



Newsletter of the Travellers in Prison Initiative

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Traveller Pride Awards

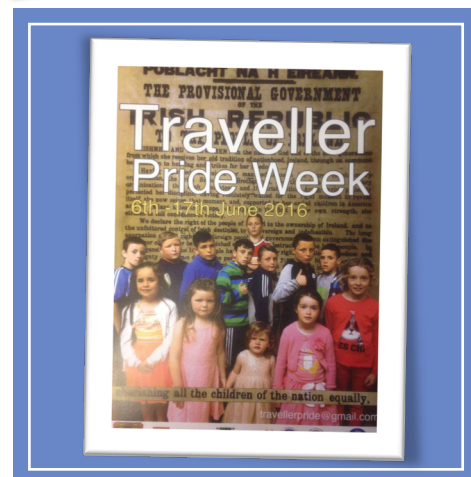
The Traveller Pride Awards which took place in the Pillar Room in the Rotunda on the 1st of June were as always a great success. The awards are a great opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions Travellers make to their own community and to Irish society despite the many barriers that exist for them.

Special guests of honour at the event included musician Finbar Furey, the actor John Connors and Minister of State for Equality David Stanton.

Amongst the winners on the day were: Mikey Kelly, a twelve year old from Galway who won both the sports award and the overall Traveller Pride Award. Mikey has excelled in sport and is the proud winner of two world champion handball titles. Mikey said *"I feel on top of the world to win the Traveller pride award for sport. I am extremely proud to have competed in the 2015 World Championship as a Traveller, and to bring home to my community 4 World Champion Medals. My success demonstrates to the wider Irish community the skill and talent which exists amongst young Travellers"*.



Overall winner of the Traveller Pride Awards Mikey Kelly from Galway receiving his award from 2015 winner Hugh Friel and Minister for Equality.



Traveller Pride Awards Continued

The residents of Spring Lane Halting site in Cork won the Community Award. This group had been campaigning for 3 years for better accommodation and basic services at their site "branded" as one of the country's worst halting sites. They generated a campaign in the hope of securing better living conditions for their children, many of whom live without access to basic facilities. They were recognised by third party groups for their dedication and commitment, while displaying good spirit against great odds. Speaking at the awards a resident Kathleen Delaney said:



'It's a great achievement, I'm very proud that we got the award. Fighting for your rights can be a long road. We are still waiting for an answer from the council. It can wear you down, but I'll never stop. We need to keep going until we get proper homes for our children and a proper future.'



Winners of the award for Enterprise were the Skibbereen Boy's Action Group, a group of boys aged 11-13 from West Cork. John O'Driscoll picking up the award said;

"It makes me feel good to get this award, it's the first award I have ever won! We decided to complete a woodwork project making bug boxes and bird houses and then thought why not design and make miniature barrel top wagons that we could sell at the Christmas markets. But, we ran out of time and came up with a great idea to make 'flat pack barrel top kits' that could be made by customers at home. With our facilitators at the Skibbereen Community and Family Resource Centre and the West Cork Traveller's Centre, we put the packs together, designed the labels, instructions and packaging. We sold all of our products at the Skibbereen Enterprise fair, and to top it off we were then asked to make bug boxes for the local golf club."

Other winners included: TJ Hogan from Cork won the Education Award for his commitment to education and volunteering, 'Songstories Pavee Ceoil' from Ennis won the Music Award for their work in songwriting and performance, The Primary Health Care team in Cavan accepted the Arts and Culture Award and Mary Kate Nevin from Meath. Won the Youth award for being the first and only Traveller Irish Girl Guide to win the prestigious GOLD Award.



The Traveller Pride Awards 2016 was coordinated by the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) and is organised by a steering committee comprising ITM, Minceirs Whiden, Pavee Point, National Traveller MABS, the National Traveller Women's Forum, Involve, Exchange House and the Parish of the Travelling People.

