

Travellers in prison news

Newsletter of the Irish
Chaplaincy in Britain's
Traveller Project

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BEANNACHTAÍ NA NOLLAG!

BAXTALO KREČUNO THAJ BAXTALO NEVO BERŠ!

HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

Happy Christmas to all of our readers! The past year has been a busy one at the Traveller Equality Project with an ever-increasing number of prisons promoting awareness of Gypsy and Traveller culture.

This year more Traveller Groups than ever before have got up and running. More and more Gypsies and Travellers are doing training courses in prison, learning to read on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan and mentoring others who are learning to read. Across prisons Traveller Groups led by Travellers themselves are empowering themselves through advocacy and education.

The work of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain is funded in part by grants from the Government of Ireland and by the support of many generous Friends.

Highlights of the year have been the massive increase in Traveller Groups in prison, the publication of our books Traveller adults learning to read, the launch of National Prison Radio 'Open Road' and the conclusion of our research report; 'Working With Gypsies and Travellers on Probation'.

In this issue we have vital information on changes in the law for scrap metal dealers, while Traveller prisoner Terry Smith gives us his life story!

TIPN is your newsletter. TIPN is for Travellers and Gypsies and those who work alongside the community – SO GET WRITING.

Let us know what things are happening in your prison for Gypsies and Travellers and how others can learn from it. Send us your poems, artwork, articles and letters to make sure that TIPN makes your voice heard.

Most importantly, we here at the Traveller Equality Project wish you, your family and friends a good and happy year.

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OPEN ROAD TRAVELLER HOUR



The 'Open Road' Traveller hour on National Prison radio is now going out every month, and is already getting positive feedback from Travellers in prison around the country.

'Open Road' goes out on the second Monday of every month at 8am, repeated at 8pm on the same day. The second episode will be broadcast on the 9th Decemeber, followed by the third on the 13th Januray.

The first episode featured thoughts and stories from Travellers in several prisons across the UK, with a particular focus on education.

If you'd like to contribute an idea for the radio show, or become involved, just drop us a line!

RICHARD O'NEILL: ROMANI STORY TELLER

Richard O'Neill is a professional Romani storyteller and performs in 150 schools, museums and libraries a year. Here he talks about his life and work:

I was born into a large Romani Gypsy family in the North East in 1962, in a modern caravan, my dad in 1925 in a horse drawn wagon and his dad before him in a tent. My ancestors came into this country 500 years ago they were believed to be from Egypt hence the term Egyptians which was eventually shortened to Gypsy. Irish and Scottish Travellers also have histories going back as far. Literacy levels were always low but training in people skills, buying,

selling and telling stories for fun and profit were very high.



I grew up listening to stories around camp fires, at family camps and fairs, in caravans at weddings christenings and funerals. When I was five years old, having learned to read at school I did my first performance, some reading (which amazed many of the older people) and a little selection of tales about my school and the Gorja (non Gypsy) people I met there. I carried on telling my tales whenever I was asked, developing new ones especially for my children and their many cousins who seemed to have a real appetite for them. Like most things you acquire for free it wasn't something I particularly valued. However I did realise that the skills certainly came in handy in my work as a construction company owner who had to explain complicated plans to customers who had little or no knowledge of construction, as a volunteer in youth clubs and schools, as a therapist and trainer and in gaining support to launch National Men's Health Week now an international event.

Five years ago I set up a website to encourage more Gypsies and Travellers to express themselves in the written and spoken word and through that website I was asked to

tell stories at a community centre in Manchester on a professional basis. This led on to a number of other offers in Manchester to tell stories in places as varied as the Imperial War Museum and at a corporate board meeting.

Since then I have worked with a number of different Traveller education, museum and library services and a number of charities around the country, entertaining and educating, but also helping to train more storytellers from the Gypsy Traveller communities through the lollobal storytelling group.

Two of the most popular children's stories have been turned into plays by children themselves, it's not just about Traveller culture; there are common themes that most of us experience being discriminated against, feeling lonely and powerless.



The question why tell stories is always in the back of my mind, I do it because I love it, the reaction from audiences, the satisfaction that comes from encouraging others to express themselves through story and the opportunity to give people a different view of the Travelling communities.

