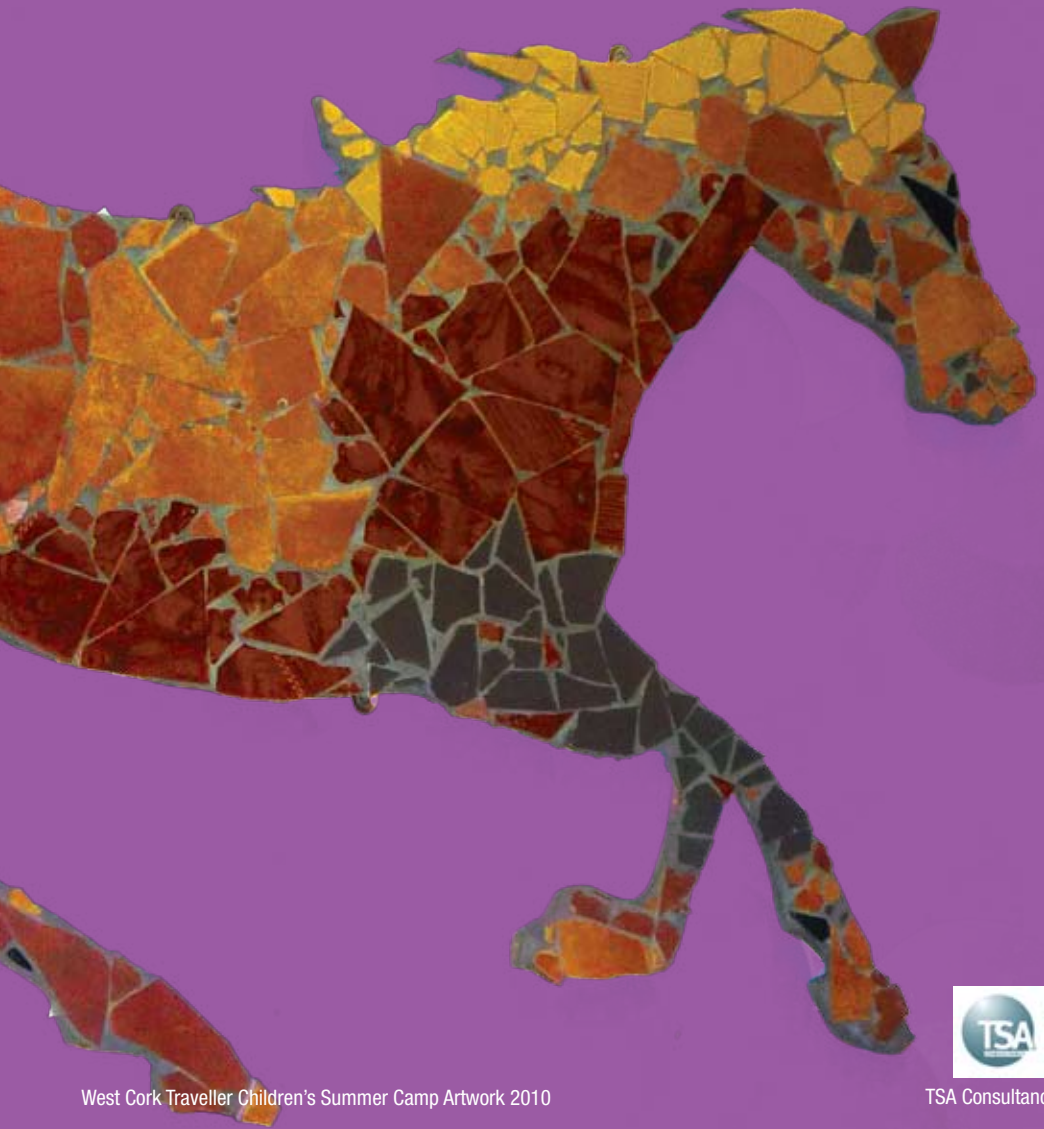


# Young Travellers in Cork and their experiences of services





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- To the Traveller organisations who supported the research and who enabled us to carry out interviews with the young people: West Cork Travellers’ Centre, East Cork Advocacy Group, and Travellers of North Cork. In particular, thanks to Cathy Crockett, Eben Barnard, Anita Toner, Marie Griffin, and to Iain Mentiply for all their support.
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## Introduction and background

