

# Somerset Youth and Community Service

# Gypsies and Irish Travellers

## Session Plan 2



**Aim:** To enable the group to understand the culture of Gypsies and Irish Travellers

**Learning outcomes:** By the end of the session the participants will:

- Have an understanding of what a Gypsy and Irish Traveller is and their culture
- Have explored myths and facts around Gypsies and Irish Travellers
- Be aware of discrimination experienced by Gypsy and Irish Travellers

**Group size:** 8 young people

**Venue:** Room

**Time:** One Hour

**Materials:**

Flipchart paper, marker pens

Background sheet

Gypsies and Irish Travellers Info Sheet

Photos of caravans and houses

Head line cards

Myths and Facts Statements

Floor Cards

Time	What	With
5 mins	Explain the aim of the session and cover confidentiality and basic ground rules around respect	
5 mins	Explain that the term traveller refers to anyone who has a nomadic way of life. This session is focussing solely on Romani Gypsy and Irish Travellers as these are the two groups who have been legally recognised in Britain as specific ethnic groups. Please see the Background Sheet for tutor information.	Background sheet
15 mins	<p><b>What is a Gypsy / Traveller:</b> Split group into threes or fours. Give each group a piece of flip chart paper. In the middle of the paper ask them to draw a picture of what they think a Gypsy or Irish Traveller looks like, this can also be what they think the place that Gypsy or Irish Travellers live in, looks like. Around the picture ask them to write all the words they associate with Gypsies and Travellers (5 mins).</p> <p>When they have finished ask each group to feed back what they have done and discuss. Ask why they have put what they have, what has influenced their thinking, is it based on stereotypes etc</p> <p>Hand out the info sheet provided and discuss any key points. More information will be explored in the next exercise.</p>	<p>Flip Chart Pens</p> <p>Gypsies and Irish Travellers Info Sheet</p>
15 mins	<p><b>People live in fear of Invaders...:</b> The aim of this exercise is to enable young people to compare their attitude to Gypsies and Irish Travellers, and other ethnic groups.</p> <p>The headlines in the paper about Gypsies and Travellers would not be tolerated by any other group, prejudice against Travellers and Gypsies is so deep-seated many people don't even realise it exists. It is only when you exchange words that it becomes apparent.</p>	Head line cards



Time	What	With
	<p>This exercise raises these issues. The statements have been taken from a single week's newspaper headlines, <b>they draw on certain myths and do more to make conflicts between Travellers and the settled community worse than actually report or explain them.</b></p> <p>Hold up each set of statements (Traveller ones first and then alternative) and discuss why we might accept one but not the other.</p> <p>Note that despite Irish Travellers and Romani Gypsies being a legally identified ethnic group that has been part of British society for over 500 years these headlines can easily make us accept racism (which is a criminal offence) as the norm.</p>	
15 mins	<p><b>Gypsy / Irish Travellers Myths / Facts:</b> Ask group to stand up and clear a space in the room. Inform them that there is a line across the room and one end is Myth and the other end is Fact (place the floor cards). As you read out each statement, the young people should place themselves on a point along the line according to whether they believe the statement is a myth or fact. Discuss with the group why they have placed themselves where they have on the line and challenge opinions around what young people think the answers should be.</p>	<p>Myth and Fact Statements</p> <p>Floor cards</p>
5 mins	<p><b>Evaluation:</b> Ask young people what they liked about the session, what they didn't like and how they would change it.</p>	

# Somerset Youth and Community Service

## Background Information



### **Ethnic Travellers**

Ethnic travellers are people who are born into traditionally nomadic cultures. Just like someone who is Black or Asian, their identity is defined by their race. The two groups recognised by British law as ethnic groups are Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Although both groups have lived and travelled in the British Isles for many hundreds of years, it has only been relatively recently that they have been recognised under the Race Relations Act.