Feud Deterrence Programme

The Feud Deterrence Programme is a new initiative that Pavee Point and the Irish prison service have approved to be run in Mountjoy prison. I am a Traveller man in Mountjoy prison and I am working with this project to help deter young Traveller men from getting involved in violent feuds and ending up in prison.

The first group of young Traveller men started a twelve week programme in June and there was eleven participants in attendance. Each of the twelve sessions had different objectives, we looked at responses to conflict, a way of sorting out rows and the traditional way Travellers have dealt with conflict in the community.

We focused some of our attention on the effects of feuding on our community and the wider community....how lives are being destroyed. Young Traveller men are becoming more involved in feuds because of their family name. I believe that this perception that young Traveller men feel they have no choice but to get involved in violent feuds needs to be challenged. This programme was designed with that in mind and every session the participants were challenged on the idea that 'they have no choice'. It is my belief that everyone should have the right to choose their own path in life regardless of their surname.

I got involved in this programme because there was time when I believed there were no choices available to me. I got involved in a feud that led to a man losing his life. I will have to live with the knowledge that my actions caused the death of a man for the rest of my life. I am now serving a life sentence for my actions. My hopes for this programme is that young Traveller men will learn from my experience and not destroy any more lives.

This programme could not have happened without the support of Pavee Point and the Irish Prison Service. The prison management have been very supportive of this programme by allowing the participants into the prison to experience the reality of prison life for themselves. We hope this will be the wakeup call they need to prevent them from getting involved in feuds in the future.

By the end of the programme the participants will have the knowledge, skills and confidence that is needed to ensure they can make their own choices in life when it comes to their involvement in any potential feud situations.

Conflict Awareness Workshop, Castlerea Prison

Some photos from a 'Conflict Awareness' workshop which was facilitated by Travellers in prison in Castlerea. A number of guests attended the workshop 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 as well as prisoners who were participating in the workshop.



Sharing My Story

As part of Traveller Pride week I had the privilege of going into the Dochas women's prison to share my personal experience with the Traveller women. I had the opportunity to speak to the women about my journey to addiction and all the heartache it brought and how hard it is for a Traveller woman to let her pride down and ask for help. I was there to talk to them about how recovery is possible. Difficult but possible.

I was very anxious and nervous. The last time I had been in Dochas, I was on the other side. But it was a great privilege to now be able to share my experiences and to let other women know that they are not alone and there is hope. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

It was very difficult to talk about all I had been through but I really wanted to share my story in the hope that it will help other women. When I was inside I thought there was no hope because I didn't know or hear about any treatment options or that people can and do recover.

As a Traveller woman, I thought that any services would treat me with discrimination but it didn't turn out like that. It was the complete opposite. There are people out there that are willing to help. It doesn't matter where you come from or what background you come from because anyone can change with enough support.

I know it's not easy, but by sharing my story I hope I showed it can be done and the peace of mind I have now. To be able to rear my kids, it's worth it. I have a future.

No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Nelson Mandela
Long Walk to Freedom



LISTENERS
SAMARITANS

Listeners in Prison

I and a Traveller man in prison and I am a listener in Mountjoy prison. I have been in prison for nine and a half years. During this time I have got involved in the listener scheme, a scheme whereby prisoners are trained by the Samaritans to take calls from other prisoners.

This involves listening to other prisoners who are going through a hard time while they are in prison. This could be their first time in prison and they might want to talk to someone who has gone through the same experience. The listeners are trained by the Samaritans in a five week training course that involves role play and learning active listening skills. This training gives listeners the skills they need to provide a service for prisoners who need to talk and just want someone to listen to them without judgement or prejudice.

The listeners are not counsellors. However they are trained to listen and talking about how you feel can help a great deal. Listeners explore suicidal feelings of callers and this can help the caller to talk through these feelings. One of the most important codes for listeners is confidentiality. The listener's scheme would not work if the caller did not have full trust in the listeners.