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This research has been commissioned by the Youth and Childcare Subcommittee of the County Cork Inter-Agency Traveller group. The County Cork Traveller Interagency group has the specific purpose of focussing on the delivery of integrated services for Travellers and to improve the co-operation between all agencies involved in delivering those services.

In 2006, the Inter-Agency group undertook an overview of the supports and services to the Traveller community in Cork provided by the agencies represented on the inter-agency Group. The research aims to examine the same situation from the perspective of young members of the Traveller community. The intention is that it will identify tasks and areas of work for the inter-agency group to fulfil its purpose.

The aims of the research are as follows:

- To carry out a participative action research project to map the experiences of Traveller children in accessing services available to them
- To identify their experience of available services and explore examples of successful participation in services e.g. existing community childcare facilities, as well as the possible barriers to participation.
- Recommendations from the project will form the foundation for planning for Traveller children and young adults from their perspective.

The objectives of the research are to:

- Identify the service needs of children and young people
- Identify the extent to which these needs are being met through accessing existing services
- Identify gaps and issues presenting for service delivery to young Travellers
- Explore the potential impacts on Travellers of these gaps and issues
- Identify a series of practical recommendations to the Traveller Inter-agency Group to address the research outcomes.

The research was funded by the HSE South Traveller Health Unit (THU), which is a partnership structure between the HSE South and Traveller organisations in Cork and Kerry. It has responsibility for the monitoring of health services to the Traveller community and the implementation of the National Traveller health strategy in the region. It supports the Southern Traveller health Network (STHN) which is a network of Traveller-led organisation in the region.

There are five Traveller-led, community development organisations in Cork City and County that, as one part of their remit, advocate for the equitable access to services for Travellers. These groups are part of both the Interagency Group and THU and

through the STHN are represented on a Research Committee which oversaw this study. The full membership of the Research Committee was:

- Visiting Teacher Service, Dept. of Education and Skills<sup>1</sup>
- Cork County Childcare Committee
- East Cork Advocacy Project
- Community Work Section, HSE
- Traveller Health Unit, HSE

The Research Committee reports to the Youth and Childcare subcommittee of the inter-agency group.

## Methodology

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The research design was developed to maximise the participation of Travellers in the design and the delivery of the consultation and research process. Traveller organisations<sup>2</sup> acted as research oversight and advisory groups: they supported the design of the research process, identified key themes and advised the research team on how best to engage with young Travellers. Engagement with young Travellers and their families was also facilitated by Traveller organisations.

Consultations took place with young Travellers and their parents in the following towns:

- Garryvoe/ Ladysbridge
- Middleton
- Youghal
- Charleville
- Bandon
- Clonakilty
- Bantry
- Skibbereen

34 young people and nine parents from 12 families or extended families were interviewed.

The majority of young people interviewed were female, and the most prevalent group was living in standard housing. The North Cork area accounts for the largest group of interviewees (41 per cent), East Cork accounts for one third, and West Cork accounted for 26 percent of interviewees.

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<sup>1</sup> Changes to the provision of supports to Travellers in education from September 2011 has meant that specific supports such as the visiting teacher service, resource teachers and 1.5 allocation hours are no longer be available. The general allocation model of supports, on an individual needs basis, now applies.

<sup>2</sup> These organisations were Travellers of North Cork, West Cork Traveller Centre and East Cork Advocacy Group.

The 12-18 years age group was the most prevalent age of young Travellers interviewed, followed by the younger age group of 5-11 years.

Interviews also took place with nine parents of young Travellers in Bantry and Clonakilty in West Cork.

