

Travellers in prison news

Newsletter of the Irish
Chaplaincy in Britain's
Traveller Project

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Celebrate Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month!

Welcome to the Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month edition of TIPN. In this TIPN we hear from Gypsies and Travellers who are using education to help other members of the community both as Toe by Toe mentors in prison, and outside prison as politicians and lawyers. These powerful voices from the Gypsy and Traveller Community are exactly what we need to celebrate during Traveller History Month.

What is your prison doing to celebrate Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month? Why not write and tell us?

The Traveller Project has visited Send, Highpoint, Eastwood Park and

Gartree over recent weeks and we've been delighted by the number of Traveller learners and mentors on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan (AKA Toe by Toe). Every week more Traveller men and women in prison are learning to read and write, often taught by other Travellers. As Ruben-James from Bullingdon describes in his letter to TIPN not being able to read or write meant:

'I was stuck. No one ever seemed to have time to help with apps, dinner menus or canteen sheets. And it was worse with the letters I used to receive from my wife or family as they were personal...'

The Traveller Project is meeting many Traveller men and women across England and Wales like Ruben-James who understand that, in the words of Nelson Mandela, 'Education is the most

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powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.' This edition of TIPN is a timely celebration of the great leaders of the Gypsy and Traveller Community across the prison estate who are becoming Traveller Reps, Diversity Reps and Shannon Trust Reading Plan Reps.

Remember to send us any articles, poems, drawings or letters that you would like included in the next edition of TIPN!

Voice of a Traveller



Soulful Traveller Kelly McDonagh Mongan fell at the last hurdle in the 'Voice of Ireland' final at the end of April, coming second place to another Cork native; Keith Hanley. Kelly had been favourite to win the competition, and her mature voice had already captured the hearts of thousands of fans across Ireland.

Kelly put her time in the spotlight to good use, taking every opportunity to talk of her pride at being an Irish Traveller, and challenging some of the stereotypes and slurs that Travellers suffer in Ireland.

Disappointment was short-lived for Kelly, from Fermoy, Co. Cork, as she gave birth to her first child, a baby boy named Bernie, at the beginning of May. Bernie is the first grandchild on both sides of the

family and Kelly said "everyone is thrilled" on the new arrival.

"God has been good: everything has worked out perfectly and I'm now going to concentrate on my baby."

Kelly's husband, Bernie Sr. said: "We just can't wait to get the baby home now and get Kelly home."

"We are just delighted with him and can't thank everyone enough for their support over the last couple of weeks. It's been a crazy time."

Although she may not have won the Voice of Ireland, Kelly was recognised at this year's Traveller Achievement awards in Dublin, where she picked up the award for music. Kelly joined icons such as John Joe Nevin where Brigid Quilligan, the director of the Irish Traveller Movement, said the achievement of young Travellers was a great source of pride to the older generation.

The Community Channel's Gypsy Roma Traveller Season



Starting in May and continuing on into June, the Community Channel has dedicated a season of programming designed to raise the profile of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK and beyond. The programmes will celebrate the unique arts and customs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and

explore some of the most pressing social, economic and political issues they face in the modern world.

The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller season will leave viewers with a complex picture; one that is challenging, beautiful and inspiring. While we are reminded of the challenges Gypsy Roma and Traveller Communities face; balancing their own identity and culture with education and integration, and the rising threat of anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary and recent discrimination in housing policy in Italy, we are also offered a real celebration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and lifestyle.

The season offers a glimpse into a history steeped in passion, spirit, song and dance, and hope for the future with new ideas, art forms and activism created and shared by the youngest Gypsy, Roma and Traveller generation.



There will be programmes looking at health, education, music, history, prejudice and lifestyle. A few highlights from the season include a documentary about Appleby Fair, 'Our Ways and Voices' and

'Gypsy Women in the 20th Century'; two films made by Pavee Point in Ireland, and 'Uprooted' a documentary about Roma people in Europe.

The Community Channel is available on Freeview Channel 87.

David Joyce: A Traveller Role Model



In 2005, David Joyce became the first Traveller in Ireland to graduate as a barrister. A human rights activist for nearly 20 years, David has spent his life on the frontline of the campaign for justice for Irish Travellers.

Prior to qualifying as a barrister, he worked in community development with local and national Traveller organisations. He was a founding member of the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) in 1990. From 1998, he worked with the ITM as National Accommodation Officer and from February 2003 until August 2005 he was Legal Policy Officer of the Traveller Legal Unit (TLU). He has contributed to a number of reports and publications on Travellers' rights.