I would like to use this newsletter to encourage anyone going through a hard time to call for a listener and not to suffer in silence. As a Traveller man I know how difficult it can be to talk about feelings but it is important to overcome this negative perception that talking about how you feel is a weakness.

We all need a friendly ear from time to time and the listeners are here for you.

Traveller Mental Health Conference

Bridging the Gap through Partnership

Research shows that Travellers have higher rates of mental health problems than the settled community. The most tragic example of this is the fact that suicide in the Traveller community is 7 times higher than for settled people.

The Traveller Counselling Service organised a very interesting conference to raise awareness about the particular issues for Travellers and to explore how Travellers mental health and well-being can be improved.

A large number of Travellers and Traveller representatives took part in the conference as well as policy makers and service providers. The Irish Prison Service was very well represented at the event with staff from Education, Psychology and Care & Rehabilitation present.



The conference was opened by the Minister with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration, and Integration David Stanton. Martin Collins from Pavee Point talked about how racism and the denial of Traveller identity impacts on Travellers mental health. He said 'when your identity is continuously devalued, criticized and demonised..it is hard to stay healthy'. He called for the establishment of a National Traveller Cultural Centre as a means of restoring Traveller pride.

Dr. Geraldine Moane of UCD school of Psychology spoke of the effects of internalised oppression on the Traveller community.

She spoke about how Travellers like other oppressed groups start to believe the myths and negative stereotypes and don't feel good about themselves or other Travellers. Travellers need to be involved in change to get rid of those feelings. Otherwise, the end result is a mental health problem.

Thomas McCann from the Traveller Counselling Service spoke about the need for training on 'cultural competency' for all mental health professionals and stated that there needs to be discussions between Travellers and decision makers to ensure that Travellers receive an appropriate service.

The Minister for Mental Health and Older People, Helen McEntee closed the conference. She made a commitment to work with Traveller organisations to try to address the serious mental health issues.



Cork Prison – Traveller Pride Week

I am a prisoner in Cork Prison. In June I was part of Traveller Pride Week 2016 which took place in the school in the prison. It was organised by the Traveller Group in the school with the help of the teachers, the Chaplain and prison staff. The Traveller Group has been meeting every Thursday afternoon for the past two years. There are usually between ten and fifteen of us in the group along with a teacher and a member of the Traveller Visibility Group (TVG) in Cork City. We discuss issues relating to Travellers and watch DVDs which were made by TVG and Irish Traveller organisations.

The events we organised for Traveller Pride Week were a Five-a-Side soccer tournament in the Sports Hall, a Mass for Travellers who have passed on and a Mental Health session. On May 20th we had a meeting with the Chaplain to decide who would do the readings, play guitar and which songs to sing during the Mass. We also met to discuss



who would be on each of the four Five a Side teams for the soccer tournament.



The Mass was celebrated by the priest for the Traveller Community in Cork City. We decorated the altar in one of the classrooms and collected photos and other personal items for the Offertory Procession. We all wrote the names of our loved ones on a painting from the Art class of a barrel top wagon. It was one of the items on the altar during the Mass. It was all very moving especially the singing of Amazing Grace and Halleluiah.

The Five-a Side soccer tournament was a great success. Almost all of us Travellers in Cork Prison that morning (twenty six of us) were in the Sports Hall either as players, subs or cheering our team on. We had great help and support from the P.E. teacher and sports officers and then for the most part we picked the teams and refereed the event ourselves. The team that won got a small prize. We hope to run other Five a Side soccer tournaments like it during the coming year.

The session on Mental Health was an opportunity for us to talk about issues that concern us as Traveller men. Some of us decided to sign up for the six week course on Men's Health which was run during June and July.

Many of the classes in the Education Unit got involved in Traveller Pride Week. There was a display cabinet in the school of work Travellers had done in the pottery, woodwork and Art classes (e.g. ceramic wagons and match craft ships etc). A banner was made in Craft class which we hope to use in future years.