The old saying that a man dies twice once when he leaves this earth and again when no one alive remembers him I believe to be true. We do keep our relatives and those we have loved and learned from alive with story but

it also gives us a sense of who we are and where we have come from.

I personally don't anyone tell anyone else's stories only those I've created or ones that have been passed down through the family. I have been asked if I will run workshops and training courses for non Travellers to teach them the culture, language and skills to deliver the stories and the answer is a resounding yes, I would like to see many more people who really understand my culture and my stories delivering them around the country.

The advice I was given by my Dad before I did my first public performance; "Dik, Shoon, Rokker" which in English translates as 'look, listen and then talk' still enters my head every time I'm about to perform. I remember the stories I've been told and the people who told them, they still have a huge impact on my life and I hope I continue to remember to look and listen more than I talk.

(Taken from the Romani Roots website)

Richard's website and contact details can be found here:

<http://richardthestoryteller.weebly.com/>

DAVID ESSEX TALKS TRAVELLERS

The singer and actor David Essex talked about his Traveller heritage in a recent interview. Essex is appearing in a forthcoming film about the Travelling community, titled simply 'Traveller'.

Essex said the film was "not carrying a banner for anybody" but that it was made in collaboration with community members:

"I think what makes it interesting is the fact that we were allowed to draw upon their experiences, we were living with them, we were talking with them".



Talking about the community, Essex commented:

"It's a way of life and it's a very insular community that most people don't look into, and one you can't get to look into and be a part of unless you're trusted".

This was made easier, Essex said, because of his own heritage:

"I've always been aware of them because I was patron of the Gypsy Council and my granddad was a Travelling man from Cork. My mum always said a line which I included in the film: 'A land without Gypsies is a land without freedom'. And in these very restrictive times, it's even more important to me that there is a sense of freedom in somebody".

The film will get a limited cinema release in 2014 before becoming available online.

MY LIFE – TERRY SMITH

This month we were thrilled to receive a 'life story' from Terry Smith; in prison in the North East. Thanks for sharing Terry; you're a natural story teller!

My name is Terry and I'm a Traveller. I was born in Ireland in 1957 and only a month or so after I was born my mother left me with my sister in a big

house. I was there until I was 5 years old, then one day out of the blue my sister took me to the front door and handed me to a big man in a big wagon. God I was so frightened! I yelped and shouted like a banshee! It turned out this was my uncle – my Daddy's brother. He'd come over to Ireland to renew his driver's license and my mother had asked him to collect me and bring me back to her in Manchester. The shouting paid off and I got sweets, chocolate and pop all the way back ha, ha, ha.



My mother and family was parked on the side of a field near a big mill. In all there were about 10 – 15 trailers. I did not know my mother and it took a little time to get used to her and being in a trailer. Everywhere we went we got called gypos, tramps, pikies; but my father would run the country people away.

I went to school once and got into a fight with two boys who I caught spitting at my brothers. I never went to school after that and I was quite happy running around with my daddy all day collecting scrap or my uncle doing tarmacking and grinding the butchers' knives.

The time soon came around and my mum got tired of being on the road, so back to Manchester we went and settled into a house. We kept the trailer and mammy said we can still go travelling in the summer and be back in the house in the winter. We went fruit and veg picking every gear in the summer around Peterborough.

I had to go to school again and I did not like the name calling but I was glad I stuck it out for 2 years. I still can't spell properly but I'm learning!

I still have the old country roads in my blood and what I would give to be on the side of the road now with a trailer, a fire outside and a coddle cooking slowly while listening to a bit of music!

Would you like to hear more about my life? Then watch this space and tell your friends about the Traveller Equality Project. They don't have to be strangers just "friends we haven't met yet".

Good luck and God Bless.

Terry.

GETTING A SCRAP COLLECTOR'S LICENCE

On the 1st December 2013 the new Scrap Metal Law came into force. It is now illegal to operate as scrap dealer without a licence. This could affect many people from Gypsy and Traveller communities, so it is worth taking the time to think about getting registered if you plan to get involved in scrap dealing once you are released.

New Restrictions

There are several new restrictions to scrap metal dealing in the UK.

