continue to construe Roma issues as a (almost mystic but certainly irrational) result of their ethnic or racial identity. Apart from putting the accent on difference as the root of social problems (something of a throwback to the theories of eugenics) this at least puts the proverbial cart before the metaphoric horse.

The propagation of Roma ethnic, racial or cultural difference also fits the agenda of the far right-wing in terms of segregating Roma as a group effectively without a political or economic reality; they are merely the result of their own category; all they are is what they are and they are restricted by what they are (not their social economic context – which is understood as just another consequence of what they are). The extent of much Roma politics is to identify themselves as Roma and others as not being Roma, which matches the fantasies of the far right. What is produced is a ‘cycle of reaction’. This has been expressed by the International Romani Union’s (IRU) ‘Declaration of a Nation’, the claim that all ‘Roma’ constitute a single and distinct community which requires its own separate representation. This is antithetical to the objective of equality for Roma people within their home societies, and as such it is probably not surprising that in more thirty years, the IRU has failed to generate grass-roots of support among Roma. However, the IRU has functioned as the forum of a few dozen international activists (Roma and ‘non-Roma’) unsurprisingly sustained by the

patronage of established political interests. But it is, operationally, a voice for segregation and forms of 'separate development' (Apartheid)

However, 'Roma' is simply the political replacement for the generic identity 'Gypsy' which covers a huge number of highly diverse communities with different political needs, aspirations, capabilities and interests, living in a wide variety of economic, political, social and cultural environments.

This fictional community has no shared language - a tiny minority might use one of the numerous Romani dialects, many of which are so unlike any other they are incomprehensible to speakers of another parlance, often being used as a second or domestic language. There is also panoply of cultural, religious, historical and ethnic differences between groups who might be called 'Roma'. Many of these groups do not call themselves or others 'Roma':

Spanish Calé and Gitanos

Portuguese Ciganos

French Manush (a sub-group of Sinti)

German and Northern Italian Sinti

Hungarian Lovari (Lovara) and Romungro (Modyar or Modgar)

Austrian/German/Czech Lalleri

Serbian Machvaya (Machavaya, Machwaya, or Macwaia)

Greece/Turkey Xoraxai (Horahane)

