

PILGRIM CATHOLIC

Newsletter of the Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Support Network

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IN THIS ISSUE...

- 1 Voices Unheard
- 2 National Gathering
- 4 Supporting Literacy
- 6 Dale Farm Evictions
- 7 Letter from Fr Dan
- 8 The Road to Romaville

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Parliamentary Launch of Voices Unheard, 13 June 2011. Left to right: Lord Eric Avebury, Bobby McDonagh, (Irish Ambassador), Tony Jeffs (Durham University), Philomena Cullen (Director, Irish Chaplaincy in Britain) Conn Mac Gabhann (Report author)

Voices Unheard *A Study of Irish Travellers in Prison*

Conn Mac Gabhann

The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain (ICB)

The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain (ICB) launched a groundbreaking report into the experiences of Irish Travellers in prisons in England and Wales, at the Houses of Parliament, on Monday 13th June 2011.

The report highlights the unequal hardships faced by Irish Travellers in prison, in particular, problems with literacy, access to rehabilitation programmes and resettlement services.

This is the first time that any substantive research has been conducted into the Irish Traveller population within prisons in England and Wales. The research has found that Travellers comprise around 1% of the total prison population.

Shockingly, although Travellers are officially recognised as an ethnic minority group in the UK, unlike many other minority groups there is no system in place to monitor their numbers in the prison system or to assess their particular needs.

The report aims to redress some of this imbalance. It highlights, for example, how Travellers are often unable to access educational courses and other services in prison because a prisoner needs to be literate to fill out the required forms to access these services. Particular problems around resettlement were also discovered, with many Travellers being refused permission to return to their homes on sites when released on licence. The report makes a number of cost-effective policy recommendations aimed at developing strategies for Traveller prisoners in order to aid their rehabilitation and to prevent future offending.

The report was launched by the Conservative MP, and member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Irish in Britain, Patrick Mercer, who was one of a number of MPs and peers at the launch.

The report's author, Conn Mac Gabhann said: 'Travellers

are a group whose voices often go unheard in society, and particularly in prison. This report aims to address that and highlight the real and particular challenges faced by Travellers in prison.'

The ICB Director, Dr Philomena Cullen, said: 'With over 25 years of experience of working with Irish prisoners in the UK, the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain (ICB) became increasingly concerned about the isolation and hardships experienced by Irish prisoners who come from a specifically Irish Traveller background. It seems that Irish Traveller prisoners face difficulties pertaining to both their nationality as Irish, and to their ethnicity as Travelling people, resulting in a double whammy of exclusion and misunderstanding. This report aims to throw light on the unique challenges faced by Traveller prisoners, challenges which have yet to be adequately acknowledged by statutory agencies, let alone solved by them. We hope this report will mark a major step forward in addressing those problems, for the benefit of the Traveller community and wider society.'

The report is available to download from the Irish Chaplaincy's website:

<http://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk/>

NATIONAL GATHERING

CARJ Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Support Network
Focolare Centre
Welwyn Garden City
15-16 March 2011

A National Gathering of the CARJ Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Support Network took place on 15 - 16 March 2011 at the Focolare Centre for Unity, Welwyn Garden City.

On the first evening there was an informal sharing session. Archbishop Bernard opened the meeting with a prayer and led the discussion. All present introduced themselves. The wide-ranging discussion that followed included: sacramental preparation, guidelines for marriage, materials for GRT History Month, difficulties Traveller families experience getting children admitted to Catholic schools and difficulties surrounding 'ascription' (declaring to others that I am a Traveller) and the consequences of work mates and others knowing.

The first morning session on Wednesday began with another round of brief introductions, as a number of new people had arrived. The rest of the morning was then devoted to two themes - literacy and the media.

Literacy training

Graham Sigley described the work of Catch up and a recently finished, two-year pilot project working with the Traveller Achievement Service in Lancashire. Graham described the use of mobile libraries and the training of library staff. In schools, they concentrate on training teaching assistants and encouraging schools to make sure teaching assistants have time with the children. A real difference can be made through two 15 minute sessions a week with children.

Lizzie Poulton described the work of the National Literacy Trust and the National Young Readers Programme (NYRP). She stressed the importance that literacy makes to how you do in school, jobs, accessing rights, community participation, health, crime and happiness. Many things improve literacy, including *enjoyment of reading*. The NYRP supports parents to support children in reading – using self-selected texts. Conn Mac Gabhann described the 'toe by toe' method



Those attending the National Gathering at Wistaston Hall, 15-16 March 2011

used effectively in some prisons. A mentor and a learner work together 30 minutes a day, five days a week, for a few months, using a manual. The Irish Chaplaincy and the Shannon Trust currently have a pilot project to recruit Traveller mentors for 'toe by toe'.

