

Every **Traveller** Child Matters Too



A response to
Every Child Matters
by the Romany Gypsy
community in Devon

Did you know that...?

"Traveller pupils are still the group most at risk in the education system. They are the one minority ethnic group which is too often 'out of sight and out of mind' ".

Ofsted

On March 17th 2006 a group of Romany Gypsies and professionals working in the field of education met together for an Education Consultation Day to look at the education of Gypsy and Traveller children in the context of the Every Child Matters agenda. The day was funded by European Dialogue, supported by Devon Traveller Education Service, and facilitated by the Devon Racial Equality Council.

The statements, facts and quotations in this leaflet came out of this consultation and have been written up by a small working group of Romany Gypsies who participated in the Consultation Day. For these participants this is just the beginning of a process to change attitudes and challenge prejudice so that their children can feel safe, feel included, learn and prosper in Devon schools.

Penny Dane
Community Development Worker for Gypsies and Travellers, Devon Racial Equality Council

Did you know that...?

'Travellers' is a broad term encompassing very diverse groups of people: Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Showmen, the Circus, New Travellers and occupational Travellers. As groups they have different lifestyles, different accommodation needs, and different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The one thing they all have in common is that they are either nomadic, semi-nomadic or have a nomadic heritage.

"You can't be a Gypsy because you live in a nice big house. I've been there so I know."

Teenager to a Gypsy child at school
in Devon

"Lots of the problems start because there aren't enough stopping places for Travellers."

Gypsy parent in Devon

Be Healthy

Our children can suffer stress and anxiety when families do not have secure accommodation. Being moved on, not knowing where you will be tomorrow, knowing you are not wanted; it has an effect on our children.

For Romany Gypsies the support network has traditionally been the extended family. It is hard to get this support now because our families often cannot stay together. We can feel isolated without this support.

Our children are affected by the negative media coverage of Gypsies and Travellers. They feel anxious when they know that the newspapers and the TV are portraying them in a bad light. They often hide who they are because they are afraid that the other children will hate them.

Our cultural belief is that Romany Gypsy teenagers should not be sexually active. This sometimes sets them apart from other teenagers at school who think they are prudish, or question their sexuality.

Did you know that...?

Romany Gypsies have strict hygiene laws. Separate bowls are used for washing dishes, washing hands and washing food. Tea towels and dish clothes would never be washed together with clothes. New born baby clothes are washed separately.

***"Don't push the wrong buttons
with me because if the manager
had his way he'd ban all Gypsies"***

Worker at a bowling alley to a group of
Gypsy boys in Devon

***"We're not letting any of you lot in
today"***

Cinema manager to 13 yr old Gypsy
girl in Devon

Stay Safe

To us, big secondary schools often don't feel like safe environments for our children.

Our children need to be free from the fear of racial abuse. Racism is hard enough for adults to cope with; it's worse for the children. They need to be confident that they can report racial incidents to staff and be taken seriously. Otherwise they will just walk away from conflict and suffer silently.

There are times when negative media coverage has put our children in danger. This needs to be recognised so that school staff are aware of what could happen.

School policies, codes of conduct and prospectuses need to stress that racial abuse must not be tolerated. All staff at school need to know that Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are ethnic groups covered under Race Relations legislation.

Some issues are difficult for our culture, for example, mixed changing rooms for PE and swimming. Our children would find it awkward to change in front of children of the opposite sex.

Did you know that...?

Romany gypsies have lived and worked in Devon for centuries; whether they live in houses or caravans, whether they travel or they live settled lives, they still retain their culture and values.

"When I was 14 I had a racist incident. A girl brought a plastic doll to school and stuck pins in it and said it was me. So I told her I'd go home, light a fire and put a curse on her. The next day our teacher called me and told me to take the curse off but he didn't tell the girl to take the pins out of the doll. I thought this was unfair so I refused. I was threatened with expulsion."

A Gypsy woman on a childhood
experience in Devon

Enjoy and Achieve

The vast majority of Gypsy/Traveller parents value education and want their children to achieve. We recognise that the world is changing and that learning to use computers and learning foreign languages, for example, are important.