- You must not receive scrap metal from a person without verifying their name and address.
- You must not buy scrap metal for cash.
- A site licence must be displayed in a prominent place, accessible to the public, at each site identified in the licence.
- A mobile collector's licence must be displayed on any

vehicle that is being used in the course of the business and can be easily read by a person outside the vehicle.



You must keep a record of all scrap metal you receive including:

- Description including type, form, condition, weight, any marks identifying previous owners or distinguishing features
- Date and time.
- The registration mark of the vehicle it was delivered in or on.
- The full name and address of the person received from.
- The full name of the person who makes the payment acting for the dealer.

You must keep a record of all scrap metal you dispose of including:

- Description including type, form and weight (site licence holders only).
- Date and time.
- The full name and address of the person disposed to.
- If payment is made (by sale or exchange), the price of other consideration received (site licence holders only).

You must keep your records for 3 years and allow the council or police to inspect your premises and records if asked.

How to apply:

- You must apply for a licence in every council you work in. Everyone you work with will have to have their own collectors licence. You must pay a licence fee and provide the council with:
- Your name, an address, date of birth, and telephone number.
- National Insurance Number.
- A utility bill in your name at the same address.
- Bank account details in your name.
- A Basic Disclosure Certificate. You must give details of any conviction for a relevant offence or any relevant enforcement action. (It can't be more than 3 months old)

To operate in the Scrap Metal trade you will also be required to have:

- Scrap Metal insurance for your vehicle.
- A Waste Carriers Licence.

You'll need to renew your licence every 3 years. You can find the application forms online on council websites, or you can ring your council and they will send you the forms.

This may all sound very complicated, but many councils offer help filling in forms and can guide you through the process. The Traveller Equality

Project are also happy to help with enquiries.

You could be fined up to £5,000 if you don't hold a licence!

STOPPING IS ALL GO

A Traveller organisation is making progress in persuading councils to take a pragmatic approach to dealing with unauthorised encampments. Over the past year, Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (GATE) has twice worked with housing officials in the city to set aside sites as temporary authorised encampments – and hopes other authorities may follow suit. The move could minimise the complaints and tensions often associated with roadside Traveller camps – while reducing the costs of clean-ups and evictions.

Under the approach – known as negotiated stopping – enforceable rules are agreed between council officials and Traveller families, who must look after the sites and leave on a pre-agreed date.

GATE director Helen Jones said: “Really this is common sense. Across the country we have lots of people living on unauthorised temporary encampments – and these cause lots of tensions with the settled community. This in turn makes it more difficult for Travellers to win planning permission for authorised sites, of which there are not enough.

“People living on the roadsides don't always have an incentive to respect their environment. Even if they do look after the site, their neighbours may dump rubbish or burn things, and in any case they could all be evicted at any moment.

“Settled people near some of these sites do experience some genuine

discomfort, which needs to be acknowledged and dealt with. More negotiated stopping would benefit all sides and could hopefully ultimately reduce the mistrust of Travellers.”

The city's experiments follow a 2010 council scrutiny committee inquiry into the issues faced by Gypsy and Traveller communities. Representatives of local Traveller families gave evidence to councillors and Leeds GATE recommended trying a negotiated approach. It took several more years to turn the idea into action. Some of the families on Leeds roadsides are from the city and have nowhere legal to park their trailers – meaning they are technically homeless – while others pass through for work at certain points in the year. The council has spent nearly £2 million cleaning up and evicting unauthorised camps since 2004.

The first negotiated site was a small piece of land in Holbeck. Following discussions, an agreement was signed by the council and a small number of Traveller families. The council insisted no additional caravans could move on and toilets and skips were provided.

The agreed rules included that horses were banned, and no fires bigger than a cooking fire were permitted. Before the date the Travellers were due to leave, another site across the city was identified and a new contract signed – and the families moved on together.

Since then there have been no other negotiated encampments in Leeds – the travelling season is over – but Jones is optimistic for the future. She said: “By making agreements with roadside families we are giving them an incentive to look after where they are living. But individual consequences for behaviour are also

important – if a camp resident breaks the law or commits an environmental crime, they must be dealt with.