## Young Travellers' experiences of services

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The main findings as regards young Travellers experiences of services are outlined under each of the key areas discussed in the research.

### Pre-school services and health

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On the basis of discussions with parents, there was a good take up and satisfaction with the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme, particularly in West Cork. Parents are satisfied with integrated childcare service delivery. Parents made the point that there is a need for additional services, particularly community-based services, as well as state assistance towards the costs of childcare for children less than three years of age.

Parents also expressed satisfaction with the health services that they had accessed for their young children.

### Schools and the education system

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Young Travellers' experiences of school seemed to vary according to the area in which they lived, and a range of experiences were reported.

#### *Negative experiences*

Many of the young people consulted spoke of being bullied and taunted by peers, where the name calling (e.g., 'knacker' or 'tinker') experienced confirmed that this was linked to the Traveller identity. There was a view that schools did not adequately challenge bullying of Travellers, particularly in North Cork. Some of the negative views experienced from teachers in the classroom included:

- Not being listened to or complaints being ignored
- Teachers reinforcing stereotypes about Travellers and Traveller culture in the classroom.

In order to avoid discrimination or stigmatisation in school, some young Travellers (particularly in East and parts of West Cork) either did not disclose, or actively hid their identity as Travellers in school.

The prospect of discrimination and racism acted as a deterrent to continued participation in education, with young people making the point that 'there is nothing for us to go to school for'.

### *Positive experiences*

Not all Travellers reported negative experiences. Young people also spoke of their enjoyment of school in parts of East and West Cork and spoke of supportive relationships with teachers. Those with positive education experiences had higher expectations as regards future career opportunities than those with negative ones.

Finally, some young parents with an interest in adult education spoke about how geographic isolation of some towns made it difficult for Traveller-specific courses to be delivered, because they could not secure the minimum of seven participants.

### **Employment and work aspirations**

Some of the young people felt that their future work prospects were minimal, primarily because of discrimination and racism, and thus many felt that there was no real gain to continued education. For some young women, they believed that family expectations around their future role as young women would limit their work opportunities.

Some of the parents made the point that Travellers do not see other Travellers in the workplace or in the professions, and that if more Travellers were in such roles, career aspirations might change.

Young men in one part of West Cork felt that they would be discriminated in relation to work because of their surname.

In response to this issue as well as a general lack of employment opportunities, the 'That's my goal' project in West Cork has been investigating social enterprise<sup>3</sup> development as a mechanism for supporting Travellers in overcoming labour market discrimination.

### **Accommodation**

The majority of Travellers interviewed were living in standard accommodation. Approximately one third of those interviewed had previously lived in mobile accommodation, mostly on unofficial sites. The most pressing issues around accommodation related to:

- The quality of accommodation, arising from living in mobile accommodation in un-serviced and unofficial sites
- The difficulty in finding long-term private sector accommodation while waiting for local authority housing
- Being constantly moved on by authorities under trespass legislation

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<sup>3</sup> Social enterprises can be defined as not-for profit businesses with social objectives as part of the businesses' mission and activities. Social enterprises are part of the social economy, which can be defined as that part of the economy, not part of the public or private sector, which engages in economic activities to achieve social benefits, and which usually comprises democratic, independent organisations.



Difficulties living on unofficial sites included a lack of electricity, no running water, and being moved on by Gardaí. Trespass legislation and the constant threat of being moved on led to stress, uncertainty and fear. Constant moving and at very short notice also meant that family connections were regularly broken which impacted on social supports and networks. School attendance as also affected.

In spite of the difficulties experienced in living on the side of the road, the tradition of nomadism was still very important for some young Travellers, and some would travel during the summer time if they could overcome discrimination experienced at caravan parks.

For many Travellers, accessing long-term private rented accommodation was a particular difficulty, and some attributed this to discrimination.

### **Garda Síochána**

While the majority of children and young people interviewed did not have any contact with An Garda Síochána, a minority did. Some engaged with the Gardaí as a result of being evicted from unofficial accommodation and spoke of how the experiences had been frightening.

