

---

# Drug Education Prevention Information Service

## A Briefing Paper

*Review of Drug Education Materials for Children/Young People with Special Needs - Travellers*

### **Purpose of briefing**

This briefing presents a review of drug education resources for children and young people who are part of the Travelling community. The aim is to inform and provide support to practitioners working with young Travellers in delivering and developing appropriate drug education

### **Who is this briefing for?**

The briefing will be of particular relevance to practitioners working with young Travellers in schools, colleges and those working within informal settings, including:

- Teachers/staff working with young Travellers
- Traveller Education Service staff
- Young peoples' drug workers
- Head teachers and governors
- Youth workers

### **Terminology**

**Traveller** is a generic term that describes diverse cultural and ethnic groups who have a similar and essentially a mobile way of life

### **Introduction**

A number of different groups are covered by the term Travellers, some may refer to themselves as “ Travellers” or may use other names to identify their own groups and culture. Some travel for most of the year, some at certain times and others settle more or less permanently in one place. Estimates of the size of

Britain's Gypsy and Traveller population vary. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE 2004) reports an estimated population of no more than 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers. This would make the community similar in size to Britain's Bangladeshi population (280,000). Travellers differ from each other in a variety of ways in terms of lifestyle, culture and history. However all Travellers are subject to prejudice and discrimination by non-travelling society.

By far the largest group of Travellers and consequently the main subject of this briefing are the **Gypsy/Romany Travellers**. The Gypsies are one of the UK's oldest ethnic minority groups, having been established in England since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Gypsies originate from Northern India. English and European Gypsy Travellers still speak a language that has its roots in Sanskrit.

The Gypsy population in the United Kingdom has been estimated at between 90,000 and 120,000. At least 50 per cent of the Gypsy/Traveller population is thought to live in houses, and many other families move in and out of housing.

Gypsy/Travellers are not defined by their travelling lifestyle or by living in caravans but by their ethnicity, which is ascribed at birth. However, despite being legally protected as an ethnic minority Gypsy/Travellers are probably the most socially excluded group in the UK. Romany Gypsies and Travellers of Irish heritage are recognised as ethnic groups under the Race Relations Act 1976 (CRE, 2004).

Although there is considerable variation within Gypsy culture, there are a number of common features that are important when considering working with the community.

Gypsy travellers have always maintained a strong identity very different from that of the settled community. The nomadic lifestyle is accompanied by a strong sense of independence and cultural identity, partly based on a pride and confidence in entrepreneurial skills and occupational adaptability. A central feature of Gypsy culture is an extremely strong sense of community and close extended family bonds. This central importance of the family places great value on children, their care and safety within the community. Families are often large and family events feature at the forefront of the community's social priorities. The Gypsy family regards care for the Elderly and the sick as a duty. Cultural traditions are respected and adhered to more firmly than in many settled communities

In addition to Gypsy Travellers who have lived in the UK for generations, there are also a few thousand Romany Gypsies of European origin, in the United Kingdom, some of who have arrived as refugees.

Other groups of Gypsies include those of Welsh, Scottish and Irish heritage. Travellers of Irish Heritage have recently increased their numbers in the UK

**Irish Travellers** belong to a nomadic distinct ethnic group within Ireland. They have their own language, beliefs and social customs, which have been made stronger over time due to their exclusion and marginalisation from mainstream “settled” society. It is estimated that there are about 15,000 Irish Travellers resident in the United Kingdom throughout the year.

**Occupational Travellers** are the circus and fairground families who travel the country providing traditional, seasonal entertainment. Many have a distinct culture and lifestyle that originated centuries ago. Fairground families have a strong sense of family and view children as an asset in maintaining their lifestyle and culture. The arduous work of the fairground involves the whole family working as a unit and involves regular patterns of migration.

Fairground Travellers tend to settle in the winter months, often living in rented or bought winter accommodation. The fairground community is generally well organised and protects its interests and lifestyle through the Showman's Guild of Great Britain. There are approximately 20,000 fairground Travellers in Britain.

