

PILGRIM CATHOLIC

Newsletter of the Gypsy & Traveller Support Network

ISSUE 8

April 2010

IN THIS ISSUE...

- 1 CARJ Gypsy & Traveller Support Network National Gathering
- 4 Recent Public Policy Initiatives Regarding Gypsies & Travellers
- 6 Dale Farm Travellers – Bailiffs Appointed.
- 8 Financial Ombudsman Service
- 8 Useful Contacts

Pilgrim Catholic is the Newsletter of the National Catholic Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Support network

The Network and the Newsletter are supported and produced by the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ)
9 Henry Road,
London N4 2LH
(020 8802 8080)

Registered Charity Number 291601



CARJ Gypsy & Traveller Support Network National Gathering

9–10 March 2010

The Annual National Gathering for the Gypsy & Traveller Support Network took place at Wistaston Hall in Crewe on Tuesday 9 and Wednesday 10 March 2010. Those present discussed key themes around health, prisons and young people.

Archbishop Bernard Longley joined members and friends of the CARJ Gypsy & Traveller Support Network at Wistaston Hall, an Oblate Retreat Centre in Crewe, for this annual event which provides an opportunity for sharing, reflection and prayer. Key themes explored during the time together included: health issues in the UK and Ireland, the experience of Travellers in prison and a new project to give young Travellers a voice.

The first evening was devoted to informal discussion of the riches and challenges experienced by those involved in a ministry to Travellers. Archbishop Bernard chaired the session during which many issues and concerns were raised and explored in a wide ranging discussion. As the

evening progressed, two themes emerged as priorities, namely the need for clarity concerning the mandate and accountability of those involved in this work on behalf of the Church, as well as the need for support where people are new to the ministry or working largely on their own.

The evening ended with participants having an opportunity to view part of the film *Pavee Caelidh* by the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) in which Travellers themselves speak of their history, culture and experience.

Health Issues in the UK and Ireland

Wednesday morning was devoted to a variety of speakers addressing the health needs of Travellers and their experience of accessing health care both in the UK and in Ireland. **Dr Joseph O'Neill (Global Inclusion) and Fran Keyes and Missie Collins (Pavee Point)** led the morning sessions, which were chaired by Sr Mary Clare Mason from Peterborough.

Dr O'Neill outlined the **health issues faced by Traveller communities in the UK**. Travellers have the worst health of just about any group in the UK. Women die 12 years younger than the general population; men ten years younger. Only one out of every 50 Travellers live over the age of fifty. The only comparable groups with severe health problems in the UK are sanctuary seekers (asylum seekers), and rough sleepers.

Irish Traveller mothers are 20 times more likely than mothers in the rest of the population to experience the death of a child. Infant mortality rates among Travellers are 3 times higher than the national rate. Still birth rates are 17 times higher than the national average. The rate of smoking is 76% (compared to 26% of the general population). As a group they are 7 times more likely than the general population to report eating no fruit or vegetables. Cholesterol levels are 13 times higher than the general

population and blood pressure is twice as high. Mental health problems are much more prevalent, and are less likely to be reported, due to stigma. There are high levels of suicide.

On a positive note, a recent NHS document called **The Primary Care Service Framework - For Traveller Health** (May 2009) advised that travellers should be fast-tracked into GP surgeries and should be given double appointments. "Walk in appointments: practices should adopt a policy of not turning away any Gypsy/Traveller who attends for an appointment, even if all appointments for that day are full." This document should be brought to the attention of all Travellers in the UK by Traveller advocacy agencies so that the human right of Travellers for access to healthcare can be achieved.

Fran Keyes and Missie Collins from Pavee Point in Dublin, outlined the **health issues faced by Travellers in Ireland**.

According to counts by the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) in 2007, there are 41,305 Travellers living in the Republic of Ireland. Within this population more than half of all Travellers in Ireland (53%) are under 20 years of age, the present life expectancy of a Traveller woman is 62 and a Traveller man is 65. Traveller communities suffer disadvantage in the areas of health, education and employment. Dependence on social welfare is very high, with 74.8% of Travellers unemployed against a rate of unemployment in the national population of 8.5%

According to a NTACC Report (2006), around 629 families were living on the side of the road without access to water and electricity. 30% of Travellers are living in temporary housing units, within this provision of accommodation

- 91% are without central heating
- 26% are without piped water
- 25% are without sewerage
- 34% have only one room to live in

Progress on the completion of the All Ireland Traveller Health Study 2007-10, which will provide a broad

range of quantitative and descriptive data across the island of Ireland North and South is continuing; but as yet no findings have been published. This research should give us a much clearer idea of the Traveller health status and Traveller health needs.

