

Shoon te o Puri Folki



Listen to the Elders



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2009



BACKGROUND

In 2006 DGLG held an event called 'Old Ways, New Days' led by the National Federation of Gypsy liaison groups in collaboration with Derbyshire County Council and other regional partners.

Our aim was to highlight some of the problems that elderly Gypsy /Traveller people have to contend with in their day-to-day lives. We targeted Health and Social Care Providers, Voluntary and Community Organizations and other local authorities.

The conference was also to provide best practice seminars with Regional Gypsy/Traveller organizations.

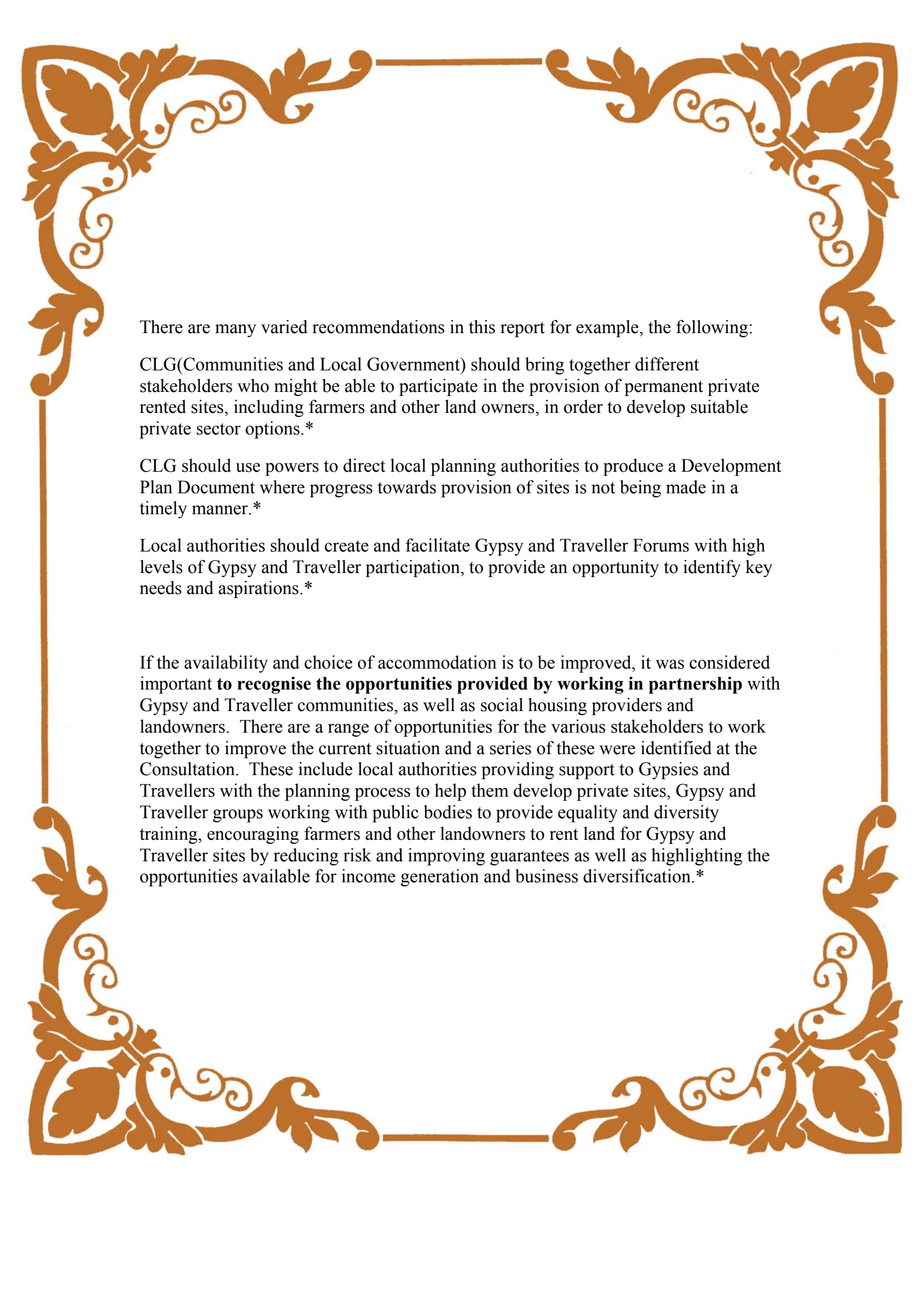
On the whole agencies like Age Concern and Help the Aged have done nothing to date, on cultural accommodation issues involving Gypsies and Travellers or for example HACT (The housing association charitable trust)