“This could all be very positive – if more councils used this approach it would facilitate the nomadic way of life, which is still not illegal in this country despite being difficult. But I also think what is more important is that it is giving confidence that it can be OK to live next to Gypsies and Travellers, which may help relationships in future.”

A Leeds City Council spokeswoman said negotiated stopping agreements “helped to reduce the number of encampments in 2012-13 and the impact on local communities of unauthorised encampments”.

She added: “Consideration regarding the use of negotiated stopping in the future would be given on a case by case basis where there is a commitment to Leeds and a preparedness to enter into a social contract and sign up to the negotiated stopping agreement.”

From an article by Ciara Leeming in The Big Issue, 18/11/13

THE WISDOM OF MANDELA



As we celebrate the life of Nelson Mandela following his recent death, it's a good time to look back on his wisdom. He once said:

'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.'

I suppose sitting in prison you could say to Mandela – 'Why would I want to change the world? – I'm in prison and just want to do my time without hassle.'

But at the bottom of it all, Mandela, a man who spent 27 years in prison, and so knew a bit about staring at the four walls, was absolutely right.

Although it's not so much about changing 'the world,' the globe, the great universe; it's about changing OUR OWN WORLD.

It's not about using education to change the world for someone else; it's about using education to make our own world better – using education to write letters home, to fill in apps, to get a CSCS card, to do a NVQ in bricklaying, to complete a sentence plan and so on.

Almost 70% of Travellers and Gypsies in prison have difficulties reading and writing. That means that 7 out of every 10 Travellers in prison will have

a tougher, longer, lonelier time in prison.



When I first went into prison a few years ago, I sometimes heard Travelling men say to me:

'Education's not what Travellers do' or 'it's not part of Traveller culture.'

It seemed strange to me. Most of the Travellers I knew growing up valued education, they wanted to run their own businesses, be independent but they knew that education could buy real freedom. Able to read and write, they could deal with councils, police and others.

Being able to read and write gave them the freedom that is so much a part of a Traveller's way of life. No one in society could push a piece of paper at them in order to confuse them or stop them getting what they wanted.

A young Traveller man, Terry, one of the smartest people I had ever met, said to me in prison last year,

'It took me a few years to realise it, a lot of it in the seg but education makes you equal. I control my own life as much as anyone can in here.'

Like an increasing number of Travellers, Terry works as a Shannon Trust Reading Plan Mentor often teaching Travellers who know that being able to read and write gives you the chance to be truly free.



TRAVELLER WRITER UNVEILS HARD HITTING PLAY



Acclaimed Traveller actor/playwright Michael Collins is performing his latest thought-provoking one-man play, "Magpies on the Pylon" in Donegal next month.

Collins, wrote the play from the perspective of Jim, a Traveller whose 23-year-old son has recently killed himself, leaving his parents, a brother, and two sisters submerged in devastating grief and confusion.

"It's about a man who cuts himself off from his wife and his children and turns to alcohol and depression, trying to find answers from religion but not really talking to anybody about it," Collins said of the play, which is a Traveller Wagon Wheel Theatre Company production. "Traveller women, after a certain amount of time, will talk to each other, but men seem to keep these things to themselves. That's one of the themes through the play. The other one is of Jim being afraid to talk to his kids, because he thinks there's something he's said or done that caused the youngster to kill himself."

Collins, whose many acting credits include a role on the television drama "Glenroe," received a

Lifetime Achievement Honour at the Traveller Pride Awards last month which was presented by President Michael D. Higgins.

He said he'd begun writing "Magpies on the Pylon" two years ago, after learning that the incidence of suicide, which has been a source of huge concern throughout Ireland in recent years, is seven times higher in the Traveller community. The recent suicides of two of his own cousins and the effects he observed their deaths to have on family members contributed to the writing of the play.

"One of the most important messages that I hope people will walk away with, whether Traveller or settled, is that they're not on their own, there is help out there, and one of the most important things you need to do is talk to somebody. It's not about you closing yourself off in a room and turning to alcohol or drugs, because you'll end up killing yourself and destroying the structure of your family. The important thing is that you need to talk to somebody. If you don't want to talk to a professional right now, you need to talk to members of your family, so they can, down the road, help you talk to a professional."