David is a guest lecturer at various universities, delivering lectures and presentations for the Human Rights and Law modules of Trinity College

Dublin's LL.M. degree programme. He is also a member of the Board of the European Roma Rights Centre.

In 2005 he received the Irish Person of the Year Award for his work and dedication to the cause of human rights for Travellers. Married to Rosie, David has three children; David Jr., Claire and Bernard who must be very proud of their father.

Traveller Reps Speak Up

We were pleased to get several great letters from Travellers this month sharing the great work they are doing in prison. Over to them...

First up is **Billy O'Driscoll**, a Traveller Rep in HMP Gartree. Billy writes:

"I recently had a meeting with Diversity and we have spoken about many different things. Until the meeting our Traveller Groups were around every three months, but we have now decided to hold a meeting every month until it's well established and moving forward in our requirements. Also I'm happy to say we have set up a tape recording service for letters, in order to maintain family links. We are going to hold an education and cultural awareness event during our History Month in June. Also I'm very pleased to tell you that we will be holding skills and crafts groups, possibly during the monthly forums. Our Community have traditional crafts and this will be a way of integrating other groups. Finally, we are looking at the possibility of finding community buddies to support those with reading, writing etc.

So all in all things are moving in the

right direction and are much better than they were before. I've managed to get a flyer up on every wing and in reception about signing up as 'W3', so with that and everything else that's going on I couldn't be more happy. I thank all the governors and Diversity team for all their understanding and hard work to make everything happen."

Billy's doing a brilliant job leading the way for the Travelling Community in HMP Gartree, making life a bit easier for other Traveller prisoners. We need more Traveller reps like him!

Next up, **Dean Caple**, sent us 'A message from a Traveller learner':

"Dear fellow Gypsies and Travellers and readers of the Newsletter,

I hope you are all in good health? Firstly I would like to introduce myself; my name is Dean Caple and I'm a fellow Traveller and also an IPP serving prisoner.

I have been in prison since 2005 for committing street robbery which I truly regret. When I arrived in the prison system I could hardly read or write so I took to thinking, instead of acting the fool and fighting against the system I would try to use it to my advantage.

I submitted an application to the Education Department and asked if I could join a reading group and learn some literacy, which was a success. So for the next 2 ½ years I got my head down and learned as much as I could. Then in June 2008 I took an exam for literacy levels 1, 2 and 3 and passed them with flying colours.

I was then asked by the Education team if I would like to become a buddy to help other prisoners with their spelling, IT and reading, to which I agreed straight away. It's now 2013 and I'm still a buddy and helping other Gypsies, Travellers and other prisoners. I'm also in the middle of a business studies course which is a three year course. At the end of this course I'll be able to do an MBA which is another year's course.

So I want to say to any other fellow Gypsies or Travellers, men or women who are locked up in prison; don't let it get you down. Use it to your advantage and gain some qualifications or certificates.

Good luck for the future in succeeding!"

From one Traveller scholar to the next, we have **Ruben-James Smith**, who sent us, 'The Reasons I Became a Toe by Toe Mentor by a Romany Traveller':

"I went to prison at a young age. I could not read or write as I never went to school. I was brought up to go out working, doing cold calling. Then when I landed in prison I was unable to read or write a simple thing, not even my name. This is where my struggles really started, as every answer to every question was: 'Put an application in!', which I couldn't do.

I was stuck. No one ever seemed to have time to help with applications, dinner menus or canteen sheets. Worst of all I could not read the letters I received from my wife and family. It was terrible because they were so personal, so I would put these letters away until I found another Traveller who could read to me.

This horrible situation of not being able to read or write made me a prize for others who could read and write. I was jeered and made everybody's joke as the dumb Traveller who had to pay packs of biscuits or roll-ups to get apps, menus and canteen forms filled out. This took its toll and I ended up fighting a lot as that was something I could do. Then, of course, I would end up in the Block or Segregation Unit.

Then one day on the Block, an officer noticed I hadn't filled my menu out or canteen sheet and asked why. I said 'I can't read or write.' She then said not to be ashamed to ask for help. She said 'I have worked with a lot of people from Travelling backgrounds who can't read or write and I'll work with you and help you learn to read if you want.'

At first, I thought 'What is she after?' and I declined the offer. I wasn't let off that easy. The officer got a few people from Education and from other areas in prison to come and encourage and help me. And eventually, I came across a Traveller from Toe by Toe who spent a lot of time and effort encouraging me to read family letters and the Toe by Toe books which helped me in many ways. I started to feel good about myself and I started to write back to my family. They were over the moon that I could now read their letters and better still write back to them. They were very proud of me that I had done everything I could to learn and help other Travellers to learn.