HACT works to develop and promote solutions concerning people on the margins of mainstream housing provision. Currently they are running three programmes – the Older People's Programme, the Supported Living Programme and the Refugee Housing Integration Programme. But none of these programmes highlight the difficulties the traditional elder Romany Gypsy/Traveller face.

HACT has undertaken work with refugees / asylum seekers and migrant workers.

In 2007 DGLG attended a three day Consultation organised by the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) held at St Georges House at Windsor to identify practical ways in which housing organisations and other public bodies can work together with Gypsies and Travellers.

A report entitled 'Out In The Open' followed this study.



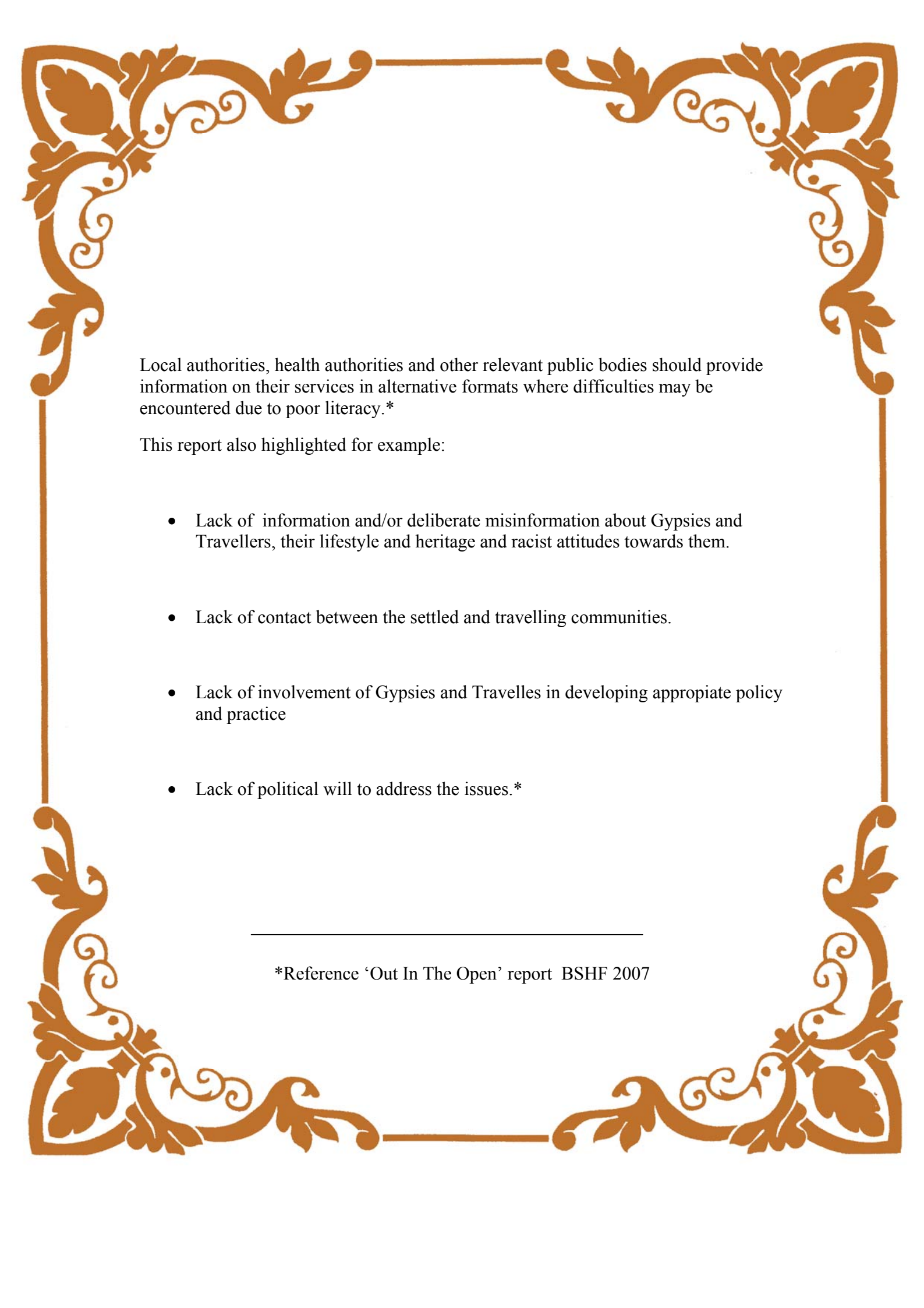
There are many varied recommendations in this report for example, the following:

CLG(Communities and Local Government) should bring together different stakeholders who might be able to participate in the provision of permanent private rented sites, including farmers and other land owners, in order to develop suitable private sector options.*

CLG should use powers to direct local planning authorities to produce a Development Plan Document where progress towards provision of sites is not being made in a timely manner.*

Local authorities should create and facilitate Gypsy and Traveller Forums with high levels of Gypsy and Traveller participation, to provide an opportunity to identify key needs and aspirations.*

If the availability and choice of accommodation is to be improved, it was considered important **to recognise the opportunities provided by working in partnership** with Gypsy and Traveller communities, as well as social housing providers and landowners. There are a range of opportunities for the various stakeholders to work together to improve the current situation and a series of these were identified at the Consultation. These include local authorities providing support to Gypsies and Travellers with the planning process to help them develop private sites, Gypsy and Traveller groups working with public bodies to provide equality and diversity training, encouraging farmers and other landowners to rent land for Gypsy and Traveller sites by reducing risk and improving guarantees as well as highlighting the opportunities available for income generation and business diversification.*



Local authorities, health authorities and other relevant public bodies should provide information on their services in alternative formats where difficulties may be encountered due to poor literacy.*

This report also highlighted for example:

- Lack of information and/or deliberate misinformation about Gypsies and Travellers, their lifestyle and heritage and racist attitudes towards them.
- Lack of contact between the settled and travelling communities.
- Lack of involvement of Gypsies and Travellers in developing appropriate policy and practice
- Lack of political will to address the issues.*

*Reference 'Out In The Open' report BSHF 2007

Tackling racism and discrimination

A significant aspect of the social exclusion endured by Gypsies and Travellers is the fact that although they have been recognised in law as racial groups, their corresponding rights are often not respected.

This denial takes many forms and operates on a day-to-day basis for many Gypsy and Traveller families: they are frequently perceived by service providers, the public and politicians as being social 'drop-outs' or living within 'deviant sub-cultures' that actively reject the settled community's norms ¹

Discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers has been described as the last 'respectable' form of racism² and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has only recently campaigned against the continuing use of 'No Travellers' signs in pubs and shops³

The Gypsy and Traveller way of life is frequently romanticised, yet Gypsies and Travellers are some of the most marginalised ethnic minority groups in Britain today and the 'No Travellers' signs still appear in blatant breach of the law ⁴

Persecuted by the state for centuries, Gypsies and Travellers are now recognised and protected in law, although popular prejudice and discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers is widely regarded as acceptable and this has been termed 'the last bastion of racism' ⁵ The Gypsy and Traveller way of life is frequently romanticised, yet Gypsies and Travellers are some of the most marginalised ethnic minority groups in Britain today and the 'No Travellers' signs still appear in blatant breach of the law ⁴

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Under the Race Relations Act 1976, as amended in 2000, public bodies are required to:

- promote good relationships between people of different racial groups;
- eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- promote equality of opportunity.

Case law established Romany Gypsies as a recognised racial group in 1988 and Irish Travellers in 2000.⁷

¹ Theorising Sedentarism: the roots of anti-nomadism. R McVeigh. T Acton (ed), Gypsy politics and Traveller Identity, University of Herefordshire Press, 1997, pp7-25.