Circuses tend to be owned by a single family who hire a range of acts often from many countries. Circuses have a travelling season lasting nine to eleven months.

**New Travellers** grew out of the free festival movement in the early 1970s. By 1980 a network of free festivals had become established throughout the country. Stonehenge became the site for the largest festival and a spiritual centre. There was an emphasis on communal gatherings and celebrating the seasons. They are now categorised as ‘New’ or ‘New Age’ Travellers but are also still referred to as ‘hippies’. These groups are generally associated with rural areas and in recent years have become high profile participants in road protests, raves, festivals and similar activities.

New Travellers have taken up the nomadic life rather than being born into it, although many have children who have known no other life. This group is now in decline in the UK largely as a consequence of the Criminal Justice Act, which has meant, a banning of the festivals and an almost complete lack of legal sites. Many New Travellers have re-joined settled life or moved abroad, mainly to Spain.

## **Drugs and the Travelling communities**

There is little published information about drug use, attitudes towards drugs and the use of drug services in the Traveller community. There are no official statistics on drug prevalence or on the nature and extent of problematic drug use within Travelling communities.

The lack of data and research is a result of several factors which include:

- A reluctance of Travellers to engage with those viewed as authority and a fear of the data being used against them.
- Travellers are not included in studies of ethnicity and health, despite Romany Gypsies being defined as an ethnic group in the Race Relations Act of 1976.
- Many drug studies are based on household surveys resulting in Travellers being hidden

The few specific health studies within Traveller communities show that the general health of Travellers is poorer than for other minority communities in the UK (Van Cleemput and Parry 2001). This is largely influenced by cultural, environmental and mobility factors. Access to health and welfare facilities is considered to be a major factor (Doyal et al 2002).

There is evidence of higher levels of mental illness among Travellers. Many Gypsies and Travellers, whether they live on sites or in settled housing, suffer from acute depression, and although they do receive treatment, little attention is paid to the causes (CRE 2004)

Poor general health and poor access to health services are risk factors for problematic drug and alcohol misuse.

Anecdotal evidence from a variety of professional and Traveller groups does, however, indicate drug use and drug problems are increasing in Traveller communities. Several drug and health agencies reported concern being expressed from within the Gypsy community, particularly from women. However, their knowledge and awareness about drugs and drug use was considered to be low.

Several agency representatives commented on the lack of Travellers using drug treatment services. Like other areas of health and welfare, Gypsy families have at times taken on drug treatment, including detoxification, without any professional help or advice. As a result, there were several accounts of inappropriate and dangerous treatment.

## **Travellers and education**

It is Government policy that Gypsy and Traveller children should be given the same opportunities as all other children. The duty of LEAs extends to all children residing in their area, whether permanently or temporarily, and therefore includes Gypsy and Traveller children.

Any school anywhere may have Gypsy / Traveller pupils on their roll. Some schools are more likely to have larger numbers registered and more frequent attendance, if close to established sites.

School attendance and attainment of targets are generally lower for Gypsy/Travelling children. The Ofsted (2003) report *Provision and Support for Traveller pupils* found that:

- Travelling children have less access to pre-school and nursery education; the average rate for under-five provision is approximately 20 per cent.
- Out of 60-70,000 Traveller children, 12,000 are not registered in schools
- Attendance rate is 75 per cent for Traveller pupils, the lowest of any ethnic minority group.
- Only 15 – 20per cent of registered Traveller pupils are in regular attendance at Key Stage 3.
- The number of young Travellers in school drops dramatically in the transfer from primary to secondary school.
- The figure for Gypsies and Travellers enrolled in post-16 courses in England is below 20 per cent.

Gypsy and Traveller pupils in England are the group most at risk of failure in the education system.

- In 2003, 23 per cent of 228 Roma Gypsy pupils and 42 per cent of 161 Irish Traveller pupils in England obtained five or more A\*-C GCSEs, compared with an overall average of 51 percent.
- Twenty two per cent of Roma Gypsy pupils and 17 per cent of Irish Traveller pupils obtained no passes, compared with 6 per cent on average (DfES2004).