Parents in Bantry recounted both positive and negative experiences of the Gardaí. In one instance, one mother reported what she felt to be abusive behaviour of an individual garda to the local Superintendent, and was satisfied with how the complaint was addressed.

One young person made a recommendation that a garda be assigned to specifically link with Travellers.<sup>4</sup> Two young people interviewed expressed an interest in a career in An Garda Síochána when they left school.

Other experiences noted as part of the 'That's My Goal' research included a view that the Gardaí did not pursue complaints or allegations made by Travellers and that young men were discriminated and harassed by the Gardaí in Macroom.

### **Free time and leisure activity**

There were limited leisure and free time opportunities for Travellers of different ages. Leisure centres, pubs and restaurants were routinely out of bounds for Travellers because of discrimination.

For boys, sporting activity was the most frequent and accessible leisure activity, and an activity where many felt was absent of discrimination. This arose in all areas of cork, but probably was mentioned most frequently in West Cork.

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<sup>4</sup> This service is in place in parts of Cork.

Young women participated less frequently in sporting activity and spoke of their desire for a space to meet up with other Travellers and to socialise.

### **After-schools and youth activities**

Travellers who were interviewed participated in youth activities in North and West Cork, as well as in homework and after-school clubs in East Cork.

Youth projects played an important role in enabling Travellers to engage in social activities, which was otherwise often not available for Travellers, owing to issues identified in an earlier section. Leadership and personal development outcomes were also reported.

### **Mental health support needs**

In the main, young Travellers of all ages did not have many people with whom to talk to if they felt down, or to discuss problems or concerns. Options included talking to immediate and extended family members, but friends would rarely be confided in, for fears that confidentiality would be breached. The most frequent response amongst young women (aged over 15 years) was to 'keep it to myself' and not to talk to family members about all problems.

Many of the young people attending youth projects felt confident speaking about discussing problems with youth workers.

Some young people made the point that they would like to talk to someone outside of their family.

### **Summary of points and issues arising in the research**

The main issues affecting young people that arose in this research can be summarised as follows:

- Discrimination against Travellers and young people across many areas of life was widely reported
- Bullying in school was a major problem for a minority of Travellers
- Perceptions that service providers, particularly schools, did not all have an appreciation of Traveller culture was reported. Many young Travellers felt isolated in their school experience and felt that they were not being heard
- Lack of spaces and facilities to engage with other young people
- Experience of youth projects has been positive in developing confidence and self-esteem
- Transport and geographic isolation was reported as a barrier for young people accessing services
- A lack of halting sites led to a reliance for some on unofficial sites. Trespass legislation and fears of being moved on had a significant impact on some young people, including their education, opportunities to engage in social activities and their general wellbeing.

# Conclusions and Recommendations



- Sporting activities were key for boys and young men, but not so much for girls and young women
- There were very few recreation and leisure activities for young people, particularly for young girls
- Expectations of discrimination in the workplace and lack of employment opportunities had a strong influence on continued education and training
- Transition to adulthood within the Traveller community could inhibit career aspirations for some girls and young women, but not for all. Young men interviewed as part of this research, particularly in West Cork, had high education and career aspirations.

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### Conclusions

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This research was concerned with the issues facing young Travellers and was drawn from their own perspectives and experiences. Just as Travellers are not a homogenous group, neither are young Travellers nor the geographical areas in which they live. However, there were some experiences that young Travellers reported that should inform how services are designed and delivered.

Travellers do not all experience the same discrimination in all areas and there are examples of good practice in services in different parts of Cork. Parents are of the view that education services have improved in recent years, and they value pre-school services available to their children. Travellers value supports and interventions such as youth projects, and additional supports that help with school work. Sports clubs for some boys and young men is one activity where they can develop confidence in their ability in the absence of discrimination. This also allows them to develop confidence and pride in their identity.