Bashaldé

Boyash

Lingurari

Ludar

Ludari

Rudari

Zl tari

Churari

Erlides

Yerlii

Arli

Kalderash

L utari

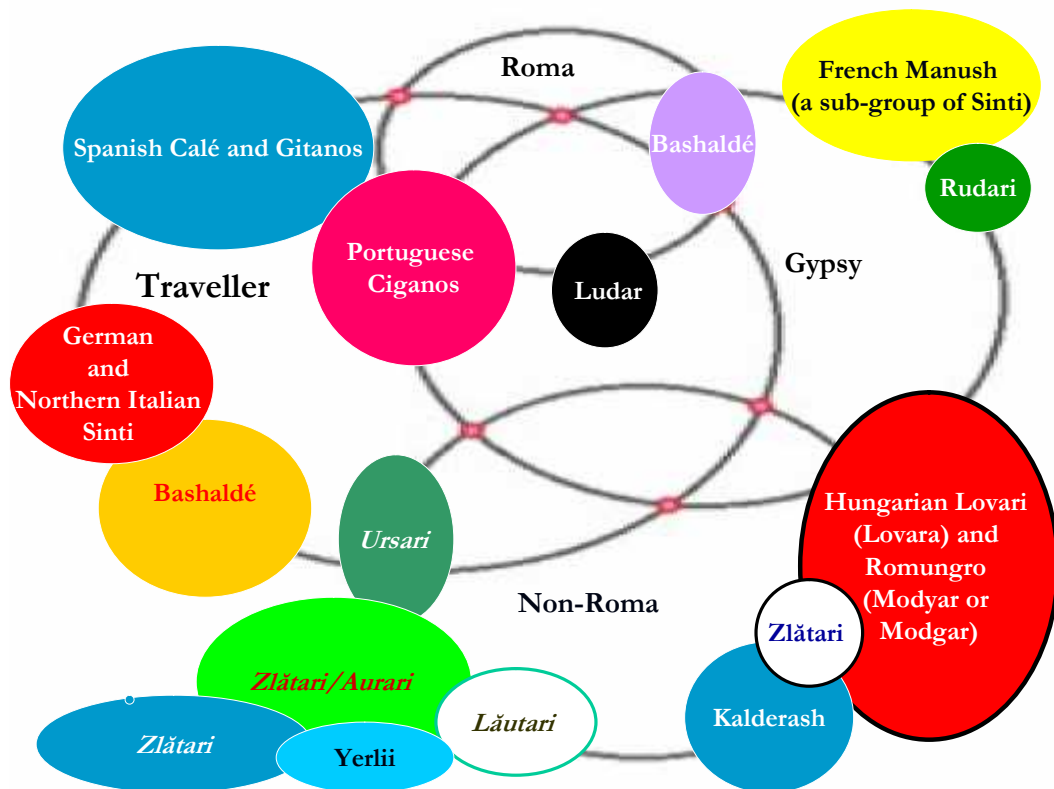
Luri

Ungaritza

Ursari

Zl tari/Aurari





These groupings can be thought of (by those who identify with one, some or none of them) as inherently different, necessarily similar or that there is an overlapping between two or many other groups

Even within countries, Roma minorities are diffuse and diverse and do not function as any kind of clearly definable or actual community. As J-P Liegois puts it, “from the Gypsy point of view there is no such group as the Gypsies”. As Kovats argues Roma as a category represents:

*...the politicisation of the Romantic racial myth of the ‘Gypsy people’; this, though intellectually discredited, has been thrown a lifeline due to its political utility. The application of ‘Gypsy’ identity has traditionally been used to marginalise the status of these communities...*

For him Roma, being pushed to the degree of separation as a distinct nation,

*...accords with this tradition by legitimating the ideology of segregation and suppressing democratic political development in order to sustain the marginalisation and isolation of ‘Roma’ people...*

This situation, which promotes the understanding of Roma as a discrete racial, ethnic or cultural group, at the micro level of local community, fosters personal and group alienation. Discarded at the margins of society, society acts like and so becomes the enemy or probably more realistically the constant threat. At the same time society understand Roma as a sort of human peril. This two way response can manifest itself in the form of crime (for instance Roma are driven to crime while they are designated because of their identity as criminal) hostility, family dysfunction and educational disaffection.

Within the corral of mutual intimidation the institutions of the host society, at best 'tolerate' the Roma 'other', at one and the same time promulgating and punctuating the perception difference, the very source of discrimination and prejudice.

This separatist outcome, wherein both Roma and host communities promulgate a divide between Roma and non-Roma, aligns with racist doctrines and ideologies, which have traditionally taken Gypsies to be alien to and irreconcilable with majority society. With the huge political shift to the right in Europe, particularly in its easterly regions, the continued allegiance with racial identification poses a huge danger. The ethnic categorization of Roma not only asserts the legitimacy of polity premised on ethnicity, it also provides the basis for the ideological, political and institutional dislocation of 'Roma' minorities from 'majority', thus freeing governments from their social and moral responsibility for a whole swath of their citizenry. Thus, Roma ethnic categorization can be understood as a reactionary phenomenon, resonant of a far right political order in which people are increasingly divided by ethnic boundaries, rather than united by their common interests (a'la socialism).

As things stand, Europe wide, 'Roma' are grossly over represented among the long-term unemployed. They experience massive inequality in regard to housing and health care. Their consequent dependency on shrinking welfare resources and declining public services are an obvious manifestation of growing social inequality. The 'prohibitive' costs of improving these people's living conditions and of returning their labour to 'profitability' provides a strong incentive for the state to define 'Roma' as a distinct racial community, thereby allowing policy to focus on the far cheaper and simplistic promotion of ethnic 'difference'. However, once the majority identify a minority group as incorrigibly distinctive it is a small step to depicting them as irredeemably defective.

The political delineation of 'Roma' as an ethnic or racial group and the promotion of some essential 'difference' between 'Roma' and everyone else in society exploits traditional prejudices and low expectations. 'Difference' is used to explain Roma impoverishment, social tension and conflicts, migration, and the failure of 'integration' initiatives. It conserves the political, social and economic isolation of 'Roma' people and supports the ideology of segregation.

We have found this is not the way forward; it is not socially progressive. We have found that the 'difference' Roma bring to host societies is enriching, a type of 'social brilliance' and that we are shortsighted, probably stupid not to embrace this richness into the heterogeneous homogeneity of our shared European heritage.

It is difficult to say how this might be done without Roma taking responsibility to examine and discuss the findings outlined in this document.

