



Traveller Men who took part in the Run-A-Muck Challenge

Newsletter of the Travellers in Prison Initiative

Issue 2

April 2016

Traveller Men's Action Plan

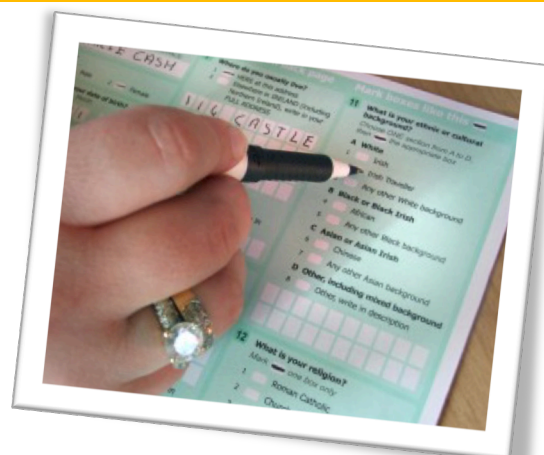
Traveller Men's Action Plan (TMAP) are a group that involves Traveller men from different parts of Dublin and Kildare and Wicklow. The idea of TMAP is a place that Traveller men can meet together and talk about health issues that are affecting Traveller men but also get involved in sports activities.

We have organised health days for the men to engage with services like the Irish Heart Foundation, Irish Cancer society and Asthma society. The men got a lot of different information and had their blood pressure taken by health nurses. We knew that if we just focused on health then TMAP would never work so we added in physical challenges for the next year.

The first challenge we did was the RUN-A-MUCK 10k challenge which 104 Traveller men took part in. The men did the run for a load of different charities like Irish Cancer Society, Pieta House, Crumlin Hospital, Marie Keating Foundation and Autism Action Ireland.

Our next challenges are to climb Croagh Patrick and to take part in the Men's Health day in Phoenix Park as part of Men's health week. We will be also having health days in between these challenges to tackle the health issues that are affecting our community.

John Collins, Traveller Men's health worker, Pavee Point



Make Sure You're Counted

Census

Census Day is on April 24th. It's very important that Travellers identify AS Irish Travellers on Question 11 on the Census form. This information will help the State and organisations to plan for the needs of Travellers in the future.

Some Dos and Don'ts when in Prison

- ✓ Do Make your time count, use it in a positive way
- ✓ Do this by applying to the Education Unit in the school. You can improve your life by learning to read and write or you can do woodwork, art, cooking, health and fitness, there's so much to choose from. Check it out, what have you got to lose?
- ✓ Do mind your mental health, if you feel down ask for a listener, chaplain, nurse/GP or addiction counsellor
- ✓ Do keep fit. Use prison as an opportunity to get fit? Go and check out the gym
- ✓ Do try keep yourself drug free or get help to get drugs free
- ✓ Do ask for the chaplain if you have any personal or family issues you want to talk about
- ✓ Do ask about getting a job in the Prison and earn extra calls or money etc.
- ✓ Do try to get into a routine
- ✓ Keep yourself and your cell clean and tidy
- ✓ Do ask any Red Cross Members for any up and coming courses/workshops or for advice on any queries
- ✓ Try to work your way positively through the Prison. For example in Castlerea Prison - A1 to A2 to A3 maybe D Wing if you get a Kitchen Job then to the Grove or transfer of choice.
- ✓ Do keep your head and do your time wisely
- ✓ Do keep in touch with your family
- ✓ STAY POSITIVE

**Your story is
the key that
can unlock
someone else's
prison. Share
your testimony.**
Spiritual Inspiration



Don'ts

- Don't be embarrassed to ask for help if you feel down or just need a bit of help in general. Everybody needs a bit of help sometimes
- Don't isolate yourself
- Don't ignore mental health issues
- Don't bully anybody
- Don't believe all the rumours you hear and don't spread gossip
- Don't get involved in any cycle of violence.
- Don't be around negative people
- Try not to stay in the protection wing unless you really have to
- Don't ever feel you're alone. Samaritans are here. We care. Call a Listener.
- Don't get involved in taking drugs.
- Don't feel this is the end of the road.