² By Sarah Spencer, Deputy Chair of the CRE, amongst others
<http://www.cre.gov.uk/Default.aspx.LocID-Ohgnew01c.ReflocID-ohg00900c001002.Lang-EN.htm>.

³ CRE to remove all 'No Gypsies and Travellers' signs from Wales by May 2006.
<http://www.cre.gov.uk/Default.aspx.LocID-Ohgnew01h.ReflocID-Ohg00900c001002.Lang-EN.htm>

⁴ Gypsies and Travellers: A Strategy for the CRE, Commission for Racial Equality, 2004-7

⁵ The Last Bastion of Racism? Gypsies, Travellers and policing, Coxhead, J., Trentham Books, 2007.

⁶ <http://www.cre.gov.uk/legal/rra.html>.

⁷ CRE v. Dutton (1988) and O'Leary v. Allied Domecq (2000)



Introduction.

This extra report is an ‘add-on’ to the work undertaken by the DGLG and members of the East Midlands Gypsy Traveller Forum to undertake an analysis on emotional health and well-being needs.

As well as Romany Gypsies, and Irish Travellers, this add-on includes Showmen


Our first report entitled:

‘I Know When It’s Raining’ 2008 was a study of 150 Romany Gypsies & Irish Travellers 66% & 33% respectively.

We have used some of the elder care studies and quotes for this report, but undertook further questionnaires from the North and South East regions of the county to obtain a bigger picture. This information can be used nationally. We instigated the expertise of well known Gypsy and Traveller groups in the North East and South East of the region.

The aspirations to travel and an importance of family are paramount to the Gypsy and Travelling community. The need for individuals to live in culturally appropriate accommodation is an overriding factor when you look at the levels of anxiety and depression and is very important to emotional well-being.

Despite the community stating ~ “we don’t suffer from that” interviewees told another story. Please don’t think that the Gypsy and Traditional Travelling community are an unhappy, depressed bunch, they are not ~ some of our interviews were a ‘laugh a minute.’ But there is a lack of understanding of culture for many agencies.



Elders are reluctant to report that their lives are becoming difficult – questions arise and worry follows as the following case studies shows:

Elderly Irish lady not coping very well, in her early seventies, incontinent and struggling to keep clean. Discussing her problem with her, (the door of her caravan remained open as her grandson was totally in fear of her being taken away and put into care home).

We were able to discuss and help with the aid of the local Health Visitor who is very understanding – good. Despite our efforts to get extra care in, the family would not engage with the Social Services who would have been able to offer extra support.

We wanted to obtain an insight into the elder's feelings. So we carried out some one-to-one interviews, we did not want to formulate graphs or percentages we just wanted to capture peoples views and feelings, of which we have produced as quotes in this report. Our aim was not to go for a quantitative report, but one of a qualitative nature.

It added further insight to the 'I Know When It's Raining' report undertaken in conjunction with East Midlands CSIP.



A BRIEF HISTORY

It is extremely difficult to place exact numbers of how many Traditional Travellers there are in Great Britain. Between 250,000 and 300,000 have been estimated.

The first authenticated records of their presence in Britain are in 1505 in Scotland.

The first authenticated record in England is in 1514.

Life was hard for the Gypsy people in Europe before 1500. Laws were passed to expel Gypsies from Spain and Switzerland, and by 1650 most Gypsy people were slaves.