Looking at the sections the reader will provide very general guidelines of what can and might not be appropriate in terms of working to promote Roma participation. This material will provide you with models of practice, but in the main you might see most avoid an emphasis on the many of the dichotomies that hold back learning and development, premised on age or relative position in the organizational hierarchy. Leadership and direction of the organizations is usually facilitated by the collective, working within the broad framework of Roma rights and equality of access. These approaches arise out of an ethos of participation that has acted as a keystone in terms of organizational approach. This deploys activities and events, chosen, suggested or initiated by and/or alongside Roma, not exclusively as an end in

themselves, but as pathways to continuous learning, advocacy and activism premised on building a more just, fair and equal society.

This collaborative operational approach allows Roma to become conversant with management and leadership structures and practice the same. This is an organic structure that nurtures ability, motivation and interest from where people are at. To that extent the examples of practice included deploy a progressive model of participation with regard to Roma.

This document might be understood principally as a conscious raising exercise. At a continent wide level, Roma participation can be understood as a 'coming of age' with regard to what the participation of minority groups might entail. Roma as participants cannot continue to be regarded as clients; this would be a contradiction in terms and probably outcomes. The findings and evidence provided above demonstrates Roma are willing and able to contribute to local, regional, national and continental development by way of enhancing their own social and identity profile.

Developing associations with Roma to develop group participation includes allowing those coming forward from Roma backgrounds to make the pace in terms of developing organizational activity. To understand this approach one needs to grasp the social, political and economic roots of Roma experience as outlined above.

This is important because it can be seen how the line between being a beneficiary or a consumer of services and an advocate and activist in terms of Roma rights and social development can be indistinct. Non-Roma are often (perhaps understandably) blind to the fact that by taking part in and making use of these opportunities Roma themselves address Roma oppression and social discrimination; they are asserting themselves socially and politically. They are also reshaping, redefining and developing their cultural response to the world. Roma can be the fulcrum of ethnic and cultural emancipation, their joint participation exhibiting courage, fortitude and optimism, often built by way of their own and their family's interaction with organizations. This is a creative process, moving beyond the mere consumption of activities/services provided.

However, this process is dependent on people learning to use their influence in order that that they might *take* authority over their personal and cultural experience; authority *given* by others is a contradiction in terms – those who take authority and use it are the creators in political and social discourse. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the work of the projects and agencies included in this document is that they clearly work with people in order that they might take authority for themselves and their identity peers, so creating their own place within the world and refusing the option of isolation and the concomitant segregation.

Working with Roma I have and am seeing possibilities for social cohesion, between Roma and the host communities. This is promoted, via community and cultural action/solidarity as (first and foremost) human beings (as opposed to types of human beings). Such processes can be developmental of new interpretations of social relations and promote cultural cross fertilization and so growth, understanding, harmony and community integrity, dignity and civility.

Being part of cross national and international collaboration, focused on work with and amongst Roma, but as part of an understanding of these groups having commonalities and overlaps with other marginalized groups/communities, is also progressive both politically and

socially. This nexus of approach can help build contemporary models of good and better political, professional and social practice, but such work needs to include members of such groups, who should be involved in research as well as the leadership and delivery of practice.

In the light of growing political extremism across Europe, such cooperation, via the promotion of understanding and cultural/ethnic interaction and co-working, has the potential to alleviate and counter exclusion, prejudice, exploitation and oppression.

The meaning of 'Roma' isn't 'slave'; it means is 'man', not in the masculine sense but as a referral to being human; you and I, 'we' are Roma!



## Epilogue

Over the process of compiling this e-book it has been thrown into deep relief that the real key to the perseverance of continuing with such work has been the joy of recognition, when any one of those individuals has found personal fulfillment and made personal progress in their education. Finally something has clicked for that particular individual, who then sees the benefit of learning and makes a decision to continue and to be the best they can be and surely that is the best reward any of us working in both formal or informal education can have".

*Maureen Buchanan*

## References

KOVATS, MARTIN –

2003 *Hungary: between ethnic community and European state*

[https://www.opendemocracy.net/people-migrationeurope/article\\_1632.jsp](https://www.opendemocracy.net/people-migrationeurope/article_1632.jsp)

2003 *The Politics of Roma identity: between nationalism and destitution*

[https://www.opendemocracy.net/people-migrationeurope/article\\_1632.jsp](https://www.opendemocracy.net/people-migrationeurope/article_1632.jsp)

2012 *The EU's Roma Role*

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/martin-kovats/eus-roma-role>

LIEGEOIS, JEAN-PIERRE 1986 *Gypsies: An Illustrated History*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Press