Media and public perceptions

Damian LeBas (Travellers Times) spoke to the group about the media and public perceptions of Travellers. He reviewed coverage from the Daily Star, the Mail and Sky News and the Today Programme's coverage of issue related to GRT communities. The importance of prioritising the positive and allowing Travellers to speak for themselves was stressed. In the discussion that followed, the value of reading tabloid headlines as an indicator of unreflective opinions was also mentioned. There was a brief discussion of the TV series 'Big fat Gypsy Wedding' and of the need for reasonable voices (including voices from the churches) to offset extreme voices. The role of the EHRC in all this was mentioned.

Travellers in Prison

Conn MacGabhann discussed the Research Project sponsored by the Irish Chaplaincy. The initial survey went to 118 prisons in England and Wales. There was no response from 20. It found 453 from GRT backgrounds among a prison population of 71,708 (0,6% of the prison population). This is likely to be an undercount, as some are not willing to ascribe to being Travellers. The survey was followed by four large focus

groups. The research is likely to recommend cultural awareness training for prison service staff, Traveller education and Traveller resources. The importance of identifying prisons which are doing good things was stressed.

Hertfordshire Police – Traveller Liaison Officer

Kevin Moore from the Hertfordshire Police talked about his experience as a Traveller Liaison Officer. After some 30 years in the police, he has been in this role for the last three years. He started by getting out and introducing himself to people, without a uniform, trying to show respect for all. After negative response, he would go back and try again. Eventually, it began to pay off. People from the community began contacting him. Most important was possibly his work with kids, to the point that they were willing to work with the police.

Policies of the new Government

To bring the event to a close, Rosie Bairwal reflected on some of the policies of the new government and the effect they may have on GRT communities. The government seems to be moving from the former obligation on local authorities to assess and meet GRT housing needs (including regional targets) to a position that local Councils are best placed to assess the needs of Travellers and that these same Councils are not bound by their own assessments. The concern is that this shift in policy will lead to a severe shortage of authorised sites.

SUPPORTING LITERACY

The importance of literacy training was a central theme at the National Gathering. Here two of those who spoke at the event outline the approach of their respective organisations.

Lizzie Poulton National Literacy Trust

"I got my big break when I was five. I learned to read. It's that simple and that profound" Sean Connery

- One in six people in the UK struggle to read, write and communicate
- We believe that society will only be fair when everyone can communicate as well as they need
- We deliver projects, campaign, investigate and innovate, share knowledge and work in partnership to transform lives through literacy
- We are an independent charity

Literacy affects all aspects of a person's life. The National Literacy Trust's report Literacy Changes Lives pulled together a vast range of research into literacy and found "People with poor literacy skills are more likely to be workless, living in inadequate housing, in poor health and dissatisfied with their life." As well as an economic cost to poor literacy there is a high personal cost.

Many different factors affect how good a child's literacy skills are with socio-economic status being a big predictor. However far more important to this is the home environment. Whether a child reads for pleasure or not also has a big impact on their attainment.

"Enjoyment of reading has a greater impact on a child's

educational achievement than their parents' socio-economic status." (OECD Reading for change 2002)

The National Literacy Trust's Young Readers Programme works to encourage children and young people to read for pleasure. It does this in two ways. The first is a three event model through schools, libraries and community groups, working with local experts to run three fun events where the children choose and keep a free book. The second is a family programme where over five weeks children's carers learn how to support children with reading for pleasure and the children also get to choose and keep three books.

Choice is key to the Young Readers Programme. "Even struggling readers will show effort and persistence when reading self-selected texts, while other studies have shown that choice can affect attitudes and personal feelings about reading" (Cordova and Lepper, 1996, Turner and Paris, 1995).

Children are also supported in making their book choice by the teaching of techniques such as dipping in and the five finger rule.

The family project supports parents with low literacy by sharing techniques on how to share books without reading and also how to fit reading activities into a busy day.

The National Literacy Trust has several websites that provide support for parents and professionals. www.readingforlife.org.uk

Reading for Life promotes the benefits of reading at all stages of life, to provide opportunities, health, family happiness and overall enjoyment. It is a site for both parents and children that has games, competitions, tips and advice around literacy

www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk

80% of brain development happens during the first

three years of a child's life. This site for parents aims to support them in talking and communicating with their child to give them the best start in life.

www.literacytrust.org.uk

This site contains more information about the programmes the National Literacy Trust runs (including the Young Readers Programme). It also has links to research as well as news and blogs. To keep up to date with our work you can sign up to the newsletter here:

<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/newsletter>

Graham Sigley Catch Up

Graham Sigley (Deputy Director, Catch Up) gave a presentation about a reading support pilot project that Catch Up (a not-for-profit charity) had carried out with the Lancashire Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Achievement Service (GRTAS) and the Access to Services Lancashire County Library and Information Service (AtS).