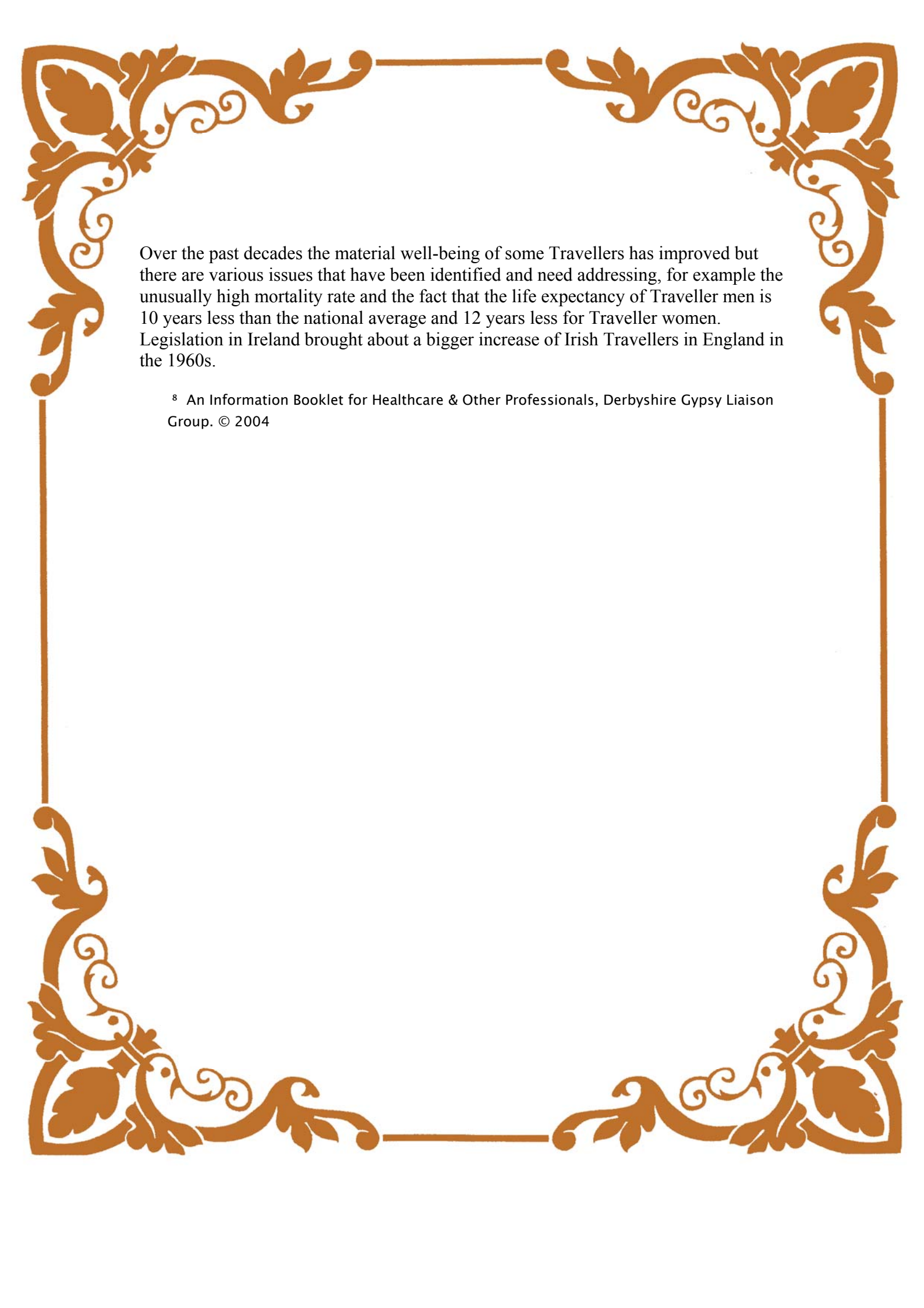
In England under Queen Elizabeth 1 Gypsies were expelled along with all freed black slaves. Laws were passed condemning all Gypsies to death. When people were out of work, prices high and peasants were thrown off the land; it was the usual story of looking for someone to blame. Strangers make good scapegoats.

In York in 1596 magistrates made children watch while their parents were hanged just because they were Gypsies.

After 1780, anti Gypsy legislation was gradually repealed. Gypsy people became a useful source of cheap labour in the fields, blacksmiths and entertainers. Gypsies survived on the margins of society.

After the mechanisation of farming, the lifestyle of Gypsies changed drastically. Not wanted for hop or strawberry picking and other traditional trades, the people found that they had to adapt, again work was difficult to find for some families and the motorisation of families also changed the travel patterns.

The mechanisation of the traditional rural work started in the 1950s. The previous sources of livelihood did not provide sufficiently in the rural areas anymore. With industrialisation started the migration from rural areas. The changes in society were also reflected in the Roma population. Many Gypsies moved from the rural areas to the cities and towns.



