

Travellers in prison news

Newsletter of the
Traveller Equality
Project

Issue 12
September 2014



Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month Event at HMP / YOI Isis

Gypsy and Traveller Culture Celebrated Nationwide

Welcome to the twelfth edition of TIPN. Well, Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month was a great success in many prisons across the country – a great opportunity for Travellers to celebrate their culture and a great opportunity for others to find out more about the richness of Traveller culture.

The Traveller Equality Project visited Wealstun, The Mount, Highdown, Long Lartin, Isis, Pentonville, Wormwood Scrubs and Bronzefield for Traveller History Month. We received many more invitations to events that we could not attend.

In this edition of TIPN we hear from Frenny in HMP Ford about how education has empowered him. We hear the experiences of Leon, a young Gypsy lad, in Medway Secure Training Centre which we visited in August. We also hear from Anthony about some great progress for Travellers in Featherstone as well as much, much more.

The work of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain is funded in part by grants from the Government of Ireland, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, and the support of many generous friends.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and please let us know what's happening in your prison. We are especially keen to hear of any education events or initiatives for Travellers

TIPN is your newsletter so, please send us your poems, letters, stories and pictures for the next issue.

Contributions can be sent to:
Traveller Equality Project, Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, 50-52 Camden Square, London, NW1 9XB

Prison and Probation staff can also download resources from our website here:

bit.ly/XCUhAc

Or email us:

travellers@irishchaplaincy.org.uk

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Letter of the Month from Anthony in Featherstone

Dear Travellers in Prison News

My name is Anthony. I'm in Featherstone where I've been for the past 5 years and I would like you and the readers to know about the fantastic things that this prison does for us Gypsies and Travellers. We have a Gypsy and Traveller meeting on the last Wednesday of every month when we all get together and find out what's been going on with our Community.

Father Steve Tuck, our chaplain, who puts this on for us deserves an award for the help and support he gives us. He also provides tea and biscuits for us plus films about our culture. The meetings are growing more and more successful.

There are also two other people who attend, Greg and Vanessa who are from an organisation called Pertemps. They can do a number of things. They can help you get a passport, a provisional licence, a birth certificate, a waste carrier's licence, grants for tools and so much other stuff to support you in and outside of prison.

The staff at the prison also treat us with respect. There is more and more information about Gypsy and Traveller Culture around the prison.

And if necessary they help us to read and write which is I think vital.

Take me for instance I left school age 11 because my family wanted to move on so I didn't really know how to read and write.


Growing up I found this really difficult. I was 22 when I came into prison, I'm now 28. Since then Education has really helped me a lot because now I can read perfectly and my writings okay. I can write to family and friends. I am Level 2 English and Level 2 Maths.

So I would like to say a big thank you to HMP Featherstone as a whole for the ongoing support for all the Gypsy and Traveller lads and a **MASSIVE, MASSIVE thank you to Father Steve Tuck**. Without Father Steve, the meetings wouldn't be possible.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Traveller Equality Project for their support in sending me Travellers in Prison News, Traveller books and for all the other support the lads here have got. I think the things you do are above and beyond, so thank you and keep up the good work.

Massive respect,

Anthony



ShannonTrust

TRAVELLERS

Become a learner or a mentor today!

If someone you know would like to be able to read **OR** you would like to help others read **ask staff for the details of the Shannon Trust Reading Plan (AKA Toe by Toe).**



Conn and Fr Gerry of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain travelled to Ireland in July to discuss the work of the Traveller Equality Project at an Irish Traveller Movement meeting with community leaders and the directors of the Irish Prison & Probation Services.



Gemma Phillips (Head of Safer Prisons and Equality) with Russ, Breda and Conn (Traveller Equality Project) at the Traveller History Month display in Pentonville

**Progress in Celebrating
Traveller Culture...
But Let's Make it Bigger
Next Year!**

This year more prisons than ever celebrated Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month. There was a Family Day in HMP Ford with traditional crafts, a Vardo and horse were brought in, and National Prison Radio visited.

At HMP Swinfen Hall, Leslie Rennocks has let us know that the story teller, Richard O'Neill came in and was amazing – ‘the lads loved his tales and stories.’



Romani Storyteller, Richard O'Neill

And Swinfen Hall has followed this up with another GRT Day with Damien Le Bas, the editor of Travellers' Times.