He said the pilot had been funded for a two year period by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation with additional resources from Catch Up, GRTAS and AtS. GRTAS and AtS staff were trained to use the Catch Up Literacy one-to-one intervention and the Catch Up Literacy online digital games. The AtS staff also had awareness and background training so that they had a good understanding of the home and cultural context of the children.

The children then took part in support sessions at the



Archbishop Bernard Longley and others at National Gathering

library or at their own home on their site. They had asked that the support that they received was 'not like school'. The trained staff provided literacy support and involved families where possible. The sessions were designed to take about 30 minutes with 15 minutes of individual Catch Up Literacy intervention support and the remaining time using the digital games with the adult supporting as required.

Test scores showed average improvements in reading ages that were three and half times those which would normally be expected. One 15 year old learner made a gain of 16 months in his Reading Age from 8 years 2 months to 9 years 6 months, after just six hours of support over three months.

There were also positive changes in the attitudes of the children and some of them now have more regular and improved attendance and take home library books on a regular basis.

In addition, staff within the partnership felt that they had benefited from participating in the project.

Overall, the evidence from the Project is that the potential benefits for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and families can be very significant.

Improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils: final report, Wilkin, A. et al, Research Report DFE-RR043, October 2010.
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR043.pdf>

www.catchup.org.uk . Contact - Graham Sigley - Deputy Director, Catch Up, graham@catchup.org.uk

DALE FARM EVICTIONS

Ann Kobayashi

On 14th March the majority party of Basildon Borough Council voted unanimously to spend up to 8 million GBP (a 1/3rd of the Council's annual budget), on evicting up to 96 Dale Farm families. The minority Labour and Liberal Democratic parties unanimously voted against this use of public money when the Travellers had already agreed to move peacefully if an alternative authorised site could be identified. The Homes & Communities Agency owns various pieces of land within the Borough which it has offered for development as Traveller sites. Dale Farm Housing Association supported by the Gypsy Council, has already submitted planning applications for 2 sites of up to 15 pitches/yards to accommodate the most vulnerable elderly Travellers and their carer families. Local residents led by their Councillors, have already organised opposition to these applications although the sites have been chosen because they are some distance from residential housing.

In early June the Home Office agreed to funding of 4.6 million in addition to the 3 million already committed by Essex Police which estimates its total costs for the eviction could amount to 10.3 million. Council and Police spending on this scale is being questioned locally against a background of cuts to front-line services, 100 Council job losses and losses/cuts in Council funding to voluntary groups. There is also opposition to the

Council selling off playgrounds, green spaces and parkland for private housing development. In this context spending so much public money to move the Travellers from a degraded site previously used for tyre burning and scrappage (by the Council itself!), appears financially reckless. As suggested at the CARJ Traveller & Gypsy Working Group meeting on 1st June, I have written to my MP and Lord Avebury Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies & Travellers, asking for a Treasury Question on the matter and hope other people will do the same.

The ongoing stress as eviction looms, is taking its toll on the children, elderly, and vulnerable at Dale Farm. Many of the children have known no other home, many of the elderly feel unfit to face life on the road again especially as there are no authorised, temporary stopping places in Essex and a national shortage of authorised Traveller sites. The constant questions when I visit or see people at Mass, are "When will the 28-day notice come? Where can we go?" Hate mail, unbalanced media coverage and some appalling comments by bloggers, all combine to create a siege mentality. The continuing support of Bishop Thomas who again celebrated Mass at Dale Farm in April, Fr. Dan Mason of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Wickford, Sr. Catherine and some parishioners, is of great comfort. Meanwhile the Support Dale Farm Campaign

Planning for Gypsies and Travellers: The Impact of Localism

A Report from the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain
Principal Authors Michael Hargreaves and Matthew Brindley
June 2011

From the Executive Summary: 'The study responded to a request from Lord Eric Avebury for evidence on the consequences of the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) for planning for Gypsy and Travellers. Lord Avebury's concerns that the abolition of RSS will make it harder to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers are shared by community members and the Parliamentary Select Committee for Communities and Local Government. The study is intended to inform decisions on the Localism and Decentralisation Bill and the consultation on CLG's Planning for traveller sites policy guidance.'

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain, The Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA
info@irishtraveller.org.uk
0207 607 2002 www.irishtraveller.org

now has over 1000 national and international organisation/individual members. Camp Constant has been established at Dale Farm; supporters plan to oppose any eviction action in non-violent acts of solidarity with the Travellers.