A number of factors both internal and external to Traveller communities and culture are important in determining access to education and achievement of Traveller children:

- *Interrupted education:* Movement from site to site hinders access to school or may give low priority to school attendance. Families may move due to seasonal working or are subjected to unpredictable forced movement.

Local authorities may refuse to provide sites or give inadequate resources. One-fifth of Gypsy/Travellers has no secure place to stay and is moved between unauthorised sites.

Ofsted (1996) report that rapid eviction is a major obstacle to access to and regular attendance at school.

- *The experience of prejudice and discrimination:* Travellers, including children, are often treated unfairly and may be subjected to racism, social exclusion, bullying and harassment. This may not always be intentional, for example a school or LEA may lack policies or procedures to encourage school attendance of Traveller children (DfES 2003, CRE 2004).
- *Teacher knowledge and expectations:* A lack of knowledge and awareness of Traveller culture, customs and lifestyles can mean that the school curriculum lacks appeal for young Travellers and is too inflexible. The content of what they are taught does not reflect their lives. Despite opportunities for flexibility within the curriculum, the history or culture of Gypsies and Travellers does not receive much attention (CRE 2004).
- Low expectations by teachers, based on the misplaced beliefs about the nature of interrupted schooling or stereotypes about pupil aspirations may lead to a lack of encouragement (DfES 2003).

Gypsy children are disproportionately represented among pupils who are excluded, despite an overall assessment of good behaviour. Ofsted reports that most are excluded for retaliatory behaviour against racism, discrimination and bullying.

- *Parental education and aspirations:* Many Gypsy parents, in particular, have had little or no formal education or have had negative experiences of schools. Low literacy skills may make it difficult for parents to know how best to support their children (DfES 2003).

Traveller families tend to value the learning of reading and writing skills but, at secondary school age, children are expected to work within the family and community business

A determination to protect Gypsy culture and their ethnic identity, often under extreme hostility, has led to the belief, in some, that school attendance may erode or "pollute" their way of life.

Education is an important area to consider, not just because Travelling children may miss out on drug education, but also because poor educational achievement in the settled community is a risk factor for problematic use of drugs and alcohol.

### **Traveller children and drug education**

Young people in the Travelling communities may receive incomplete or inadequate drug education for a number of reasons:

- Lower school attendance rates for Traveller children means that many will miss drug education altogether or may receive only part of the curriculum. Only 15 to 20 per cent of registered Traveller pupils are in regular attendance at Key Stage 3. Since many young Travellers will miss out on drug education at this level, they may lack the important knowledge, understanding and skills about drugs they use and about support and services for problematic drug use. In addition, Traveller children are less likely to receive drug education outside of the school curriculum since they are less likely to access colleges or other agencies such as the youth service.

Traveller children often rely more on parental and family education and advice, than other children, particularly in areas, which may overlap with strong moral concerns like sex and drug education. Since parental knowledge about drugs is generally poor, young Travellers may be further disadvantaged as they may receive inaccurate information.

- Many Gypsy parents consider school as a threat to strongly held values around gender relationships. Moral and cultural values often lead to opting out of sex education lessons, which may also mean other PSHE subjects including drugs are not taught (Ofsted 1996). For example

PSHE lessons combine issues of sex and drugs to address issues such as unwanted pregnancy and date rape, so what is seen as good practice for the majority of young people may disadvantage some other.

- Low literacy levels within the travelling community and a cultural tradition of oral communication make much of the written drug information and advice available in and outside of school less appropriate and accessible to young Travellers.

## **Drug education for Travellers**

*Drugs: Guidance for Schools* (DfES 2004), in section 3.1.3 'Diversity', makes specific reference to "Roma Gypsies (sic) and Traveller communities". The guidance states "schools should plan drug education which has relevance for all pupils and which takes into account the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*" and recommends that schools should work "closely with parents/carers, youth workers and the wider community to alleviate concerns and ensure that the drug education programme is relevant and sensitive to the culture, ethnicity and diversity of pupils."