There were some variations in experiences of Travellers in different parts of Cork, and some of the common themes arising in the different parts were:

- The area where discrimination appears to be least prevalent was West Cork, particularly in the towns of Clonakilty and Bandon. However, this is not to say that discrimination was not part of the everyday experience of Travellers. Positive experiences of school were referred to by young people in West Cork more than in other parts of Cork.
- Greater confidence in disclosing Traveller identity arose amongst the young people in Charleville town where the research was focused and this was probably the area where discrimination was felt to most prevalent. North Cork probably was the area where Travellers had a strong social network with other Travellers, and extended family members.
- Some of the young Travellers in East Cork felt that they needed to hide their identities in school and amongst friends.

The over-riding point is that discrimination and racism remains a major issue for many young Travellers, which impacts on their daily life from a young age. Discrimination arises with individuals but also with many of the services that Traveller engage with, and in this research, young people reported discrimination with schools, leisure centres, shops, the Gardaí, and they also expected continued discrimination in the workplace as they finish their education. Travellers who have lived in uncertain or unofficial accommodation experience stress and fear at very young ages, and the responses by some state agencies to this issue often exacerbates this situation.

The portrayal of Travellers in Ireland is predominately negative, and young Travellers in the main do not feel that their culture or traditions are reflected or acknowledged in most of the services and activities that they engage in – for some, this led to alienation and eventual withdrawal from these services and activities. Similar to some young people in the settled community, many young women felt that there were limitations placed on them arising from culture and expectations around gender roles as a Traveller. These young women welcomed an opportunity to further explore these issues.

It is also important to note that there were also issues that did not arise in the consultations, but which may be issues of relevance to young people now, or in the future. These include issues to do with sexuality and relationships, health, depression as well as issues to do with drug use.

Research has indicated that drug use within the Traveller community is on the increase, and it has been closely identified with risk factors such as high unemployment levels, low educational attainment, poor accommodation, discrimination and racism.<sup>5</sup> According to research completed in 2009:

Traditional resiliency factors are dissipating in strength due to increased Traveller housing within marginalized areas experiencing drug activity and increased levels of young Travellers encountering youth drug use within school settings, by way of their attempts 'to fit in' and integrate with their 'settled peers'<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the issue of suicide is a significant one within the Traveller community and had recently impacted on one particular community in Cork, where two men had died in a short period of time.

It is therefore important to recognise that some issues are sensitive and may not arise in consultations with young Travellers, and that the inter-agency group continue to engage with Travellers on these other issues on an ongoing basis.

<sup>5</sup> NACD (2006): *An overview of the nature and extent of illicit drug use amongst the Traveller community: an exploratory study*. Dublin: National Advisory Committee on Drugs

<sup>6</sup> Van Hout, M.C. (2009): 'Irish travellers and drug use – An exploratory study', *Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care*, 2(1), 42–49

## Recommendations

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These recommendations are made in light of limited financial resources, as well as emerging policy at national level. They aim to provide practical means by which young Travellers' experience of, access to, services can be enhanced.

The recommendations are developed on the basis of the opportunities presented by an inter-agency approach: these include capacity to learn from experiences throughout the county and to replicate good practices. In addition, the inter-agency approach provides an opportunity for collaboration in areas of common interest, and support around overcoming obstacles.

However, actions undertaken at a local level will also be subject to measures and decisions made at national level, which will ultimately impact on young Travellers.

### Overarching recommendation

1. While discrimination and racism remains a key issue for Travellers, this research has identified areas and services where Travellers report positive experiences and a lack of discrimination: these include experiences within schools, sporting activities (including the GAA) and within An Garda Síochána.

All agencies and services have a specific remit towards Travellers, and therefore there is an obligation that such good practices should be examined and replicated across the county. It is therefore recommended that all agencies undertake an exercise whereby they identify best practice approaches and initiatives within their own services, document these, and seek to have these approaches replicated across the county.

By definition, best practice approaches will be underpinned by a respect for diversity and for Traveller culture. For those agencies that cannot identify good practices, cultural awareness and anti-racism training should be made available and prioritised, and the inter-agency group should monitor the uptake or prevalence of this training.