Our children enjoy school if they feel accepted for who they are. Many of us don't disclose that we are Gypsies/Travellers on the forms at school because we don't want the children to be picked on or labelled.

If Gypsy/Traveller children change schools regularly because their families travel they may feel anxious each time they go to a new school and it is important for teachers to be aware of how they may be feeling. They will achieve more if they settle in quickly.

In secondary education the curriculum sometimes isn't very relevant to our children. Our children are good at developing skills they need for their futures. These skills need to be valued and recognised as much as academic skills.

For families who travel, giving education packs and laptops to the children makes a real difference. They can keep in touch with their schools and they don't get behind.

Did you know...?

That children of dual heritage is the fastest growing ethnic minority group in Devon. This group includes the children of many Gypsies and Travellers who have married outside their community.

"My 16 year old grandson has always lived in a house, fitted in to the community, and achieved highly at school. One day his life changed. A boy at school found out he was a Gypsy and abused him in front of many others. Other children then joined in. The head master did not recognise this was racist."

A Gypsy grandmother in Devon

Economic Wellbeing

Gypsies and Travellers need somewhere to call home even if they travel for some of the time. There is a shortage of Council sites, and there are difficulties with applying for planning permission if we move on to our own land. Many people don't want us to live near them.

If we have somewhere to live, we can work and earn a decent living. Our children can learn our trades and have hope for their futures.

When we travel for work, we need somewhere safe to stop so we have a chance to find the work, and complete jobs.

Work experience for our children could be going out to work with their parents. This should be valued as much as more traditional work experience.

Did you know...?

That most Gypsies/Travellers in Devon are self employed in a family business, and that boys usually learn the trade from an early age. Teenagers as young as 14 are often respected as adults within their community, and have adult roles within the family.

***"What's the point in educating
the children about racism at
school if they go home to parents
who are racist? Everyone needs
to learn."***

Gypsy parent in Devon

Make a Positive Contribution

It would be good if people acknowledged that Gypsy / Traveller families contribute to the communities they live in just as other people do.

Most Gypsies/Travellers want to be included and accepted in to the school community and the wider community. Sometimes we are left out because people assume we don't want to join in.

We need to feel proud of who we are, and of our culture. Sometimes people like the romantic image of Romany Gypsies travelling in wagons, but we have moved on just like everyone else in society and this needs to be recognised.

The curriculum in schools should include information about Gypsies and Travellers. Not just in schools where there are Gypsy/Traveller children but in all schools. We are part of this society and have been for hundreds of years.

Did you know...?

The Traveller Education service can support schools to fully include Traveller children, and it has resource material about Gypsies and Travellers for use in schools.

As a group of Romany Gypsy women living in Devon we have:

- ◆ Produced a leaflet about Gypsies to counteract the negative image portrayed in the press
- ◆ Been involved in producing an Information Pack for Gypsies and Travellers in the County so they have easier access to services and information
- ◆ Compiled this booklet for schools
- ◆ Produced a DVD about Romany Gypsies in Devon (**The pride, the prejudice**) which we take into secondary schools to educate teachers and students about our community and the issues we face
- ◆ Conducted training sessions, with Devon Racial Equality Council, for voluntary and statutory organisations throughout Devon about Gypsies and Travellers

For details of any of these publications or for information about the DVD or training sessions, please contact Devon Racial Equality Council

**Do you want to know more about
Gypsies/Travellers?**

Friends, Families and Travellers
www.gypsy-traveller.org

The Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group
www.dglg.org

Travellers in Leeds
www.grtleeds.co.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Devon Travellers Education Service
**[www.devon.gov.uk/
travellers_education.htm](http://www.devon.gov.uk/travellers_education.htm)**

The Gypsy Council
www.thegypsyCouncil.org.uk

This booklet was produced by members of the Devon Gypsy and Traveller community supported by Devon Racial Equality Council.

We value your opinion and would like to hear feedback on anything raised in this booklet. Any comments or suggestions can be given via the Devon Racial Equality Council.

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