Although most of the Traveller Education Services and other organisations reported a lack of specific drug education tailored for young Travellers, most were convinced of the need to develop materials and approaches. A small but welcome number of examples of tailored drug education initiatives were found:

Supporting material for the FRANK national drug awareness campaign provides information on Gypsies and Travellers in the *FRANK Action Update: Understanding Diversity*. It provides a brief description of types of Traveller groups and of Gypsy cultural issues.

### **Example of Practice – Travellers’ Drug Education Initiative**

#### *Face It – North Nottinghamshire Young Person’s Drug Service*

*Face It* provides drug education, information and advice to a local Gypsy community. *Face It* is also involved in producing a drug educational video aimed at young Travellers (due for release Autumn 2004).

After identifying a need for drug education work with the local Gypsy population, one of the young people’s workers began conversations with young Travellers in a local coffee shop. He also made contact with a group of mothers through the site nursery. Six drug awareness sessions were held in the nursery, known as the ‘little school’. All the participants were given certificates of achievement. This gave the women confidence to allow the drug workers to talk more formally to their children. As a result some young people from the site have received confidential support from *Face It*. The mothers also gave permission for drug workers to take a small group of young people to the UK Youth Festival of Fun.

The mothers in partnership with other agencies made a successful bid to the Children’s Fund. This enabled the provision of a portacabin. A variety of workers and agencies, including *Face It* will have sessional time in the centre.

#### Contact

Donnamarie Donnelly, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

Tel. 01623 620121

[faceit@hq.cnhc-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:faceit@hq.cnhc-tr.nhs.uk)

### **Example of Practice - *Ladged no longer* – Drug Awareness Video**

The video was commissioned by the Home Office’s Drugs Strategy Directorate, Diversity Team, is due for release Autumn 2004

The video, which features contributions from within the Gypsy community, is aimed to raise awareness about the nature of drugs and drug problems within the community. It is filmed in an environment that is familiar to Travellers and is aimed at the whole community. Personal accounts of drug problems within the community are used to educate the realities of drug use.

The video features Barrie Taylor (a Gypsy drug counsellor/educator) and Jake Bowers (a gypsy journalist and drug abuse campaigner).

### **Example of Practice - Barrie Taylor - Drug Counsellor/Educator**

Barrie, a Gypsy man, provides information, education and advice within mainly settled (houses and permanent sites) Gypsy and Irish Heritage communities. He provides individual, family and group work, culturally acceptable and appropriate to Gypsy communities.

Barrie uses his and others experiences of living with and dealing with drug problems to support his work

An educational presentation by Barrie usually consists of two sessions. The first session includes: types of drugs and their effects, signs and symptoms of drug use and availability. It includes showing participants examples of different drugs from a "drugs box". The second session begins with the playing of a tape of personal accounts of drug use and experiences from within Traveller communities. After discussion the session is concluded with a verbal test of twenty questions relating to key learning points.

### **Example of Practice - Drugs and the Travelling Community – Audio Tape**

Cambridge DAT

This tape is aimed at the whole Gypsy community and was produced by members of the community themselves.

After expressing a lack of information about drugs, local gypsy women in Cambridge took part in a 12-week drug training programme. After completion they went on to make the tape, which includes personal stories to help raise awareness of drugs and drug problems.

The tape is due to be launched in October 2004 at a conference to be addressed by the women involved in making it.

Sherry Peck  
Tel. 01480 496010  
[Sherry.peck@ormiston.org.uk](mailto:Sherry.peck@ormiston.org.uk)

## **Good practice in drug education for Travellers**

The above examples and other non-drug initiatives point to ways of developing more appropriate and effective drug education to young Travellers. Although it is important to develop non-school drug education resources, all those working with young Travellers should also work towards increasing engagement with school based drug education.

Enabling more young people to access school based drug education means practitioners must work with Traveller Education Services and also be part of the general drive to increase school attendance. Traveller children should not be treated as a 'special group' when delivering school drug or any other education – they should receive the same content as others. However, issues for Travellers should be recognised and included in school drugs policy as are issues concerning other ethnic and minority groups.