By the Red Cross Volunteers in
Castlerea Prison



Red Cross

The 7 Fundamental Principles (In prisoners own words)

1.

Humanity

We show kindness, understanding and respect to everyone we talk to

2.

Impartiality

We don't discriminate with a wide range of nationalities, culture or crimes. We treat everyone equally

3.

Neutrality

We don't take sides in any issues or arguments

4.

Independence

Independent from Irish Prison Service but follow their rules

5.

Voluntary Service

We don't look for any gain. We do it because we get great satisfaction

6.

Unity

Only one Red Cross, all work as a team

7.

Universality

All Red Cross Volunteers in Irish Prisons are equal, share responsibilities and hope to set up in all prisons

Community Based Health & First Aid Prison Programme Overview

Ireland is the first country in the world to introduce Community Based Health and First Aid *in Action* through groups of special status Irish Red Cross Volunteer Inmates in a prison setting. It first began at Wheatfield Prison in 2009 and following the success of this pilot it was extended to ten prisons by 2013 and to all fourteen prisons in Ireland in 2014.

Groups of 12 – 24 Irish Red Cross volunteer inmates in each prison attend a weekly CBHFA training session over a 4-6 month period. It is delivered by ETB teacher/s in the school/education unit of the prison and allocated nurses who are employed within the prison healthcare system. Once volunteers have successfully completed the training, with the support of staff they start to implement projects aimed at improving the overall health and wellbeing of prisoners in their community.

The following is an example of projects promoted by IRC volunteer inmates in the different prisons:

Volunteers actively conduct practical demonstrations in CPR and Basic First Aid around the prisons
Weapons Amnesty Project at Wheatfield - Assisting management with an advocacy role through the volunteers linked to the 7 Fundamental Principles to remove cutting weapons from the prison. The results have shown a 94% reduction in assaults with a weapon and 50% reduction in assaults.

Harm Reduction drug awareness highlighting the dangers of over-dosage when taking drugs after leaving the prison.
Volunteer led projects on Nutrition, Fitness, Cholesterol, Blood Pressure checking & Dental Hygiene
Mental Health Awareness in some prison about key issues including the risks of self harm and suicide prevention.

Promotion of Men's Health Awareness

Intercultural Day promoted by volunteers with the help of staff in Castlereagh

Conflict and Violence Awareness Workshop facilitated by Traveller volunteers with the support of staff in Castlereagh

Interested in becoming a Red Cross volunteer?

The Red Cross programme runs once a year in each prison during the school term.

If you are interested in becoming a Red Cross Volunteer you should give your name to the Red Cross teacher in the school.



Conflict Awareness Workshop

I am a prisoner in Castlereagh and I am an Irish Red Cross Volunteer here in the prison. I would like to tell you about a workshop called 'Conflict Awareness' which took place in Castlereagh prison and which was put together by the Irish Red Cross volunteers here in Castlereagh.

The workshop was aimed for the most part at the Traveller Community here in the Prison, which has a higher number of Travellers than in any other prison in Ireland. But the course has reached out to many other non-Travellers like myself who believe in it 100%. I believe we all need to be educated on conflict awareness and resolution.

One thing regarding conflict and feuds that is different for Travellers and settled people is that the whole settled community doesn't get painted with the same brush if somebody from the settled community gets involved in feuds etc. You can see this in newspaper headlines and other media attention that shows all negative stories about Traveller conflict and feuding.

On January 29th we held our first official Conflict Awareness Workshop. Many guests attended including the Director General of the IPS Michael Donnellan, Governor Flavin, guests from the Traveller in Prison Initiative, Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board, Psychology, Medical and Security Staff from here in Castlereagh as well as prisoners who were participating in the workshop.

All prisoners and guests worked together throughout the day. Some volunteers shared their personal stories of experiences in conflict and how they ended up in prison as a result. The workshop was very interactive with all participants being involved in group work from beginning to end, as well as some role plays.