Damien Le Bas, editor of Travellers' Times

The Traveller Equality Project

visited a lot of prisons in June including Wealstun, The Mount, Highdown, Long Lartin, Pentonville, Wormwood Scrubs and Bronzefield for Traveller History Month. All of these visits were a great chance to put Gypsy and Traveller issues and cultural awareness at the forefront of prison life for staff and other prisoners.

In particular, the event at HMP / YOI Isis which was organised by David Malone and the Equalities Team showed a genuine commitment on the part of the prison to understand and respect Traveller Culture. The atmosphere was great – Officer Malone gave a very thoughtful presentation, then we enjoyed a one-man play by a Traveller, then there was an engaging and focussed discussion about Traveller issues and then we had Irish Stew and wheaten bread cooked for the occasion.



Enjoying the food at the GRT History Month celebrations at HMP/ YOI Isis

The event at Isis was a brilliant occasion which was a practical example of a prison showing respect and recognising an ethnic group which has been too often ignored in prison – so well done to all of the prisons, staff and prisoners who did make the effort to celebrate Traveller Culture! Let's make sure that every prison celebrates Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month in June 2015!

AND the final word goes to Chris in ISIS:

'I really enjoyed the Isis/Traveller Equality Project meeting for Traveller History Month. It was informative and a great turnout. I feel that the prison is starting to recognise and understand Traveller/Gypsy culture, and it is moving in the right direction to accommodate us.'

Traveller History Month at Bronzefield

I watched a video at Bronzefield brought in by the Traveller Equality Project to celebrate Traveller History Month. My aunty was singing in it, Kitty from Waterford. I also saw my mum and dad's wedding photo, Bill marrying Kathleen from Ballyfermot on the programme.

My mum died 20 years ago when my little brother was 10 days old, I was only 20 myself. My mother was only 41 years old. My father is still alive in Edgware, London. My mother left 8 of us. I am still in touch with Aunty Kitty although her husband who was Miley also passed away and is buried where my mother is in New Ross graveyard, Co. Wexford.

I thought the whole event was a very good idea and thoroughly enjoyed seeing people belonging to me on the programme.

Margaret, Bronzefield

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

**'W3 – Gypsy / Irish
Traveller'**

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



'My Child' by Jerry, HMP Isis

Lily

Lily Lily
You bring joy to me every day
When you turned one you had your first steps
And when you turned two I've never been so
proud of you

And when you turned three you looked like me
With big blue eyes with a cheeky smile that
Would light up the sky at night in winter
Lily Lily my little star that's what you are.

By Jerry

Thank You, John in Wormwood Scrubs

A letter from John in Wormwood Scrubs published in the June edition of Travellers in Prison News got a lot of reaction from readers. Many readers said told us how they were inspired by his words encouraging Travellers to empower themselves through education. Here's just one note we received:

'Thank you John in Wormwood Scrubs.
Your words were inspirational and helped give me direction. There was a lot in what he wrote to ponder on. Again
thank you John.
Yours sincerely,
Leslie

The Write Time

He's sitting in the prison van
He's not long left the dock,
Ten long years his sentence
His body's still in shock.

Passing through reception
He hears the prison calls
But because he is illiterate
He's got no voice at all.

All that night he worries
As he sits there in his cell,
Because he cannot read or write
His sentence will be hell.

He knows if he's to make it
It will be his hardest fight,
But his voice it will be heard at last
When he's learnt to read and write.

Two long years have come to pass
He's made it in that fail
And he knows that it was worth it
For he's finally reading mail.

So you can spend your time in darkness
And never see the light,
Or spend your time in learning
And know you spent your time just
right.

By John in Wormwoods Scrubs



**The Oldest Horse Fair in
Europe
Ballinasloe**
27 Sept – 06 Oct 2014

The Ballinasloe Horse Fair is a horse fair which is held annually at Ballinasloe, the second largest town in County Galway, in the western part of Ireland. It is one of Europe's oldest and largest Horse Fairs, dating back to the 18th century. This annual event attracts up to 100,000 visitors from all over the world, with many returning to the town year after year.

The Ballinasloe Fair has a long traditional association with the Irish Travelling Community who get together to meet friends and family.

Ballinasloe ranks with the Appleby Horse Fair, in Cumbria in importance for the Travelling Community. The fair lasts nine days and starts on the first Saturday in October, when a parade through the town is held.

It continues during the next week and includes a tug-of-war competitions, artistic and cultural events, singing competitions and fair-ground attractions as well as the horse fair itself.

The horse fair includes sale-and-purchase, racing and show-jumping, all concentrated on a 6-acre site: the *Fair Green*. Events culminate during the second week-end; the Saturday of which is known as "*Country Fair Day*". Traditionally, this is the day in the fair with the highest attendance.