When working to produce materials tailored for Travellers, these should be culturally appropriate and reflect literacy levels of the community.

Drug education materials should take into account literacy levels and be culturally appropriate. Story telling is an important part of Gypsy culture - pictures, stories, video and tapes may be more effective to deliver drug education messages than other classroom-based strategies..

Parental knowledge of and attitudes to drugs need to be addressed. In Gypsy culture, the influence of parents is crucial in guiding choices taken by young people. The importance of the extended family often means that individuals needs and aspirations are secondary to those of the family. Thus involving parents in drug education is an important step towards improving drug education for young Travellers.

Practitioners from outside the Travelling communities should find out more about the customs, lifestyle, culture and history. Patience is vital as it takes time to build trust. Where necessary, services should be taken to the community, using Travellers and Travellers representatives to facilitate discussion and action with the community.

It is important, as in other work with ethnic minorities, that discrimination against Travellers and assumptions and prejudices of Travellers are challenged and that their lifestyles and culture are positively promoted within the wider community. It is important that Travellers do not perceive "social inclusion" to mean social and cultural erosion of the Traveller communities. In support of these, Avon Consortium Traveller Education Service have produced a very interesting and comprehensive resource for promoting Gypsy and Traveller culture, *Gypsies and*

*Travellers a Secondary school classroom resource to support Citizenship at Key Stage 3: Units 3 & 4*, for use in all schools, whether or not they have pupils from the Travelling communities on roll.

### **Challenges for practitioners in delivering drug education to young Travellers**

- ❑ More information about the level and nature of drug use in the Travelling community is required to help plan future services. This research needs be carried out sensitively to ensure that the information is not used against Travellers. A peer research project should be developed.
- ❑ There are a number of people who are providing drug education initiatives to Travellers, and many more who have expressed an interest in developing them. A forum for interested professionals, Travellers and Traveller groups to discuss ideas for the future should meet as soon as possible.
- ❑ Drug Action Teams should identify Traveller communities in their locality and develop strategies for drug education tailored for Travellers and their children. This is particularly urgent in areas where there are significant Traveller populations
- ❑ Information materials on health and safety issues concerning drugs, alcohol and medicines for Travellers is needed. This could be based on *The Site Detectives (ACTES2004)* a site safety booklet, designed by young Travellers and Avon Consortium Traveller Education Service.
- ❑ A Traveller / Gypsy Drug strategy is needed to incorporate the needs of Travellers into the national drug strategy. This should be accompanied by guidance notes for drug education delivery in Traveller communities produced and disseminated nationally.

### **References**

Avon Consortium for Traveller Education, (ACTES) (2004) *The Site Detectives*.

Department for Education and Skills, (DfES) (2003) *aiming high: Raising the achievement of Gypsy Traveller pupils.*

Department for Education and Skills, (DfES) (2004) *National Curriculum Assessment and GCSE/GNVQ attainment by pupil characteristics, in England, 2002 (final) and 2003 (provisional).*

Department for Education and Skills, (DfES) (2004) *Drugs: Guidance for Schools.*

Doyal L., Cameron A., Cemlyn S. and Nandy S. (2002) *The health of Travellers in the South West Region: a review of data sources and a strategy for change*, a report prepared by all School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol and Mary Shaw, South West Public Health Observatory.

Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (2004), *Gypsies and Travellers: A strategy for the CRE, 2004-200.*

Liegeois J-P and Gheorghe N. (1995) *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority*, International Report 95/4, the United Kingdom. International Minority Rights Group.

Ofsted (1996) *The education of Travelling children: A survey of educational provision for Travelling children*, London: Ofsted Publications Centre.

Ofsted (2003) *Provision and Support for Traveller Pupils*, HMI 455.

Van Cleemput and Parry (2001) "Health status of Gypsy Travellers, *J Public Health*; 23: 129-134.

## **Useful resources**

Acton T. (1994) *Gypsy Politic sand Social Change*, London.