There is no shame in asking other Travellers for help which is why I

became a Toe by Toe mentor, to make sure no other Travellers have to feel there was no , no help and that no one cared. There are people who care and there is help. And because I'm from a Traveller background the men feel more able to approach me and say they have difficulty reading.

The big problem is that there is not enough Traveller Toe by Toe Mentors. So any Travellers who can read and write please join The Shannon Trust Reading Plan AKA Toe by Toe. Otherwise our people will continue to suffer in silence!"

Last up we have **Johnny Fury**, a Traveller in HMP Thorn Cross, who has a few words to share about Traveller identity:

"My take on settled people's view on Travellers is that most people don't really understand true Traveller culture. They think that they can get to know an age old culture through the rubbish they see on TV which is not made by Travelling people. Me myself a 100% Traveller and many like me would never go on TV because it is just not done. Why go on TV and make a fool of yourself? The people who know, Travellers, know the difference between truth and pure rubbish.

Gypsies are very happy to go through life being in the background doing what they do and keeping on their side of the fence and knowing their place. True Gypsy people know they can never live like settled people, do the same job, have a boss, chalk and cheese is the difference.

Settled people have a total different take on life than Gypsies,

they need other people; a Gypsy needs no-one, only a strong back and a witty brain.

A Gypsy man can do many jobs, they are survivors. When one job ends they will do another and so on and work more hours than any horse would if the price is right. Family honour is everything, his word is who he is.

These days, sadly there are too many pretend Travellers giving the true Gypsy a bad name because settled people think if someone lives in a caravan they're Gypsies-not true!

I tell you this from a true Traveller, a real Gypsy, a dying race and there are not many of us left."

It's great to hear so many Travellers speaking up in this edition. Keep the letters coming in!

[Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Irish Traveller and Member of the Irish Parliament](#)



Many of the big decisions in life are made by politicians; decisions on site provision, education, policing, ethnic recognition and

cultural respect. So it's good to know that more and more Travellers and Gypsies are involving themselves in politics to make a change for themselves, their families and the whole of society. Pádraig Mac Lochlainn is one such person, the first ever person from an Irish Traveller background to be elected as a member of the Irish parliament, the Dail.

Pádraig Mac Lochlainn is soon to introduce legislation to identify Travellers as an ethnic minority. He says a "very practical view" informs his position.

"First, it's time to actually acknowledge the important role of the Traveller community in Irish culture and history. And then, if we can acknowledge that in legislation, we can move into a straight conversation between the Travellers and settled communities.

"I can see that whenever the settled community has stepped up and provided facilities, like halting sites, there wasn't always great respect for the facilities. There's a real sense of a lack of respect from both communities for the other."

He believes ethnic recognition would be a first step in a process - that may take generations - towards mutual understanding and respect that would benefit both communities.

It would confer on the community certain rights - to culturally appropriate housing, healthcare and positive support in accessing education and employment.

Mac Lochlainn was born in Leeds, England in 1973, the son of two

Irish parents, Réamonn and Mary Mac Lochlainn. While his father was imprisoned for nine years in jails across England, Pádraig was raised in Birmingham by his mother, Mary and grandmother, Lizzy Gavin, who he describes as "two strong, loving Traveller women."

After his father's release from prison in England, Pádraig, then aged 10, moved with his family to his father's home of Bunrana, County Donegal and he has lived there ever since. Pádraig left school at the age of 14 and later returned to education as an adult through community development studies and distance learning. He worked in the painting and decorating trade for many years.

Incensed by the high levels of unemployment in his native county, he acted as the Donegal spokesperson for the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) serving on the National Executive from 1997 until 2000 as well as representing the organisation on the National Rural Development Forum.



He speaks at conferences across Europe on the issues of unemployment, regional neglect and rural poverty. After many years work as a community activist and local politician, Mac Lochlainn was elected to the Irish parliament in 2011 for the constituency of Donegal North-

East.

It remains to be seen whether Mac Lochlainn's work to secure Ethnic status for Irish Travellers in Ireland will pay off in the short term but there is no doubt that for the first time Travellers are being heard at the highest levels of government in Ireland.

A Travelling Life

When Donegal man Tadhg McGinley turned 80 years old on May 1st, he'd beaten even more odds than most who reach that hard-won milestone.

For while the life expectancy of most men in Ireland is 76, Traveller men like Tadhg have a life expectancy of 15 years less than that, or 61, according to a 2010 All-Ireland Traveller Health Study.