Over the past decades the material well-being of some Travellers has improved but there are various issues that have been identified and need addressing, for example the unusually high mortality rate and the fact that the life expectancy of Traveller men is 10 years less than the national average and 12 years less for Traveller women. Legislation in Ireland brought about a bigger increase of Irish Travellers in England in the 1960s.

⁸ An Information Booklet for Healthcare & Other Professionals, Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group. © 2004



Tried and tested, I won't do it again.

“Well, I had problems on a Council run site with other Travellers and we made up our mind seeing that we had 3 of our 5 children still at home we would move into bricks and mortar. After a short time, being on our own away from friends and family, which we were not used to, I found myself in a distressed state. I went to the local Drs who gave me ***** [prescribed drugs] for my nerves I did not settle in the 9 years that we were there and it made me worse that my three children were wed from there. During the 9 years I had two nervous breakdowns so we decided after all we would buy a trailer and move back to friends and family. Even though we have had our hard times and good times I am very happy to be back in my trailer with my own kind.”



The Muller Mush. (Romany Gypsy)

The belief in the Muller Mush is very strong especially within the generation who lost their traditional stopping places in the early sixties and were cleared off the common grounds, families from Shave Green in the New Forest for example. This generation found themselves forced into bricks and mortar accommodation and stress took its toll and the natural belief that bricks and mortar housing may have a ghost in it that has not been put to rest. It can be a belief that manifests itself very strongly and the situation can be amended by laying ghosts to rest or families understanding the knowledge of where they are living and who was in the house before. Or the family just have to move. This belief can be very real to the person involved. It can manifest itself into a psychosis that the medical profession may not fully understand, so it's not talked about. It is linked to the belief that personal belongings of the deceased person are burnt, including the caravan, otherwise the spirit lingers in this world.

This belief is similar to the belief of the Wendigo amongst some Native American people.

Many families now who follow the Evangelist path are keen not to promote this belief but it is still here with us in today's modern society.



'I need me animals round me; sometimes they make more sense than us humans!
They make me happy' –

Romany Gypsy man 72 years old.



"4 chickens, 11 dogs and puppies, 4 birds, magic! Dogs, chickens and horses!
How many horses have I got? Dunno, quite a few - I don't know how old I am"



MY SECRET

My secret...
Staying in a house has made things easier
For me and my family –
Hot and cold running water, I feel I am dreaming.
Knowing that I am being treated
Like a normal person
Kids going to school make me feel great,
Knowing they are learning.
You never know what they may become,
Doctors, nurses, vet – even a lawyer.
How great this would be to my family and me...
For you see, I am keeping a secret –
From the country people who surround me.
I am from Travelling people
No need to rock the boat,
And go back to the old ways,
Country people calling my children
Dirty names, throwing stones...
Not getting allowed to use public buildings.

Worst of all,
Not getting taken on by a Doctor,
Specially when one has a child
Who needs around the clock
treatment

My secret...staying in a house has
given me the same equal rights as
everyone else,
So I stick out my chin, and smile and
bear it,
Hiding away my real feelings...
Staying in a house – the
downside is not showing
my true feelings,
Not travelling the roads
with my friends and
family, or just staying
outside – below the stars
at night.
It's a shame I need to
lie...
And cover up who I am
Just so I can get a peaceful
life, equal rights
Like the country people

What is your understanding of the words *Mental Health*?

“Its like a flower, do you know what I mean its like a flower that’s wilted and needs water, the mind is like that it wilts if it doesn’t have company you have to feed it with company.”
Romany Gypsy lady, over 70 yrs.

“I don’t feel I have got any mental health issues but
I have terrible mood swings like a *beng*, sometimes a proper *beng*.³
I am on ***** [prescribed drugs]
I call them cobweb tablets it feels like you have cobwebs over your face when you take them.”

Romany Gypsy, 64 yrs old.

Another word to describe Gypsy or Traveller people would be that they both are a nomadic people. In times gone by extended families that go from pasture to pasture with their animals and today like an inherited memory this carries on with the love of having animals around.

The majority of all the Romany Gypsy people interviewed could not imagine life without animals, Gypsy people tend to be more of a rural people, the few that did not have an animal was due to restrictions on where they lived.

The majority of Irish Travellers that we interviewed did not profess the same link to animals but this it could be down to the fact that many Irish Travellers interviewed have been forced to inner city areas and are in larger groups.