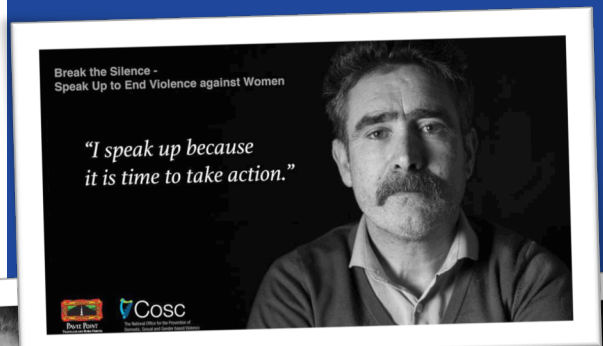
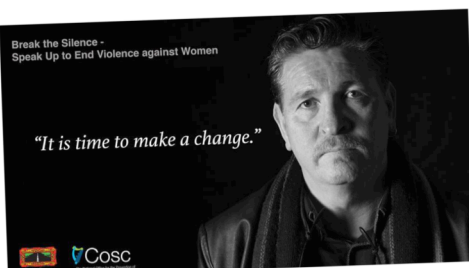
Workshops on conflict awareness like the one that we did with the Red Cross deals with issues around how conflicts start, how conflict can escalate into violence and how to resolve conflict.

We need to promote this type of courses so people can bring it back into the communities. There can be no losers in this. Everyone gains; families, Traveller community and prisoners, as well as the wider community, justice system, medical services and Gardaí.

Without the huge work of the Irish Red Cross Volunteers and the support of the GRET, the School, the IPS, the Governors, Chiefs, ACO's, Officers and the Irish Red Cross who have supported this project from the beginning this project would still be just an idea.

With their continued support we can continue our work and hopefully even roll it out to the community to make it a better and safer place for everybody. We look forward to working with everyone in the future as we really want to make a difference.

Irish Red Cross Volunteer, Castlereagh Prison



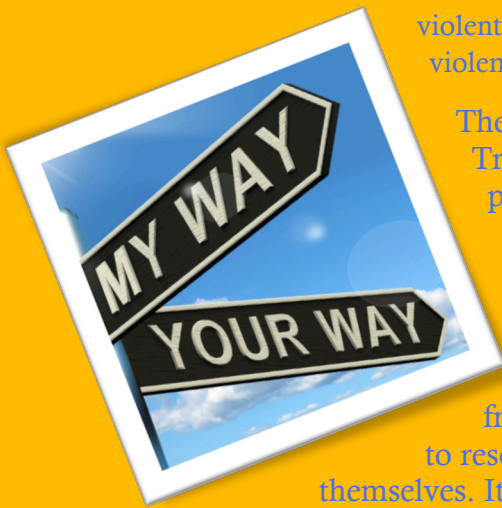
Traveller Conflict Intervention

A Training Programme for Travellers

The Midlands Traveller Conflict Mediation Initiative (MTCMI) was established in 2009 as a result of research, which was carried out in the Midlands into Traveller related conflict and violence.

The research showed that:

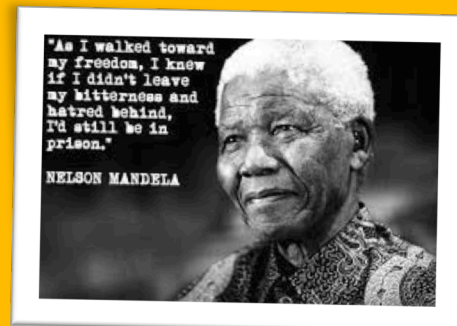
1. Violent conflict is hurting Travellers
2. It is having a negative effect on the work that agencies and organisations working with Travellers are trying to do to help Travellers
3. Traveller families embroiled in violent conflict have expressed a strong desire to end violence.



The MTMCI is committed to working in partnership with Travellers and other relevant people or organisations to develop plans to help prevent conflict before it becomes violent and to intervene effectively where violent conflict is already an issue.