Prisons – Research Project

On Wednesday afternoon, Fr Joe Browne talked about Travellers in prison. There are an estimated 1,000 people of Irish descent in the UK prison system. He said 40-50% of the 1,000 Irish people in prisons are from an Irish Traveller background. Fr Joe said that the over-representation of Travellers in the prison system had always troubled him and that anecdotal evidence suggests that Travellers in prison face multi-layers of discrimination and disadvantage. The Irish Chaplaincy will be conducting a **Research Project in 2010** to look at the issue.

Fr Joe explained there was a lack of monitoring of Gypsy and Traveller prisoners; and because the information required had not been gathered, the full extent of their disadvantage was not known. Most statistics are based on estimates. To address this problem the Irish Chaplaincy will carry out a 1 year research project beginning in April 2010, to gather the data and evidence. It will identify and make contact with those with a family member in prison. It will look at the numbers in prison and where they are located in the UK, and the total numbers in the criminal justice system - prison, probation etc. It will also look at patterns of behaviour leading to prison and how these can be prevented. For example, many prisoners will start out being arrested for motoring offences such as driving under-age, without insurance or a licence. Later they may proceed to worse crimes. The research will also look at the impact of being in prison for the Traveller and for the family. For example if someone is imprisoned 300 miles away from their family, the family are not able to visit and not all requests for a transfer to be nearer the family are agreed. Due to high rates of illiteracy many prisoners cannot write letters and so are heavily reliant on the telephone and accessing phone credit which is expensive. This restricts their opportunities to communicate with their family.

The project is ground-breaking; and it will provide the evidence which is required in order to bring about changes in the system.

Giving Young Travellers a Voice

The final session was introduced by Phil Regan from the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB). He described their work with Travellers and the Project they are developing to give young Travellers a voice.

The **Who R We - Young Traveller Group** was formed in direct response to a request by one young Traveller, 'Why isn't there a Traveller youth forum across London?' asked Bridy Purcell in January 2009. Throughout the next few months the ITMB spent time exploring young Traveller groups across London. They found that while there are a number of existing groups, often these are localised to a Borough and there is no existing London wide Traveller youth forum. The activity in many of these forums is directed towards education, sport and creativity. .

In September 2009, a small group of young people met with Rebecca Palmer (Greater London Authority) at City Hall and discussed the kind of forum they would like to see. It was decided that the group would bring together young Travellers from across London to talk about issues that effect them, develop skills and understanding to challenge those issues, and be involved in cultural and fun activities. The group is currently very much still in its infancy though to date they have visited museums and theatres, been involved in drama workshops, done a Digital Story Telling project, and seen the successful application of one group member to the Praxis Inter-Cultural Leadership Programme (a 5 day residential programme aimed at developing young leaders with a cross cultural understanding).

CARJ will be exploring ways in which its Schools & Young People's Project can work with the ITMB project to *give young Travellers a voice*.

Developing the Network

The final session on Wednesday afternoon was led by Richard Zipfel and explored some matters related to the CARJ Traveller Support Network. There was a brief, exploratory discussion of the possibility of CARJ doing research into the presence of Travelling communities in Catholic parishes and schools in England & Wales. There was also a brief discussion of our relationship with the Ecumenical Churches Network for Gypsies & Travellers. Archbishop Bernard expressed the appreciation of the Bishops' Conference for the quiet dedicated work of the Network.

Recent Public Policy Initiatives Regarding Gypsies & Travellers

A Statement by
the Catholic Association for Racial Justice
April 2010

Since 2005, the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) has been repeatedly calling attention to the prejudice, discrimination and disadvantage suffered by Gypsy and Traveller communities, and the lack of suitable accommodation and security of tenure on existing local authority sites.