*Gypsies and Travellers a Secondary School classroom resource to support Citizenship at Key Stage 3: Units 3 & 4*, Avon Consortium Traveller Education Service (ACTES), Charborough Rd, Filton, Bristol, South Gloucestershire BS34 7RA, Tel. 01454 862620/21, Email: [ac.tes@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:ac.tes@southglos.gov.uk)

FRANK *Action Update: Understanding Diversity.*

Kiddle C. (1998) *Beyond the stereotype: Including Traveller perspectives in the curriculum*, Plymouth, Devon Education Service.

McDonald T and Thompson M (1999). *Travelling Information and Training Pack – Gypsies and Other Travellers*. West Midlands. Save The Children.

*The Roma Education Resource Book* - useful research from eastern Europe that affirms that Roma parents, children and communities need to be involved in planning projects if they are to succeed.

[www.osi.hu/iep/minorities/ResBook1/ResBookAll.htm](http://www.osi.hu/iep/minorities/ResBook1/ResBookAll.htm)

Tyler C. (2004) *Traveller education: Accounts of good practice* Trentham Books.

Save the Children, (2001) *Denied a future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*

Derrington C., and Kendall S. (2004) *Gypsy Traveller students in Secondary schools*, Trentham Books.

O'Hanlon C., and Holmes P. (2004) *The education of Gypsy and Traveller children*, Trentham books.

Holmes P. (1985) *A guide to information and resources useful for the education of Traveller children*, National Association of Teachers of Travellers

## **Organisations**

Advisory Council for the Education of Romany & Other Travellers (ACERT)  
Moot House, The Stow, Harlow, Essex CM20 3AG

National Association of Teachers of Travellers (NATT)  
c/o Alec Hunter High School, Stubbs Lane, Braintree, Essex Tel/Fax: 01376 340360

The Association of Gypsy Women  
Sylvia Dunn  
01268 782792

## **Useful organisations and websites**

**Arthemis** – Gypsy and Travellers education [www.jokak.demon.co.uk/artemis](http://www.jokak.demon.co.uk/artemis)

Scottish Young Gypsy Traveller , written by the young people themselves.  
[www.ComeLookatus.org](http://www.ComeLookatus.org)

**Devon Traveller Education** - Excellent list of resources available:  
[http://www.devon.gov.uk/Travellers\\_Education](http://www.devon.gov.uk/Travellers_Education)

**Department of Education's Official Traveller Education Policy**  
**[http://www.dfes.gov.uk/a-z/TRAVELLER\\_CHILDREN.html](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/a-z/TRAVELLER_CHILDREN.html)**

**Roma Education network** - Has lots of information about the culture and history of Roma and Gypsy people.

**<http://www.romaedu.org.uk/>**  
**<http://www.romaedu.org.uk/stereotypes.htm>**

**The Traveller Law Reform Coalition,**

Andrew Ryder,  
Policy Development Worker,  
Banderway House,  
156-162 Kilburn High Road  
London  
NW6 4JD  
020 7625 2255  
email: **[romanistan@yahoo.com](mailto:romanistan@yahoo.com)**  
**<http://www.travellerslaw.org.uk>**

**The Gypsy Council**

Charlie Smith / Anne Bagehot  
01708 868986  
**<http://www.thegypsycouncil.org/>**

**Travellers Times** - Download Travellers Times at **[www.travellerstimes.org.uk](http://www.travellerstimes.org.uk)**

Special thanks to Neil Baxter, staff consultant

This briefing is produced by the Education and Prevention team ,DrugScope for DEPIS, the online information service about drug education and prevention projects, resources, evaluations and reviews to support good practice. .Download briefing at **[www.info.doh.gov.uk/doh/depisusers.nsf/main?readForm](http://www.info.doh.gov.uk/doh/depisusers.nsf/main?readForm)**

**DrugScope**

**32-36 Loman St**  
**London**  
**SE1 0EE**  
**Tel: 020 7928 1211**  
**Fax: 020 7928 1771**  
**Website: [www.drugscope.org.uk](http://www.drugscope.org.uk)**