The MTMCI held some workshops in 2014 on the subject of conflict, and looking at different ways of managing/resolving conflicts. There was general agreement from the group who attended the workshop that the best people to resolve conflicts within the Traveller community were Travellers themselves. It was recommended that specific training should be developed to enable Travellers to get the skills and knowledge to act as mediators in their own community.

The MTMCI have linked with the University in Maynooth to develop a one year accredited training programme for Travellers interested in being mediators. The training programme started in February and runs for 1 day per week. 22 Travellers have signed up to do the course.



Who are the participants on the course?

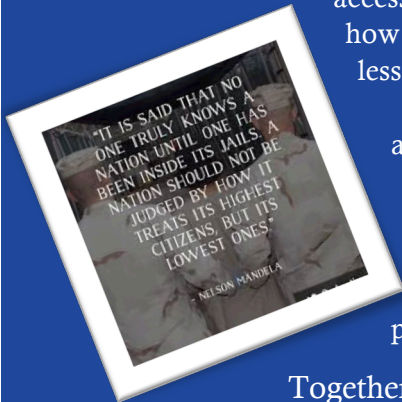
- People who have shown a commitment to look for alternatives to violence
- People who have experience of dealing with conflicts
- Possibly people who have a history of feuding and who are now looking to do things differently
- People with a real interest in resolving conflicts
- A spread of different family names and locations
- People who can be role models for other Travellers
- There was agreement that both men and women need to be involved in the programme, although their roles as conflict interveners seen as somewhat different.

We will include more information about the course and some ideas that the MTMCI have for working with Travellers in prison in the next issues of the newsletter.

Delivering a Traveller Inclusive Counselling Service

The Travellers in Prison Initiative and the Traveller Counselling Service were pleased to be invited to deliver a workshop to the IPS Psychology Service. The aim of the workshop was to help IPS psychologists to:

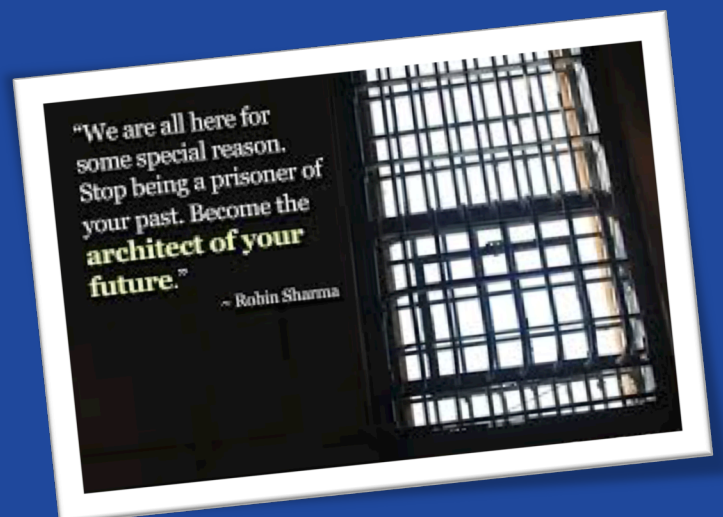
- Get a better understanding of the needs of Travellers in prison and some of the reasons why Travellers may be 'wary' of attending counselling
- Make the psychological service more accessible to Travellers and how to 'make Travellers less wary of the service'
 - Learn more about aspects of Traveller culture relevant to therapy
 - Make psychologists aware of their own prejudices and how to challenge them
 - Learn more about the diversity within Traveller culture including particular issues for Traveller women



Together we came up with some ideas to encourage more Travellers to attend counselling and to benefit from it:

- The psychologists could come onto landings and other areas where Travellers gather e.g. gym to explain to Travellers about the psychological service and to encourage them to come to a session
- Psychologists need to be mindful of their own prejudices/biases and need to show Travellers that they are not prejudiced
- Reassure Travellers that the service is confidential. Psychologists won't tell anybody about what you tell them in the counselling session
- Psychologists need to understand the importance of family loyalty and how talking about some issues could be considered 'betrayal'. Travellers need to be assured that the psychologist understands how difficult this is for them.