Tadhg, who has been Donegal's oldest Traveller since returning to his native county from Scotland in 2006, said a range of factors have contributed to his longevity.

"I never smoked - that is the secret of life," he said. "I would advise young boys not to. Another Important thing is plenty of exercise. A lot of people work all their life, but without exercise their body stiffens up. When I get up in the morning the first thing I do is exercise, to keep every

muscle in my body working. I've got awful pain in my legs but I fight the pain. If you let pain get the upper hand, that's it."

"It's a hard life...I've had days of being out all day in the country with my coat wet, and that would be my pillow. The women needed to be tough too. But I never was sick in my life. I never took bad until I came back to Ireland. I got one hip replaced and I've been waiting to get the other done."

Tadhg was born in 1933 in North Donegal and has packed a lot into the years since then. They include: accompanying his mother selling tin pots door to door, helping his father with horse training and dealing at country fairs around Ireland.

And much more: Standing in a line with other youngsters at a hiring fair in Letterkenny Market Square, from where he was hired as a labourer on a Strabane farm. Moving to London as a teenager and working with horses in a circus there and then working in kitchens in Glasgow. Turning 18, and old enough to be hired for the gruelling and perilous work of mining coal and drilling tunnels in Scotland, which he did for 30 years. Raising a family of six with his beloved Donegal-born wife, Jenny, in Edinburgh, where he ran a tarmacking business before retiring. And returning to live in Donegal following Jenny's death in 2005.

"When my wife died, she wanted to be buried out the road by her mother," Tadhg said. "We had a good big house in Edinburgh, but it was too lonesome going round to the shops where I'd been with my wife."

A natural historian, Tadhg played a feature role in the 2011 film 'Barrel Top Days: Personal Reflections of

Donegal Travellers.' Reflecting on the lessons life has taught him, Tadhg returns to the importance of Faith in his life: "God tries us all, He's a teacher," Tadhg said. "God made all the rules, too. I was never educated, but in the line of life I've nothing to learn. I always believe in religion, and I pray to a saint. I've gotten answers... you get signs from God. I got those signs and took them to heart. I know what religion is and I know no one should put it down, either."



Tadhg McGinley on his 80th birthday with Christy McGinley and Patrick McGinley of Donegal Travellers' Project.

"If I meet a man who wants trouble of me, I ignore him. My father taught me that; otherwise you're as bad as he is. He's too far gone to convince otherwise by anyone but God."

Tadhg said his father's approach to trouble has served him through the knee-jerk negative reactions he has experienced because of being a Traveller. "I loved my mother and father, and we were all well-reared. I never was in trouble. When we were growing up, though, we got no chance. We were classed as people that would steal when all we were was really poor. Travellers are very religious people who believe what goes around, comes around. We'd think it would be bad luck to steal, but we had no way of proving nothing. When you were poor with no fixed abode, people

didn't know you, they couldn't weigh you up. Any Travellers I've met I found to be great people. People will say I'm favouring my own group, but that's been my experience."

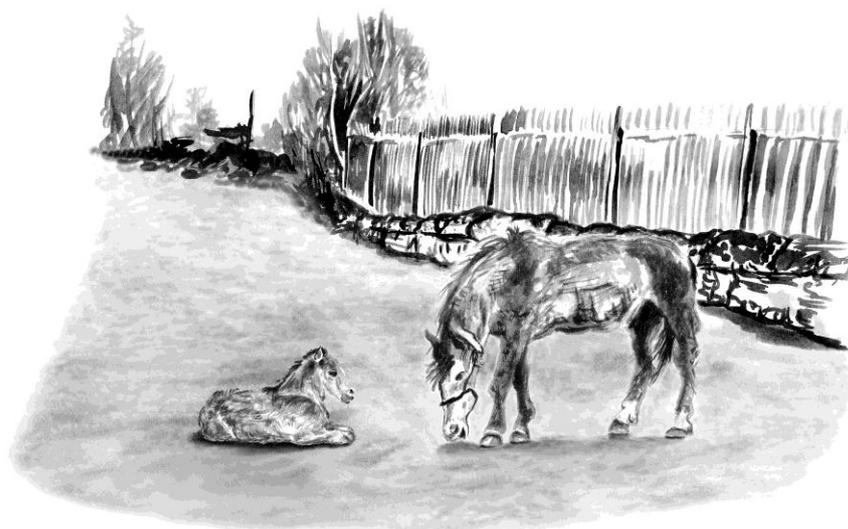
It's the education system, Tadhg feels, that offers one of the best hopes for addressing the negativity about Travellers that many settled people have absorbed from childhood through fears passed on by their parents.