With regard to schools, intercultural programmes and measures developed at national level (for example, the Irish Traveller Movement's *Yellow Flag* programme<sup>7</sup>) and comprehensive anti-bias approaches could be explored for their relevance in

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<sup>7</sup> The Irish Traveller Movement's Yellow Flag Programme provides a practical series of 8 steps that brings issues of inter-culturalism, equality and diversity into the whole-school programme and allows schools to apply them to the day to day running of the school. It works with students, staff, management, parents and wider community groups so that issues of diversity and equality are not merely seen as "school subjects" but can be understood and taken outside the school setting into everyone's personal lives. In parallel with the Green Schools, the Yellow Flag Diversity in Schools is both a practical programme and an award scheme, therefore; on completing these steps, and being assessed externally, the school is awarded its "Yellow Flag" in recognition of its work in promoting diversity & inclusion. [http://www.itmtrav.ie/keyissues/yellow\\_flag/](http://www.itmtrav.ie/keyissues/yellow_flag/)

schools and other service providers such as childcare services in county Cork.<sup>8</sup>  
 Lead Agencies: All members of the County Cork Inter-agency group.

### Supports for young Travellers

The difficulties that Travellers face are substantial. The daily reality of discrimination, and identity issues can be a significant burden for Travellers. Many stated that they do not have someone to talk to about their concerns or problems. The issues that they face would indicate risk factors to mental health for their age group.<sup>9</sup> They favour someone of their own age group and background to discuss issues with. Furthermore, due to limited education and labour force opportunities, there is often a lack of role models for young Travellers.

2. The inter-agency group should explore models for peer-to-peer and mentor support for young people around issues affecting young people, including discrimination, education,<sup>10</sup> mental health and wellbeing. The participation rate of Travellers in existing mentoring projects could be examined as part of this. This could be undertaken in collaboration with youth projects.

Lead agencies: Youth and community projects, Traveller organisations, and the HSE.

3. Traveller organisations, in collaboration with youth projects and schools, should explore how role models can be one method of supporting young people to remain in education. Models used elsewhere to support retention in education amongst ethnic groups could be explored for their application to County Cork, and the inter-agency group should support or lobby for resources to support this work.

Lead agency: Traveller organisations

4. Opportunities to develop a space for Travellers to discuss and explore issues of common concern, including such issues as mental health, drugs and sexuality, etc., should be investigated. Some older girls and young women would welcome a space to consider issues such as gender and identity. For young men, the model of the 'men's shed'<sup>11</sup> could be explored to see if there is relevance in the model for men in

<sup>8</sup> The underlying intent of anti-bias education is to foster the development of children and adults to build caring, just, diverse communities and societies for all. It can be applied effectively to all areas of potential discrimination such as gender, disability, sexual orientation, age marital status, family status, religion, 'race' and membership of the Traveller community. An anti-bias approach acknowledges that children aged 3+ should be encouraged to explore and experience a range of different cultural practices, events, and symbols and to appreciate and respect difference and cultural diversity, and that children aged 5+ should be encouraged to understand the negative effects of stereotypes and prejudices and be able to identify them in their own attitudes.

<sup>9</sup> Consultations undertaken in 2008 by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with young people on mental health and issues that impact on it identified eight themes that 'hurt' mental health: self-image, school pressures and exam system, family, bullying, death, peer pressure, relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends and isolation.

<sup>10</sup> For example, mentor support in education could be delivered at the point of transition between primary and second level.

<sup>11</sup> Men's sheds organisations are typically located in shed or workshop-type spaces in community

county Cork.