Travellers, Education and Prison Staff (in particular the School Officers) worked well together to make Traveller Pride Week 2016 a great success. A big Thank You to all involved. It is hoped that next year's event will be an even bigger success. We have begun to plan for it already!



I am a thirty five year old Traveller in the Midland's Prison. Years ago I used to watch my uncle making pots and pans from copper. It was a great pastime. I used to love making the holly wreaths for Christmas, something that I don't see happening that much anymore. That's the way things have changed; Travellers can't stop on the side of the road no more. I remember the old days when you could stop anywhere along the road, make a camp, light a fire, sing songs, tell stories and be happy. But now it's locked gates and doors closed in your face.

I myself have learned to live with it and make the best of life. I used to love being out in the open air...these days I spend most of my time in a cell and believe you me it's the not the place for anyone who likes being out in the open air.

So if you get the chance to be free, do whatever it takes to keep your freedom. A life behind bars is no place for a Traveller.

I would love to see the old Traveller ways come back, they are truly missed. The times are rapidly changing and the way of the Traveller is becoming more and more of a distant memory

My Life is a Song

My life is a song, the truth at last I have found
My days are like a record, they just go round and round
I'm gonna spill the beans, pull my life through the dirt
You wanna know about anger? You wanna know about hurt?
Ok then, I will tell you. But you might not like what you hear
Cos I'm gonna skip around the bullshit and tell you all about me

You know it stings me. I think of all the years I have wasted
But that's nothing to the tears I have tasted
From the moment I could walk I was always a bit wild
I faced everything in life alone ever since I was a child
In a world full of lies, I'm only writing the truth
From behind prison bars where I've been spending my youth

Since then I've been battered, bruised, left almost for dead
I've fought battles with demons that run riot in my head
I've had my heart broke and kicked in the air like a ball
I've been with good girls, bad girls, prostitutes and all
I've been locked up, broke up, thrown naked into a cell
The world that I lived in often felt like hell

I have fell to my knees and screamed out to the night
But the survivor in me will never give up the fight
Cos just when I think I can't take anymore
I remember where I came from, I remember before
I'm reminded of my poor mother who's an angel in all her glory
Then I know this is just a chapter in my life long story
So if they think they can break me, trust me they are wrong
Ssshhh can you hear the music? My life is a song



Director General of Irish Prison Service pledges support for Traveller inclusion



Michael Donnellan, Director General of the Irish Prison Service (IPS) has stated that he is fully committed to ensuring that Travellers are identified within the Irish Prison Service context.

This, he stated will ***"enable the IPS to deliver services to Travellers in prison which are more suited to meeting their needs, both in prison and in preparing them for life post-release. When we know the correct ethnic origin of the Traveller population in prison, we can plan and deliver workshops, education programmes, drug treatment and counselling services that are more Traveller-centred."***

Mr. Donnellan also gave his backing to the research that is being carried out by the Travellers in Prison Initiative to identify the barriers to Travellers giving their ethnic identity at the time of committal to prison.

He stated that the IPS would co-operate fully with the research to find practical solutions to this issue for both existing prisoners and new committals.

"By recognising Traveller ethnicity, it won't make us less Irish. It will however acknowledge our dual-identity of being both Irish and Traveller, similar to both Irish-Americans and African-Americans."
Bernard Joyce, Director of ITM speaking at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice & Equality

Remembering Carrickmines Fire Victims

Traveller organisations from around the country held candlelight vigils to mark the first anniversary of the deaths of the victims of the Carrickmines fire tragedy on 10th of October.

Speaking at the vigil outside the Dail, Martin Collins, Co-Director at Pavee Point, called for an increase in funding for Traveller accommodation and a new approach to help avoid another tragedy. He said 'We still have 1,300 Traveller families – approximately 7,000 people who are living in sub-standard, unsafe accommodation right across this country'. He warned that there are other Carrickmines out there waiting to happen if urgent action is not taken to address the crisis.



This is the third edition of the Travellers in Prison Initiative Newsletter.

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@ssgt.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.