Dogs however were cited as being a necessity and an old Irish belief still held is that dogs warn you if a ghost is about. Many interviewed had relatives that kept horses but did not travel as much with animals.

Romany Gypsies feel that there is a need for agencies to learn about cultural beliefs.

Question 6 – how do you cope if you are on your own?

We manage very well between us but we would like to get about more and I would like someone to help my wife with the cleaning she can't do it now and we need somebody who we know from our own community to come in and help who is clean and knows what to do in our place (home).

Man 71yrs

Try to get on with it best I can, I don't like to bother people.

Woman 61yrs

Question 7 – do you know where to go or whom you can contact for help?

Age concern – Help the Aged - Samaritans – Citizen's Advice Bureau?

Never heard of any these.

Woman 64yrs

I know we could ask the Doctor to find out but we would not like anybody who does not know our ways to come in do you lasses (U.K. Association of Gypsy Women) know any Travellers that would come and help my wife about the place (home)?

No, we would not go to them, we do know about them but they would laugh at our beliefs – meaning our do's and don'ts.

Man 71yrs

Not really, only the Doctors.

Woman 61yrs

I am lonely I get very depressed. I had the people from MIND coming into me but I did not like them, too bossy, but I have lovely people from Advocacy helping me now, the woman from there has helped me sort all my things out, money and bills and things. Them from MIND tortured me for smoking and the woman would not iron me a shirt. I would not answer the door for them to come in at the end up.

Man 61yrs

Question 8 - do you think / it would be useful to have a leaflet about services that would be relevant to you?


Yes it would because if they give 'phone numbers we could ring and ask questions we wanted answered. It would be easier than going answering questions of why we wanted to know. *Interviewer ~ you mean the numbers on the leaflets of different services would guarantee confidentiality?*

Yes it would because; if we did not want to use the service we would not feel embarrassed as we would if we had visited the office.

Man 71yrs

I think it would be good for people who, like me until I took bad, we did not know what help we could get, so I think it would be a help to people to see what help there is especially for elderly people.

Woman 74yrs



Yes, but I can't read out but I can look at the picture.

Man 81yrs

I think it would be very useful for people to have leaflets. We have not got the greatest state of health but we always have the place and we can see everybody coming and going on the camp (site) so we never get lonely or depressed as such and we have each other we keep each other going cracking on about the young times, all the people we used to travel with and when our bairns were little.

81yrs & 83yrs (man woman) respectively

If there were leaflets people would know what they could have to make their life easier for them. I have a good family who would know what to do but not everybody has that support.

Woman 82yrs



Showmen.

It would be remiss of us not to include the Showmen (also now known as Show people) in this study

The Showmen are not recognised in law as a separate ethnic group but many families have been born into a tradition of travelling and have known no other life after many generations it is very much part of that culture to live in caravans. The Showmen have their own planning circular and do not come under the planning circular previously mentioned for Gypsy and Traveller sites. (Circular 01/2006)

The Showman's Guild formed in 1889 to fight a Bill that was being proposed in parliament at the time to stop caravan and tent living - The Mobile Dwelling Bill.

The Showmen's Guild are very well organised and have the country divided into sections, how ever this is very much work based. There is little or no evidence regarding health needs and general well being of Show people.

There can be strong links between the communities as some Show people have married into the Romany Gypsy community for many generations.

There has been no argument put forward that these families too may suffer from an aversion to bricks and mortar and have the traditional right to live as their parents, grand parents and generations before them.

In the last few decades there have been considerable changes for the Showmen, for example, the loss of some traditional fairs, not being allowed to pull from one fair to another straight away and lack of affordable land. Showmen's yards need to be bigger than the conventional Romany Gypsy pitches to incorporate the loads such as stalls or fairground rides. To try and store these loads can be stressful, they are the livelihood of the family and need to be on site where they can be maintained in the winter months and safe from vandalism and theft. We have added two case studies from the community. We are not identifying which Showmen's section/region these case studies are from.