Lead agency: Traveller organisations

### **Mainstream services**

5. The inter-agency group should work with education providers, schools and Traveller organisations to explore how impacts and gaps arising from the discontinuation of certain supports for Travellers (for example, the Visiting Teacher Service) could be met by existing supports (for example, the Schools Completion Programme, or Home School Liaison Officers).  
Lead agency: Department of Education
6. The extent to which the primary school curriculum reflects Traveller culture and identity should be examined. Consideration should be given to exploring ways in which the inter-agency group, Traveller organisations and other allies could support an effective reflection of Traveller culture and identity in the primary school curriculum. The importance of reflecting cultural identity at the earliest stage was emphasised.  
Lead agency: Department of Education
7. An Garda Síochána should work closely with Traveller organisations to engage with Travellers, through youth activities, homework clubs, etc. The Community Garda service could provide clarity on procedures around members of the public engaging with An Garda Síochána in relation to certain issues, e.g., reporting complaints and follow up procedures.  
Lead agency: An Garda Síochána with Traveller organisations.
8. Most youth services and organisations have a focus on disadvantage (and Travellers as a specific target group). It is therefore key that Travellers are named as a specific target group of youth services. In this respect, youth services should prioritise outreach work to Travellers, and continue to develop specific Traveller youth projects. However, youth projects should also target Travellers within a mainstream setting, to allow choices for Travellers as to what types of youth work projects they wish to participate in. In particular, a need for activities for young men and young women aged 16 years and over was identified.  
Lead agency: Youth organisations
9. Sporting organisations should be encouraged to continue engagement with Travellers and to document the good practice identified in this research for further dissemination (as identified in recommendation no.1). In particular, opportunities for

settings that provide opportunities for regular hands-on activity by groups deliberately and mainly comprising men. They have proliferated across parts of southern Australia and New Zealand with higher proportions of men not in work participating. They are often used as a basis for combating isolation and supporting health and wellbeing amongst men. An Irish men's shed forum has recently been established:  
<http://www.menssheds.ie/>



girls aged 13 years and over to engage in sporting activity should be stressed as there is little participation amongst girls in this age group. Collaboration between the County Sports Partnership, schools, sporting organisations, community projects and parents could be initiated to develop a strategy to achieve this.

Lead agency: County Cork Sports Partnership

### **Labour market and economy**

Young Travellers are keenly aware of labour market discrimination, which they feel will impede their work opportunities. The following measures are recommended as mechanisms to overcome these barriers, and should be undertaken as part of the core remit of local development agencies.

10. The inter-agency group should initiate contact with employers around positive action measures for Travellers in preparation for an upturn in the economy.

Lead: The five LCDP companies in the County with Traveller organisations.

11. The inter-agency group should support the development of social enterprise strategies in county Cork with Traveller organisations. The 'Traveller Enterprise Development Unit' model developed by the Galway Traveller Movement in developing social enterprise could be explored for its replication.

Lead: The Enterprise and Training Subgroup in collaboration with Traveller organisations in Cork and the Department of Social Protection.

12. The inter-agency group should engage with local development and enterprise agencies in pursuing measures to support self-employment for Travellers to overcome discrimination.

Lead: The five LCDP companies in the County with Traveller organisations.

### **Implementation**

13. Most of the recommended actions above come within the remit of many agencies and member organisations of the inter-agency group. It is recommended that they be included in the next inter-agency workplan in 2012. As regards their implementation, each should be delegated to their relevant lead agencies and inter-agency subgroup, which would report on their progress at each inter-agency meeting. Where any of the issues come within a national remit, they should be referred to the national inter-agency group for implementation.

### **Recommendations requiring additional resources**

14. The opportunities for career guidance starting from the beginning of second level school should be explored. As many Travellers have left school by the time that career guidance is put in place, they will lose the opportunity to avail of career guidance support.

Lead agency: Department of Education

15. Similarly, schools programmes around mental health that start at transition or fifth year should be started sooner to enable as many Travellers as possible to participate in such supports.

Lead agency: Department of Education

16. The inter-agency group should lobby for resources to be made available for recommendations 14 and 15, above.

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Cork County Childcare Committee



Fóidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



West Cork Traveller  
Centre



East Cork Traveller  
Advocacy Project

Funded by the Traveller Health Unit, HSE