This position was officially confirmed last year when the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published *Inequalities Experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller Communities: A Review* (Research Report 12, Winter 2009). The Review pointed out that overt racism towards Gypsies and Travellers is still common. It went on to describe their 'severe wide-ranging and mutually reinforcing inequalities and problems,' including: early death; poorer health and inadequate health care; educational under-achievement; poverty and unemployment; high suicide rates; unfair treatment by the criminal justice system; and lack of access to culturally appropriate support services for the most vulnerable.

The EHRC Review also argued that 'the lack of suitable, secure accommodation underpins many of the inequalities which Gypsy and Traveller communities experience.' Thus the shortage of Sites is intrinsically linked to inequality and disadvantage.

In the light of the serious marginalisation and disadvantage of Gypsy and Traveller communities, we are concerned that recent initiatives by the Conservative Party and the Labour Government may undermine progress towards a more equal and more cohesive society.

Site provision in London – a continuing challenge

Over the past year, developments in London have highlighted the difficulties in providing additional, much needed sites. The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has engaged in a series of consultations concerning the London Plan (which sets out an integrated framework for the development of London over the next 20-25

years). Among other matters, these consultations addressed the need for additional Gypsy and Traveller Sites. Response to the consultations was polarised – with some supporting a maximum option of 807 new pitches and others supporting a minimum option of 238 new pitches. After attempting a compromise of 538 new pitches, the Mayor has settled on a minimal target of 238 pitches.

The Mayor wants to improve on London's poor record in increasing pitches, but he is adamant that the targets should achieve real outcomes. He expressed confidence that the new targets strike the right balance between what is needed and what is possible and sustainable. He believes his new targets also set an ambitious agenda for all involved.

This experience confirms the intractable difficulties we face as a society in providing adequate sites for Gypsy and Traveller communities. Our inability to meet this challenge over many years is the root of other problems involving these communities.

Nonetheless, both the main political parties, in their recent initiatives regarding Gypsies & Travellers, have concentrated on efforts at curbing anti-social behaviour without seriously addressing the deeper issues of racism, disadvantage and the severe shortage of sites.

Conservative party green paper

The Conservative Party's Policy Green Paper 14 (22 February 2010), *Open Source Planning*, includes a section on Travellers (p 18). The Green Paper reaffirms the Party's belief in social justice and asserts that 'different communities, should be free to lead their lives in different ways.' The Green Paper goes on to assert that local authorities have a role to ensure the provision of suitable authorised sites to tackle genuine local need. Nonetheless, the policy put forward in the Green paper is punitive and fails to address underlying causes. The policy includes:

- **stronger enforcement powers** to tackle unauthorised development and illegal trespass.
- **a new criminal offence of intentional trespass.**
- requiring Travellers to make a contribution to the appropriate cost of services on authorised sites.
- replacing the **Human Rights Act** with a new British Bill of Rights, which would address some of the current difficulties in evicting trespassers from private and public property.
- **doing away with top-down building targets**, for traveller camps or new houses, which too often force local planning authorities to build new traveller camps on Green Belt land or to use compulsory purchase to acquire land for sites.
- **Limiting the concept of 'retrospective planning permission'** which has led to the planning system being abused by those seeking to use unauthorised sites.

Finally, the Conservatives would introduce a legal framework, similar to that which exists in the Irish Republic, to enable councils to remove unauthorised dwellings. This will allow councils to tackle the problem of unauthorised sites including both those built on land owned by travellers and land which is not.

Government guidance on anti-social behaviour

The Government's new Guidance on Anti-Social Behaviour associated with Gypsies and Travellers was similarly punitive and also ignored any reference to inequalities and shortage of sites. On 23 March 2010, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) published guidance for local authorities, the police and other agencies, setting out the strong powers that are available to them in dealing with anti social behaviour associated with Gypsies and Travellers. These powers include Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) and Injunctions. The guidance makes clear what action can be taken on

policing and prevention, fly-tipping, noise, straying livestock and untaxed vehicles. The Minister also welcomed new planning rules which will speed up the enforcement process so that quicker action can be taken against developments without planning permission such as unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Response to these new initiatives

The Conservative Party Green Paper and the Labour Government's Guidance on Anti Social Behaviour were published within a few weeks of one another. Soon thereafter, on 25 March 2010, **Lord Avebury** (with Chris Johnson, Marc Willers, David Joyce and Andrew Ryder) **issued a response to the Green Paper.**

CARJ supports this response, and believes some of the arguments could be appropriately addressed to the Government's Guidance on Anti Social Behaviour as well as to the Conservative Party Green Paper.