Ballinasloe historically served as a meeting point, or hosting area, for local families. Indeed, its name derives from *Béal Átha na Sluaighe*, the Irish for "Mouth of the River-Crossing of the Crowds".

Evidence on the date of the fair's origin is scant but the town's traditional role as a meeting place justifies local traditional belief that this is an ancient event. In 1804, *The Times* described Ballinasloe Horse Fair as "the largest of its kind in Europe."

Long may it thrive!

**Thoughts from a Young Traveller
in Medway Secure Training
Centre (STC)**

I've been asked to write something about how I've been since I come here and this is it.

The first feeling I had about coming to the STC was that it was strange. The way things were laid out was so different, like everything was bolted down. It's like back home you can just get stuff and move it around when you want to but you can't here.

Education, schooling was the hardest part. I couldn't read or write, I mean, I could read and spell simple words like 'cat' or 'dog'. It felt really hard like I didn't want to do it, but everyone understood. I always had a member of staff all the time helping me, reading out and that.

The teachers and Learning Support Assistants helped a lot, sitting there helping. It's not so much the reading as remembering the words. You just keep doing it, reading the same words again and again. You work out how to break stuff down and spell it in your head.

Being able to read has helped a lot, and will when I get out. Being able to read long text messages, or do the shopping. You can read what all the stuff is if you don't know what's in the box. It's great being able to read to your niece and nephew, if they ask you to read them a book. You can help look after them and build them up so when they're old enough they can start looking after themselves.

Being in the STC has changed me and what I want to do. I don't want to come back to these places! I always liked doing practical stuff with my hands and that, I'm not the sort of person to be sitting in an office all day. But reading gives you access to opportunities... to do an apprenticeship. I might still need a little bit of help with the writing parts but I can do it.

I miss my freedom. When I first came here I didn't give a f*** about anything, but now I think about the consequences of stuff. I never used to think twice about stuff but now I think before I do anything. So the majority of the time if it's something bad I'll think, then I won't do it.

The other thing is getting control of my anger, I've been doing meetings and it seems to be helping a lot. If I use one word to describe the changes in me, it would be 'perspective.' That's what's changed the most. It's hard to explain really. It's a bit about the schooling, a bit about just being locked up and it's a bit about being trusted to do work experience and things so I'm being more mature and responsible about things.

Being here in Medway is not all negative, there's some positives. When I first came here I couldn't see that. You just move along, and as you learn you realise the positives and see what you've learnt.

Leon, Medway STC



David Essex, Christy Moore and, Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh with Winners of the 2014 Travellers Pride Awards in Dublin.

Traveller Pride Awards Presented in Ireland

The fifth annual Traveller Pride Awards have taken place recently in Ireland. The Director of the Irish Traveller Movement, Brigid Quiligan said they offered an opportunity to reflect on the question of Traveller pride and "why it is so important to promote and protect".

Actor and singer David Essex, musician Christy Moore, as well as broadcasters Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh and Norah Casey were among those who presented awards in the seven categories.

Ms Quiligan said the events allow Travellers and settled people to embrace and promote Traveller culture in areas such as sport, culture and community. The awards "allow us to shine a light on the contribution that the winners have made despite so many challenges," she added.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, she told younger members of the audience to "always remember who you are. Be proud of who you are, you come from a people with a unique history".

Sindy Wins Education Award

Sindy Joyce, is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick. She is a graduate of the University of Limerick's Masters in Sociology.

Sindy was announced as the winner of the Traveller Pride Award by the singer and actor David Essex and was presented the award by RTE'S Education and Science correspondent Emma O'Kelly.

Sindy's PhD is entitled *Divided Spaces: An Examination of Young Travellers' Spatial Mobility in Cities and Towns*. Her research will address the question of how anti-Traveller racism impacts upon young people's use of public space.



Journalist Emma O'Kelly presenting Sindy Joyce with the 2014 Traveller Pride Education Award

Education is Power in HMP Ford

Over the past few years the Traveller Equality Project has been in touch with HMP Ford on a regular basis. What we find there are Traveller men and staff dedicated to empowering Travellers to fight for equal treatment in all walks of life. Indeed, Ford have even produced their own Gypsy and Traveller Good Practice Guide.

So we were delighted to get two articles from HMP Ford, one from Aleta Blackall, Education Department and the other from Frenny, a Traveller man in prison. **They are both inspirational to us all here.**

From One Sentence to Another! (One man's journey to learn to read and write.)