To do so they had to prove, in landmark legal cases, that they met the following conditions, known as the 'Mandla Criteria'

- Long shared history
- Cultural tradition of their own
- Common geographical origin
- Common language
- Common tradition
- Common religion
- Characteristic of being a minority or being oppressed within a large community

### **Romani Gypsies (recognised in 1989)**

Romani Gypsies have been in Britain since at least 1515 after migrating from continental Europe. The term Gypsy is a corruption of 'Egyptian', which is what the settled population perceived them to be because of their dark complexion. In reality, linguistic analysis of the Romani language proves that Romani Gypsies have originated in India.

### **Irish Travellers (recognised in 2000)**

Irish Travellers are a separate and distinct ethnic group that has come from Ireland. They share some of the same cultural values as Romani Gypsies, such as a preference for self-employment and living and travelling in caravans or 'trailers', but there are also big differences. For example most Irish Travellers are catholic and their language – Cant – is not related at all to Romani.

### **Non-ethnic Travellers**

There are other groups and individuals who call themselves Travellers. They may be individuals who have chosen or been forced into a life on the road. Or they may be part of larger cultural groups, who aren't part of an ethnic minority but who do share a common culture. In Britain, the main groups are:

### **New Travellers**

The term New Travellers refers to people sometimes referred to as 'New Age Travellers'. They are generally people who have taken to life on the road in their own lifetime, though some New Traveller families claim to have been on the road for three consecutive generations. The New Traveller group grew out of the hippie movements and free-festival movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Because of this, New Traveller vehicles are generally more colourful and self-built than other Travellers.



## **Showmen**

Showmen are a cultural minority that have owned and operated funfairs and circuses for many generations. Though culturally similar to Romani Gypsies, their identity is connected to their family businesses. They operate rides and attractions that can be seen throughout the summer months at fun fairs. They generally have winter quarters where the family settles to repair the machinery that they operate and prepare for the next travelling season.

## **Other Travellers**

There are other groups of Travellers who may travel through Britain, such as Scottish Travellers and French Manush Gypsies, who have a similar origin and culture to Romani Gypsies. There is also an increasingly large population of Roma immigrants that have come to Britain from long-settled communities in Eastern Europe.

# Somerset Youth and Community Service

# Gypsies and Irish Travellers



## Definition

- Ethnic Travellers are people who are born into **traditionally nomadic cultures**, just like someone who is Black or Asian, their **identity is defined by their race**.
- The **two groups recognised by British case law** as ethnic groups are **Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers**.

## Romani Gypsies

- Travelled west from **northern India**, from about 1000 AD, first seen in England in 1515
- They were **wrongly thought to have come from Egypt** because of their dark complexion – so they were called Egyptians, which was **shortened to Gypsy**.
- Romani Gypsies who have arrived in the UK **during this century** have come from **Eastern Europe**. Their language is 'Romani' which originated in India and has no connection to Rome or Romania.

## Irish Travellers

- *Are a **separate and distinct ethnic group** that has come from Ireland*
- *They **share some of the same cultural values** as Romani Gypsies such as a preference for self-employment and living in caravans or trailers, but there are **also big differences**.*
- *For example **most Irish Travellers are Catholic** and their language 'Cant' is not related at all to 'Romani'*

## Discrimination

There is widespread public hostility towards Gypsies and Irish Travellers, who often lead separate lives, such as

- **Illegal 'No Travellers' signs** can still be seen in shops and pubs.
- Gypsies and Irish Travellers often have **difficulty getting planning permission** for private sites.
- Gypsy and Irish Traveller **children are often bullied** and harassed at school by other pupils.
- There have been growing numbers of reports of **racist graffiti and attacks** as well as one of a petrol bomb being thrown onto a site.



**POLICE WARN  
LANDOWNERS  
OVER  
TRAVELLERS**

**POLICE WARN  
LANDOWNERS  
OVER BLACKS**

# **WINNING THE WAR AGAINST TRAVELLERS**

# **WINNING THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN**

**GYPSIES**

**LEAVE**

**DEVASTATION**

**FAT PEOPLE**

**LEAVE**

**DEVASTATION**

**TRAVELLER'S  
DOG BIT ME  
ON THE ARM**

**BLIND MAN'S  
DOG BIT  
ME ON THE ARM**

**TRAVELLERS**

**BREACH**

**CARAVAN**

**DEFENCES**

# **GAYS BREACH CARAVAN DEFENCES**

**GYPSIES  
BOMBED  
OUT BY  
ARSONISTS**

**PENSIONERS  
BOMBED  
OUT BY  
ARSONISTS**

**GYPSIES**

**LEAVE EVEN**

**MORE MESS**

**DISABLED  
PEOPLE  
LEAVE EVEN  
MORE MESS**

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**Gypsies and Irish Travellers**