The Conservative Party Green Paper is more serious because it involves legislative changes (including human rights legislation), while the Government's Guidance concentrates on using existing legislation. Nonetheless, both initiatives concentrate on enforcement powers addressed primarily at the behaviour of Gypsies and Travellers. Neither document seriously addresses the prejudice, discrimination and disadvantage suffered by these communities or the intractable difficulty experienced in trying to provide appropriate numbers of sites and how this might be overcome.

Both initiatives, if put into practice without seriously addressing the shortage of sites, could create a negative atmosphere and undermine the difficult consensus that is gradually being developed in some local areas.

We should be supporting these local successes and encouraging others to emulate them. The 2009 EHRC report *Gypsies and Travellers: Simple Solutions for living Together* points out that investment in adequate site provision can generate income for local authorities, improve community relations and provide safe and decent accommodation for Gypsy and Traveller communities. Well-run, authorised sites can exist in harmony with settled communities. Investment in such sites could pay for itself over time. In Bristol for example, when authorised sites were developed, eviction costs fell from around £200,000 to £5,000

annually. The Council was also able to collect significant returns in rent, council tax and utility bills from the sites.

CARJ accepts and shares the underlying intent behind the new initiatives of the Conservative Party and the Government - to move toward a society characterised by law and order; mutual respect and social cohesion. However, this will not be accomplished by imposing punitive restrictions on extremely marginalised and vulnerable groups, without seriously addressing the causes of their marginalisation and vulnerability.

DALE FARM TRAVELLERS – BAILIFFS APPOINTED.

On 10th December (Human Rights Day), Basildon District Council awarded Constant & Co. the contract to evict 86 families from Dale Farm and several families from Hovefields Traveller site which is also near Wickford. The 5-day eviction is estimated to cost as much as 3 million GBP. The affected families will receive a letter from BDC giving them 28 days notice after which eviction could take place at any time. The Dale Farm Housing Association has submitted several proposals regarding pieces of brownfield land in the district which the families would be prepared to move to but so far these have been ruled out.

Meanwhile the Homelessness process has continued, those Travellers whose applications merit consideration, are called for interviews on the basis of which they can be sent up to 3 offers to bid for named properties. Some are then made an offer to view one property. Failure to attend interviews or viewings can then result in applicants no longer being eligible for further consideration by the BDC. All the Travellers stated in their applications that they did not want standard housing units but

“yards” with planning permission where they could continue to live in extended family groups where they feel safe and supported. They have further stated at the interviews that they do not wish to deprive people on the BDC housing list, of bricks and mortar homes which should be given to unfortunate people who genuinely need them.

For some months Malcolm Tully of New Life Church, Wickford and I have been accompanying Travellers to interviews and viewings. Recently I went with K a widow in her 60s, to see a sheltered accommodation “bungalow”. We looked around the single bed-sitting room with small kitchen and combined toilet/shower. The Housing Officer confirmed there was no car park space let alone one for a caravan. K took a framed photo of her present 3-bedroom mobile home surrounded by well-kept garden, out of her bag. She asked the Housing Officer if she would be willing to exchange that home for the one we were standing in. K explained she had 7 children, 22 grand-children and 2 great grand-children the majority living at Dale Farm, some in the same yard as herself. She sees them daily, helps look after the children, is never left isolated. If she is evicted the home her children bought for her and their father, could buckle if moved, her possessions damaged and the only option would be a move to a temporary and probably unauthorised site.

The local primary school which has 99% Traveller enrolment, has received a good Ofsted report. It is now offering pre-school sessions and literacy classes to parents. These developments have taken a long time and much dedicated work by education professionals building trust with the Traveller community. Similarly health workers have worked hard to encourage Travellers to take the children for full immunisation programmes. All of this work would be undermined if eviction takes place. The Council has urged the Travellers to leave voluntarily, school and health workers have urged them to be consistent users of their services, there are still no alternative sites identified. Meanwhile the word is that eviction could happen in June. There is a big difference between moving by choice and being moved. The women and children especially are suffering from the stress of waiting for those final letters.