“My dogs are the only thing I trust in the world I don’t have family”

Born in to Showmen family Age 60

This Showman had become estranged from his family due to problems when he was a child. Similarly to other traditional Gypsy/Traveller men that have become isolated from their communities for one reason or another they do not settle well in conventional housing they suffer “wanderlust” and the need to “just go.” This man had a string of broken relationships. (This would mean that to a certain degree he would be looked down on by the more traditional community as on the whole divorce is frowned on, although divorce is more prevalent than what it was say 20 years ago). Multiple partners are also a no-no across all the traditional Gypsy Traveller communities.

Life made significant changes to him when he was a teenager, both parents died relatively young. He is on his own and unable to work. This is the difficult thing to Showmen “work is the culture” he is reliant on antidepressants and also consumes alcohol daily.

He has no wish to be part of any one’s society and steers clear of all.

He did not obtain his planning permission he was “between the devil and the deep” he was not a working Showman so that circular did not apply. Coming from a Showman family the Gypsy/Traveller circular would not apply.

Picture by kind permission of National Fairground Archive.

www.nfa.dept.shef.ac.uk/



“March time I think about turning out ¹ as soon as the birds start to sing and the early spring flowers start to appear I think back to happy times and hard times Although I have been in bricks and mortar for some years due to ill health I was given the assistance to move into a bungalow. I am far happier being on one level. Many Showmen have settled in traditional seaside towns and have become very much part of British culture. (We have been actually for hundreds of years.) I think schooling is better now. In those days most families would at least try to get one child educated in school, now I think it is better and there is more help. Computers are a marvellous thing”

Show woman Age 70

“We have all had to adapt but it is important for people to realise that we have close families. The yards are getting overcrowded and this causes upset. We have been on this yard and there has been two generations more come into the business. It is important that there should be some where for them to start and have room for their own loads. We are not asking for anything we would make our own yard. ² If we could be sure of planning permission, but anyone with their homes on wheels have problems.”

Show woman Age 63

¹ First move of the season

² Show people often refer to their ground as a yard rather than a pitch or plot

RESOURCES

You may find the following information useful: DGLG reports

The "I know when it's raining" report published by DGLG with support from UcLAN funded by East Midlands CSIP

The 'Count us in' report published in conjunction with Derbyshire Connexions

The 'An improved path to a better road' an information booklet for healthcare and other professionals. Updated version Of a Better Road 2004

The Health Status of Gypsies and Travellers in England a report to the Department of Health, by the University of Sheffield 2004 @ www.dh.gov.uk or www.shef.ac.uk/scharr/research/publications/travellers

The health of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK a Race Equality Foundation briefing paper written by Zoe Matthews 2008 @ www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/health

Hull's Gypsy and Traveller Health and Lifestyle Survey 2007 published May 2008 @ www.heros.org.uk

BBEMI Barnsley's Community Engagement Project of the Gypsy and Traveller Communities @ www.barnsley.nhs.uk

Good practice examples - @ www.rcn.org.uk

London Borough of Bromley, Gypsy Traveller Health and Education Needs Assessment @ www.bromley.nhs.uk/equality

The National Fairground Archive, University of Sheffield @ <http://hri.shef.ac.uk/fairground/guilds.html>

The Building and Social Housing Foundation @ www.bshf.org

YWCA woman changing lives @ www.ywca.org.uk/resources

Leeds G A T E (Gypsy and Traveller Exchange) @ www.gypsyromatravellerleeds.co.uk

FFT (Friends, Family and Travellers) @ www.gypsy-traveller.org

DGLG (Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group) @ www.dglg.org

The contact for the groups across the regions is:

NFGLG (National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups) hosted by DGLG

@ www.nationalgypsytravellerfederation.org



Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison group would like to thank the following groups for assistance in extra questionnaires.

North East

UK Association of Gypsy Women,
Rachel Francis Ingram and Kay Beard

Society for the Promotion and Advancement of Romany Culture.
Emily Clark and Louise Adams

South East

John & Amy May Johnson

East Midlands

Lincolnshire Gypsy Liaison Group
Ryalla Duffy



Dedicated to all those elders who wonder about a safe resting base and a safe place to be and to all the young families with that Gypsy/ Traveller 'gene.'

With thanks to West Midlands CSIP for funding of report, Kokoro and It's Good To Talk Leaflets.

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