**Myth**



**Somerset Youth and Community Service**  
**Gypsies and Irish Travellers**



**Fact**



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## Gypsies and Irish Travellers

### Myths & Facts



#### 1. Gypsies and Travellers are outside the law – enforcement of planning and criminal laws doesn't apply to them

**Myth:**

Some Gypsies and Travellers set up sites on land they own before applying retrospectively for planning permission. It is lawful for anyone to apply retrospectively for planning permission, and many planning applications, including Gypsy site applications, are passed this way.

In event of damage or criminal behaviour by someone on an unauthorised encampment, the police have civil powers to evict the entire camp. Unfortunately this can lead to the mistaken belief that everyone on the encampment has committed a crime, even if only a small number of people on the site were responsible.

#### 2. Gypsies and Travellers get special treatment – they get sites where no one would get houses

**Myth:**

Most Gypsy site applications fail to get planning permission first time round, and many are also unsuccessful on appeal. There is no comprehensive data on this, but the information available suggests that Gypsy site applications have a lower chance of approval than others.

#### 3. Most Gypsies and Irish Travellers in England live in houses

**Fact:**

However, the courts have confirmed that, for many Gypsies and Irish Travellers, living in a caravan is not a 'lifestyle choice' but a result of their social and cultural heritage and an essential part of their ethnic identity. This is true whether they are nomadic or settle for long periods in one place

Most gypsies and Irish Travellers in England are believed to live in houses. While some choose to live in conventional housing, others feel they have no alternative, because of bad health or educational needs. Many, particularly those who have recently moved from sites, find it difficult to settle in housing, and to maintain the tenancies.

#### 4. If we provide sites, we'll attract Gypsies and Travellers from around the country

**Myth:**

Gypsies and Travellers travel for various reasons, sometimes economic and sometimes family related. There is no evidence that provision of a site in a certain area leads to greater demand. However, just as other ethnic groups are not equally distributed around the country, so Gypsies and Travellers are concentrated in certain parts of the Country. Councils need to respond to the needs in their communities, however large or small they might be.



**5. Gypsies and Travellers who live on council or privately-owned sites pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity and other associated charges**

**Fact:**

These vary from site to site, but are often higher than comparable charges for conventional housing. Those living on unauthorised encampments do not pay council tax but they do not receive standard services. This is not because they are avoiding paying tax, but because encampments need to be in place one year before tax becomes payable, and most encampments are far more temporary in nature.

**6. All Gypsies and Travellers are criminals – they steal and trespass on other people's land.**

**Myth:**

Criminal justice agencies do not collect information about Gypsies and Irish Travellers as separate ethnic groups but there is no evidence that offending is higher among these groups than among others.

Setting up an unauthorised encampment on someone else's land is not in itself a crime. Either the council or the police can serve the trespasser with a notice. The occupants of the encampment will only have committed a criminal act if they breach the terms of the notice.

Many Gypsies and Travellers feel they have no choice but to set up unauthorised encampments because there is no other accommodation. It has been estimated that there is currently a shortage of between 2,500 and 4,000 pitches in England alone.

**7. Gypsies are dirty and leave rubbish everywhere**

**Myth:**

Although there are exceptions (as with people who live in houses) Gypsy culture is built upon strict codes of cleanliness learnt over centuries of life on the road. For example dogs are not allowed in trailers or anywhere near plates or cutlery.

**8. Most Travellers don't work?**

**Myth:**

Traditionally Gypsies and Irish Travellers worked as pedlars, horse dealers or seasonal agricultural jobs. Nowadays many work as landscape gardeners, scrap dealers or motor trade workers. Some are employed as teachers to the entertainment industries as with any other ethnic group.