When I first met Frenny he had no confidence in himself and was embarrassed by the fact that he could not read or write. Frenny came from a Travelling background and education had not been a priority.

He worked for a removal firm but, could not read a map and relied on others to plan journeys and give directions. When he came to education his target was that he wanted to be able to read maps. The first day we went to the library Frenny, 'freaked out' outside the library door. 'I can't go inside there, it's full of books and I can't read!'

After a lot of gentle persuasion I encouraged him to work on his reading and when he gained his confidence he started to learn to write.

That was a year ago and now Frenny can read and write and is no longer scared to use the library. This year I nominated him for an Adult Learner Week Award and he was shortlisted from 1,400 nominations, which is a wonderful achievement in itself.

Aleta

My Journey Through Ford

When I first arrived at H.M.P Ford I was a little nervous to say the least until I was met by a young Travelling fellow called Joe W. who turned out to be the Travellers Rep.

He introduced himself and told me what was on offer in the way of help for Travellers and the best way to go about things. Joe also introduced me to other Travellers who was also in the same boat as myself, which relaxed me a great deal.

Once I put in my application for education I met a lady called Aleta Blackall, who is also the Gypsy, Traveller, Roma Staff Rep, who sat me down and explained to me what the program was all about and what she thought I stood to gain.

I have never once sat down with anyone and spoke about reading and writing even though I know it to be important in life.

I have now been in education for nearly a year and I have learned so much, even I find it hard to believe how far I have come, I now write my own letters to my wife and family instead of asking a trusted friend to do it for me.

The best thing that has happened to me on this sentence was meeting Aleta, she is a very patient woman who will sit, listen and it doesn't matter how many times you ask the same question she will give you her full attention until you understand it.

I am so pleased to know that when I leave this prison I can read, write and also read and understand maps as that plays a big part in my life as I'm a lorry driver by trade.

During my time on education I have gained certificates for my achievements which is a big encouragement for someone like myself.

I would advise any Traveller to have a go at education instead of thinking that it's too late for all that because it's never too late. I'm 44 and proof that it can be done.

Frenny, HMP Ford

Billy Joe Saunders Takes European Title in Style

Billy Joe Saunders added the European title and moved 20-0 with a breathtaking stoppage of previously unbeaten 34-year-old Emanuele Blandamura in late July.

It was a tough night for Saunders, 24, who had an awkward task on his hands as Blandamura's pace and spoiling made it difficult for the hard-hitting Hatfield ace.

Southpaw Saunders started the quicker of the two and impressed with his pace and accuracy in the early rounds, but the experienced Italian became increasingly threatening as the fight wore on.

Saunders, returning after a 10 month injury layoff, had to dig deep to keep applying pressure to Blandamura. The Romany-Gypsy fighter, who strengthened his hopes of becoming boxing's first ever Traveller World Champion, secured a stunning stoppage in the eighth round when he landed a big right hand on the button and sent Blandamura into the ropes.

The win opens up some intriguing possible fights for the dynamite-fisted Saunders. Earlier on the card, highly-rated British middleweight Chris Eubank Junior demolished Ivan Jukic and subsequently called out Saunders. 24-year-old Saunders grabbed the mic in the ring immediately after his win to return fire, saying he'd fight the Brighton youngster "if he was man enough".

Saunders holds a strong WBO ranking, however, and a possible bout against the current World Champion Peter Quillin is also on the cards for the high-flying southpaw.



Tyson Fury Unlucky Again!

Tyson Fury's on-off grudge match with Dereck Chisora will be rescheduled for later this autumn.

The giant Mancunian's initial reaction to the withdrawal through injury of Chisora was to wash his fists of the London rival he has defeated once already.

Fury's frustration with Chisora's breaking of his left hand was understandable given that David Haye's twin-set of injury withdrawals have held up his career for so long.

Hopefully we'll see this great fighter in action soon!



Open Road is the monthly National Prison Radio Show for Gypsy and Travellers. It has been running for almost a year. If you've listened to Open Road or contributed to it, let us know your opinion about the show.

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?
- Are you looking for resources for Traveller prisoners?

Then please get in touch!

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What Can You Do To Support Your Gypsy and Traveller Community?

* REGISTER AS 'W3 – Gypsy / Irish Traveller'

- Become a Toe by Toe Mentor or Learner
- Become a Traveller Rep
- Organise a Traveller Group
- Become a Listener

EDUCATE / ORGANISE / EMPOWER