The psychologists based in prisons are clearly committed to providing a service that better meets the needs of Travellers. If you have any suggestions about how we could encourage more Travellers to talk to the psychologist in order to improve their mental health and reduce the likelihood of re-offending, please let us know.



The Battle Within

My name is Robert and I'm a Traveller in prison. I was born into a large family and the first fourteen years of my life were spent travelling from site to site with my family.

Legislation came into force in the 90s which made it harder for us to continue living on the roadside. It became ever more frequent for us to be forced from our camp by both the council and the Gardaí. These visits were always stressful and would normally end in both verbal and sometimes physical altercations.

My parents would often face the threats of their children being taken into care or their caravans being impounded. My parents endured this as long as they could but eventually they had to concede and move into a house which was supplied by the council.

I will never forget the shock and resentment I felt after this was imposed on us. It felt like the only life I had ever known and had been comfortable with had been taken from me. I became more and more angry having to deal with people who did not want us among them. I didn't know then what racism was but looking back it was something we were dealing with every day.

My first drink was with other 14 year olds and I felt as if I had found something which made me feel good and could help me to cope with the difficulties I was facing. One evening after a heavy session with some friends I ended up damaging a car. The Gardaí were called and my anger at them for the previous bad treatment of us erupted. I ended up scuffling with them and being arrested.

I was never asked to explain why this incident happened and feel now that this was an opportunity missed. Alarm bells should have rang and for a 15 year old with drink problems and issues with dealing with the settled community, surely help should have been priority! Unfortunately help was not offered. I was taken to court and given a 12 month prison sentence. All I got from my first time in prison was a serious drug problem.

The year after my release from prison, my life was in turmoil. I got into more and more trouble and I ended back inside and for the next 5 years. In prison I continued to bury myself with the blur of drink and drugs but it all became too much for me. I had hit rock bottom. I knew I could no longer face these issues alone and needed help.

I always had a strong faith and the only person I felt I could confide to was the prison chaplain. For the first time I felt a person was listening to me and could understand the frustration and desperation I felt.

The prison chaplain organised for me to talk to the psychology services within the prison. At first I had an issue with trusting this person. I had never opened up to anyone about my feelings before. Eventually they got a clearer picture of where I was coming from and I felt for the first time in my life I was receiving the support I was craving for.

I attended AA meetings and completed a drug counselling course and now I will never again use these types of substances.

I now know I owe my life to these people. It took 4 years of counselling to find myself and gain some inner peace. I'm sure that this time when I leave prison I will live a healthy lifestyle and hope I can help some people that may have been through similar situations that I have.

Today, I can look back and know the war that was raging in my head is finally over.

As a proud member of the Traveller community I am very grateful for the opportunities I have been given in prison. All I can ask is if you have drink, drug problems or a lack of trust in people try to seek the help which is available.

I am Traveller

“Since I was a child I have had people call me ‘knacker’. It hurts and it builds and it makes me angry. But I’m not going to give that word any power any more. I am not a knacker. I am Traveller.”
John Connors who featured in ‘I am Traveller’ on RTE recently

TRAVELLER PRIDE AWARDS

The aim of the Awards is to celebrate Traveller achievements whilst highlighting some of the obstacles that exist for Travellers in Irish society, to instill pride, increase expectations and celebrate Travellers’ undoubted positive contribution to Irish life and also the pride and determination one has to have in order to succeed as a Traveller.

The awards are judged in seven separate categories, from which one will be chosen to receive the overall Traveller Pride Award

The Traveller Pride Awards are now in their 7th year and will be held in Dublin in June.



This is the second edition of the Travellers in Prison Initiative Newsletter. We plan to produce three or four newsletters every year.

We are delighted that this edition contains many articles written by Travellers in prison. If you would like to write an article for the next edition of the newsletter please contact Anne Costello, Co-ordinator of the Travellers in Prison Initiative.

Anne can be contacted at anne@sstg.ie or 0876577666.

St. Stephens Green Trust also provides funding to Traveller organisations to work with Travellers in prison and their families. They are currently funding Traveller organisations to work with Travellers in prison in Wheatfield, Limerick, Midlands, Castlerea and Loughan House.