The reality however, is that eviction is an inherently

violent business and so there is still hope that a traumatic and potentially dangerous situation can be avoided by on-going campaigning and mediation.

For information and details of how to help:
Dale Farm Solidarity Network
<http://dalefarm.wordpress.com>

Letter from Fr Dan

Fr Dan Mason is parish priest at Our Lady of Good Counsel parish in Wickford. The parish relates closely to Traveller families at Dale Farm. Fr Dan wrote the following widely circulated letter to the Home Secretary regarding the evictions.

7th June, 2011

Dear Ms May,

I am writing to express my profound disgust at the decision by your department to award Essex Police £4.65million to help cover the policing costs of the planned forced eviction of half of the Dale Farm travellers site near Basildon in Essex.

At a time when essential services are being cut and when we are constantly being told that the country has no money, I find it extraordinary that your department can award this sum on top of the £1.2 million which the Communities Department has promised to Basildon Council.

The United Nations Advisory Group on Forced Evictions has made clear its opposition to the forced evictions of travellers as has the European Union.

The real problem that travellers face is the chronic shortage of authorised sites. Given that half of the Dale Farm site is already an authorised site and given that Basildon Council are currently failing to provide an adequate number of authorised sites for travellers, surely it makes much more sense to recognise the whole of the Dale Farm site as a designated traveller site thus saving at least £5.85million.

This is not about allowing travellers to be above the law. Instead it is about providing support to a recognised ethnic group which historically has been one of the most disadvantaged in society and which continues to experience widespread discrimination.

It is not too late to reverse your decision and to prevent the destruction of homes and livelihoods at Dale Farm.

Yours Faithfully,

**Father Daniel Mason
Parish Priest
Our Lady of Good Counsel R.C. Church
Wickford.**

The Road to Romaville

By David Crawford

The idea of a model community enjoys an honoured place in the history of urban form in the UK. Welwyn Garden City, where the 2011 National Gathering of CARJ's GRT Support Network took place, is one, large-scale example, developed to combine the benefits of urban and rural living.

So, what about the parallel concept of a pioneering model community for the GRT people – a Romaville? One that, while honouring and securing GRT culture, would be as much of the early 21st century as Welwyn Garden City was of the early 20th? That could secure a happier life than GRT people living on unauthorised pitches, as at Dale Farm, currently enjoy.

The timing could be propitious. In April 2011, the European Commission outlined a strategy for Roma inclusion, focusing on access to education, jobs, housing and healthcare, for which EU Member States, including the UK, have until end-2011 to submit proposals. (The strategy specifically cites Roma; but Travellers face the same issues).

In the UK, the issue of unauthorised pitches is not numerically or geographically daunting. According to the Independent (12 June 2009), there are currently around 4000 which, at current levels of land take, would take little over one square mile (around 300ha) in total to replace.

At the same time, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) - the English national housing and regeneration delivery agency, which published its first development and land disposal strategy in June 2011 - is apparently willing to make land available. The HCA currently owns 7438ha, much of it in the area of former new towns such as Basildon.

Scheme planning guidelines, issued in May 2008 by the

Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), contain useful advice on layouts and good practice, much of it developed jointly with GRT representatives. But this has not necessarily made it any easier for schemes to gain planning permission; while CARJ is concerned that the Government's Localism Bill could make the process more difficult.

So, do we need a fresh start, with an imaginative approach that could start to unblock the situation? To begin working towards the concept of a Romaville that would be attractive for GRT people to live in, settled neighbours to live nearby, and local planning authorities to consider favourably? That could help to defuse current controversies over Dale Farm and other locations?

Here is a possible plan of action

First, identify a suitable site, perhaps one owned by the HCA, with scope for a typical 15-20 pitches, as the basis for an ideas competition.

Next, encourage committed and enthusiastic urban designers, planners and engineers to work with representatives of the GRT community to devise a scheme for a Romaville that will reflect, but go further than, the CLG's good practice guidelines.

These, for example, acknowledge the need for play areas; and that many GRT people prefer soft landscaping to concrete and paving. So, why not provide allotments too, for partial self sufficiency and, possibly, surplus produce sales to settled neighbours?

Again, why not build in sustainability? The settled community has access to low-energy options such as solar arrays, wind turbines and air- or ground-sourced heating. Could these be relevant to the clusters of the GRT community? Could there be useful lessons, eg in economies of scale, for the settled community, many of whose members also live in clusters?

Finally, present the developed concept to politicians, national and local; landowners; the media; and funding institutions as a well thought out and developed response to a problem that, in present conditions, looks as if it can only get worse.