At recent health appointments some Travellers have been advised to have 3-month prescriptions as "they might be moving soon" and a child's special education needs assessment has been halted reportedly on the grounds that he might be moving shortly. News like this spreads around the site rapidly.

On 25th May Basildon District Council v Secretary of State is being heard at the High Court in which the Council is appealing against the pending requirement to provide an additional 62 pitches. Dale Farm residents are planning to attend and hold a rally outside the

Court. Anyone is welcome to come along to support them. We are also appealing to anyone willing to act as a Human Rights monitor in the event of eviction action to contact Grattan Puxon at dale.farm@btinternet.com for further information. Grattan is coordinating organisation of various groups/individuals into monitoring teams and is also in communication with the Police Mobile Support Division at Boreham which will be in overall control of the policing operation.

The ruling party on the Council recently issued a bulletin which included a section headed "Travellers on the Move" which stated "We still hope that people living on pitches without planning permission will realise the game is up, and move off peacefully." Listening to the anxious queries from people at Dale Farm about what is going to be done to them, game seems hardly the word for what is happening.

Note: Be-Longing: Travellers' Stories, Travellers' Lives An Exhibition of Photographs by Eva Sajovic which includes photos of people at Dale Farm. Contact Eva at evasajovic@yahoo.com

Ann Kobayashi, Our Lady of Good Counsel parish, Wickford.

Financial Ombudsman Service

The Financial Ombudsman Service is a free service set up by law to settle disputes between consumers and financial businesses. If someone has a problem that they can't sort out with a bank, insurance company or other financial business the ombudsman may be able to help. The ombudsman can deal with a wide range of complaints - from current accounts and credit cards to pawn broking and pensions.

Recently the ombudsman service has received a few cases from the Traveller community, where Travellers have had problems accessing money from bank accounts. The ombudsman is keen to raise awareness with the Traveller community, to ensure that Travellers are fully aware of their rights to complain.

If you are working with the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community and would like some information on the ombudsman service, please contact Stacy Stewart on 020 7964 0766. Please let Stacy know where to send the information to and in what quantity it is required - all resources are provided free of charge. The ombudsman will be happy to:

- supply information about the

ombudsman service on audio CD

- provide leaflets – including a new “basic guide to the ombudsman service”
- or have a link to its website put on your organisation's useful contacts list

The ombudsman can supply information in a range of formats and languages – and aims to meet the individual communication needs of all the people using its service. If someone would like a friend, relative or other trusted individual to help them bring their complaint to the ombudsman or wants them to act as their correspondent, the ombudsman service can deal with that nominated individual.

More information can be found on the ombudsman's website: www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk or if you want to refer a financial complaint to the ombudsman you can phone: 0800 023 4567 or 0300 123 9 123.

Financial Ombudsman Service
South Quay Plaza
183 March Wall
London E14 9SR

USEFUL CONTACTS

Advisory Council for the Education of Romanies and Other Travellers (ACERT), Moot House, The Stow, Harlow, Essex CM20 3AG (01279 418666)

Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ). 9 Henry Road, Manor House, London N4 2LH. (020 8802 8080). Gypsy & Traveller Support Network.

Catholic Children's Society (Westminster). 73 St Charles Square, London W10 6EJ. (020 8969 5305).

Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ). CTBI, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX (020 7901 4891)

Friends, Families and Travellers, Community Base, 113 Queen's Road, Brighton BN1 3XG (01273 234777)

Gypsy Council for Education, Culture, Welfare and Civil Rights (GCECWCR). 8 Hall Road, Aveley, Essex RM15 4HD. (01708 868986)

Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition (G&TLRC), c/o Friends, Families and Travellers, Community Base, 113 Queens Road, Brighton, E Sussex BN1 3XG (07985 684921)

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain, The Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA (020 7607 2002)

The Irish Travellers Project, Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1 9XB. (020 7482 5528).

The London Gypsy & Traveller Unit, 6 Westgate Street, Hackney, London E8 3RN. 020 8533 2002)

Office for Migration Policy, Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX (020 7901 4865)

Pavee Point, 46 North Great Charles Street, Dublin 1, Ireland (353 1 8780255)

Travellers Aid Trust, PO Box 16, Llangyndeyrn, Kidwelly, Wales SA17 5YT (01269 870621)