"Settled people, in some ways, it's not their fault, it's been handed down from generations," he said. "What should be done is a couple of Travellers should go around schools and talk to the younger generation about what being a Traveller is all about. If settled people get to know Travellers, they know we are good people. If they say Travellers should be kept separate, they'll never learn about them. You've got to let people find out what you are, and let them show you what they are, too."

[Traveller Reading Books](#)



The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain is producing a series of books, to provide interesting reading materials to Gypsy and Traveller adult learners. The first two books have now been printed and are available, free of charge, to prison libraries



and to Gypsy and Traveller prisoners on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan.

The first book, 'A Travellers Home' was written by Conn MacGabhann and illustrated by Niamh Merc. It tells the story of John, a Dublin Traveller and wannabe cowboy. The second book 'We Are Travellers' was written by Joe Cottrell-Boyce, and is a factual introduction to the history and culture of Irish Travellers and Romany Gypsies.

Both books are available now for free from The Traveller Project at The Irish Chaplaincy.

[Voices Unheard: Traveller Prisoners in Their Words DVD](#)

One of the biggest challenges facing Travellers in prison is a lack of understanding of where they come from and the challenges they face. That's why last year The Traveller Project produced a DVD of Traveller prisoners speaking about their experiences: **Voices Unheard: Traveller Prisoners in Their Words**.

If you are a member of a Diversity Team and would like a copy please get in touch with The Traveller Project.

[Traveller Resources](#)

The Traveller Project are always on the look out for new resources which could be used in Traveller Groups in prison.

This month we'd like to promote a great new publication from Pavee Point in Ireland; 'Pavees: Travelling Through The Generations.'

The life of Irish Travellers has changed hugely within a few generations, Pavee Point explains.

Many older Travellers on different sites fear a loss of culture is occurring. They feel intimidated by the young Travellers as they cannot identify with their modern ways, slang and education. This creates a gap between generations.

To address these differences, a group of Travellers of different ages came together at Pavee Point

to work on a unique multigenerational project.

The end result of this great project, a book, can be downloaded and printed at:

<http://paveepoint.ie/sitenua/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Pavee-Generations-Book-LR-1.pdf>

Another great resource recently produced is the ITMB's 'Tell Someone' educational DVD on Gypsy and Traveller mental health.

The DVD was made *'in response to a shocking epidemic of anxiety and hopelessness that is draining the vitality and well-being out of many Gypsy and Traveller communities and families'*

If you would like to find out more about this DVD or obtain a copy, contact ITMB at info@irishtraveller.org.uk or phone 020 7607 2002

Tyson Fury Proves He's The Real Deal With KO Win Over Steve Cunningham



Tyson Fury in action against Steve Cunningham in Madison Square Gardens, New York.

Tyson Fury's exciting KO win over Steve Cunningham demonstrated he can beat the best even Wladimir Klitschko. But it also showed that he could just as easily lose. Fury's win on his US debut highlighted both sides of the 6ft 9ins heavyweight.

He showed tremendous heart in picking himself off the canvas in the second to hand Cunningham his first career stoppage. And yes, he showed devastating power when he unloaded that killer shot in the seventh and, yes, he provided great excitement.

But a more-disciplined fighter would not have left himself so open in the second to Cunningham. A more-controlled fighter would not have come in swinging like he did, and he almost paid a hefty price.

As entertaining as Fury's style is - and the watching fans at Madison Square Garden Theater and on TV in the US and UK loved it - it's also dangerous. He takes risks by always looking for that KO punch.

Against Cunningham, he could have been more restrained picking Cunningham off at range. He wasn't restrained and he didn't pick him off from distance. But that's not Fury's style and that's the risk. His gung-ho style could prove fatal for his world title hopes.

While he got away with it against Cunningham, who is essentially a blown-up cruiserweight, he might not be so lucky against Klitschko. Big Wlad isn't the most exciting of fighters and prefers to grind them into submission, but his style has brought him the WBA Super, IBF and WBO titles. It clearly works.

Tyson Fury needs to curb his attacking instincts and fight the long game.

Of course, this is easier said than done for a fighter who has attack stamped on his DNA. It will be hard for Fury, but he must become more clever as he closes in on his world title dream. Otherwise, it may always be just a dream.

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:**

**W3 Irish
Traveller /
Gypsy**

*If you are not counted, you won't
count!*