A FEW THOUGHTS...

Just a few thoughts that I've had after questions from prison staff –

Why do you use a capital letter for 'Gypsies' and 'Travellers'?

Gypsies and Travellers are groups of people – an ethnic group – and so for the names of things we always use a capital letter. It is a matter of respect for a group, just like when we use a capital letter for English, Irish and French.

Are Travellers that don't travel still Travellers?

Travellers are an ethnic group with a shared heritage. Just one part of that

shared heritage is the custom of nomadism – moving on for work and pleasure from place to place. Nowadays it is very difficult to live a nomadic life or even to live on an authorised site or halting site because of various laws and prejudice. BUT living in a flat or house or wherever a Traveller still remains a Traveller because that is his or her heritage and ethnic origin.



Where do Gypsies and Travellers come from?

Although Gypsies (Romanies and English Travellers), Welsh Travellers (Kale), Scottish Travellers and Irish Travellers (Pavees or Minceir) have different origins, they share similar experiences and traditions.

Generally speaking and this is in no way the full story – Gypsies / Romanies / Kale originated in Northern India – although they have lived and worked in Britain for many centuries.

Again it's not the full story but Scottish Travellers mainly have their origins in Scotland and Irish Travellers their origins in Ireland.



BEING A TRAVELLER IN JAIL

A few thoughts from Michael King – A Traveller in a prison in the South East.

If you're a Traveller inside a prison. You might not know how to act - my advice is - be yourself!

You'll be judged. You'll be bullied and you'll get mad. It's only because they don't understand us and really that's quite sad. Teach them. Guide them. Show them who we are because we all live on God's earth and the distance between us isn't much.

So when you are angry because they judge us – just remember – people are scared of what they do not know!

TRAVELLER LEARNERS

Many Gypsies and Travellers have had poor experiences of education. Being unable to read and write in the modern world – where you need to fill in a form to get anywhere – may even have been a factor behind many ending up in prison in the first place.

Getting education in prison is one of the most worthwhile things you can do, but too many Travellers are still missing out.

If you have been a Traveller learning in prison we want to hear from you! We want to hear what worked for you, and also what didn't work. What challenges did you have to overcome to get an education?

Your experiences will help us help others to get an education.





TYSON FURY FIGHT RESCHEDULED

British heavyweights David Haye and Tyson Fury will now fight each other on 8 February in Manchester. The duo had been due to meet on 28 September, but Haye pulled out after sustaining a cut on his head, which needed six stitches, in sparring.

Haye says he is relieved a new date has been arranged so quickly. 'Only the possibility of getting another chance to land punches on [Fury's] massive head and doughy gut has helped cheer me up. News of the date in February is music to my ears. I was absolutely devastated this weekend and felt as though I'd let a lot of people down,' Haye said.

'My fans will still get the chance to see what they all wanted to see this weekend. They'll get to see Tyson Fury sparked out in a spectacular fashion.'

Fury called former world heavyweight world champion Haye 'a clown' in the wake of the postponement.

Chris Farnell, a sports lawyer who represents Fury, questioned Haye's decision not to use a head-guard in sparring. But Haye has deflected any

criticism and says his desire to 'expose' Fury has been strengthened for the rescheduled bout.

He added, 'These things sometimes happen in training and to suggest I decided against wearing a head-guard, or that the cut was premeditated, shows a clear lack of knowledge and understanding.'

'Tyson Fury might start to get brave now that he's received a stay of execution and he might call me names and accuse me of ducking him, but that will all be short-lived, I can promise you.'

'After hearing the nonsense he has come out with in the last few days, I'm even more determined to expose him in front of millions.'

'And only the possibility of getting another chance to land punches on his massive head and doughy gut has helped cheer me up.'

Time will tell...

STAY IN TOUCH!

We hope you enjoyed this newsletter and will sign up for future editions.

- Do you have a question about Travellers in prison?
- Are you thinking of starting a Travellers Group and would like advice?
- Would you like help arranging speakers from the Travelling Community?
- Are you looking for resources for Traveller prisoners?

Then please get in touch!

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**Remember to register in
your prison as:**

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